

# THE Outlook

Devoted to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith

May 1993



**MUSIC  
IN  
THE  
CHURCH**

# INSIDE *insights*

## MUSIC IN THE CHURCH

- How shall we express our delight in the Lord and our praise for all He is and has done? **Randal S. Lankheet** opens the Scriptures to display the multiplicity of vehicles for praise.
- Laurie Vanden Heuvel** explores the *reasons* for our praise.

## ARTICLES

- Peter De Jong** sends President Clinton an urgent appeal.
- The new International Reformed Fellowship is introduced by **W. Robert Godfrey**.
- Why have a new International Reformed Fellowship? **John E. Kim** explains.
- Does your family need stimulation and instruction for family devotions? Read **Connie Sikma's** article on "Family Worship Patterns."
- The "right to kill" granted to Dutch physicians sets a dangerous precedent. **Cal Thomas** comments.

## DEPARTMENTS

- Cornelis Venema** wraps up his discussion of the *Canons of Dort* by stressing the centrality of God's initiative in every aspect of salvation.
- What is "relativism" and how can Christians counter it? **John R. Sittema** points to the *only answer*.
- W. Robert Godfrey** shares his impressions of Korea—the people and their faith.
- Read about continuing CRC struggles in Church and World.

## BOOK REVIEWS

- Linda Lanning** reviews doctrinal training materials for the family written by James Beeke.
- A new book written by Peter Beyerhaus, a prominent figure in missions and ecumenical enterprises, is reviewed by **Peter De Jong**.



# THE Outlook

Volume 43, No. 5

(USPS 633-980)

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

JOURNAL OF  
REFORMED FELLOWSHIP, INC.

Send all copy to:

Editors, Rev. & Mrs. Thomas Vanden Heuvel  
2475 85th St. S.W.

Byron Center, MI 49315  
Phone (616) 878-9278

### BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Edward Knott, President; Paul Murphy, Vice-President; John Velthouse, Treasurer; Douglas Van Der Aa, Secretary; Arthur Besteman, Ass't Secretary/Treasurer; Edward Heerema Jr., Henry Hoeksema, Ted Miedema, Wybren Oord, John Piersma, William Renkema, Thomas Spriensma, Gerrit Sterk, Jacob Uitvlugt, Harlan Vanden Einde, Derrick Vander Meulen, Peter Wobbema

### EDITORS:

Thomas and Laurie Vanden Heuvel

### CONTRIBUTING EDITORS:

Drs. W. Robert Godfrey  
Theodore Plantinga, John Sittema  
and Cornelis P. Venema

### DEPARTMENT HEADS:

Dr. Roger S. Greenway  
and Rev. John Piersma

### PRODUCTION MANAGER:

Peter Wobbema

### BUSINESS MANAGER:

Mary Kaiser

### GRAPHIC LAYOUT ARTIST:

Mary Van Der Aa

This periodical is owned and published by Reformed Fellowship, Inc., a religious and strictly non-profit organization composed of a group of Christian believers who hold to the Biblical Reformed faith. Its purpose is to advocate and propagate this faith, to nurture those who seek to live in obedience to it, to give sharpened expression to it, to stimulate the doctrinal sensitivities of those who profess it, to promote the spiritual welfare and purity of the Reformed churches and to encourage Christian action.

The publishers of this journal express their adherence to the Calvinistic creeds as formulated in the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, and the Westminster Confession and Catechisms.

All contributions represent the personal views of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the members of Reformed Fellowship, Inc.

**SUBSCRIPTION POLICY:** The Outlook (USPS 633-980) is published monthly (except July-August combined) for \$15.00 per year (foreign rates: \$17.00 per year, Canadian rates: \$17.00 per year plus 7% GST Tax (1.19)), by Reformed Fellowship, Inc. Unless a definite request for discontinuance is received, it is assumed that the subscriber wishes the subscription to continue without the formality of a renewal order and he will be billed for renewal. If you have a change of address, please notify the Business Office as early as possible in order to avoid the inconvenience of delayed delivery. Include your Zip Code. Second Class postage paid at Grand Rapids, MI. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to The Outlook, 2201 Oak Industrial Dr. N.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49505.

Registered as Second Class mail under permit #9489 at Norwich, Ontario.

### Editorial Office

2475 85th St. Byron Center, MI 49315  
PH: (616) 878-9278 • FAX: (616) 878-3256

### Circulation Office

2201 Oak Industrial Dr. N.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49505 (616) 456-5909

### Circulation Office Hours

Monday, Wednesday, 9-11 a.m.  
After Office Hours - please call: 452-9519

### Business Mailing Address:

2201 Oak Industrial Dr. N.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49505



## Church Music — Let There Be Variety

Randal S. Lankheet

If you've ever visited an art museum with family members or friends, you know the experience well. You want to pause and admire the realistic works of Rembrandt; you're impressed with his use of light and shadow, but others in your group eagerly urge you on to another wing of the museum. They've come especially to view the impressionistic paintings on display. From the impressionists, you all move on to the section devoted to modern art. A chill runs down your back. You can find hardly anything worthwhile in most of the works wrought in the twentieth century. In vain your friends try to convince you that most modern works are filled with deep meaning. You would rather not have to work hard to discover this "meaning"—you're at the museum for more immediate satisfaction. That's also probably why you appreciate the realistic art of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Let's face it, art appreciation is a very subjective field. What fails to impress you as an individual admirer of art might greatly move me. And vice versa. So it is with music, both secular and sacred. Musical works are pieces of art and, as such, they evoke different responses from different people.

Much of this subjectivism is due to our differing backgrounds. We were each raised by a different set of parents; we were raised in different homes and communities. We differ in our educational and economic levels, in personality traits, and in our emotional reactions. A child raised in a home where Handel's *Messiah* is appreciated will probably not care too much for a simple Bill Gaither tune. On the other hand, the parents who have

collected the "greatest gospel hits" of Tennessee Ernie Ford probably will not raise children with a love for Bach's "Fugue for Organ in A Minor."

Don't misunderstand. There is more to music, much more to it, than merely subjective factors. (We will consider other factors later in this series of articles.) But since music is art, we must be honest to admit that different people find different kinds of music appealing to them. And the same person may find different kinds of music more appealing at one time than at another time, depending on his circumstances or his moods.

I believe that it has become too easy for us, under the guise of "Biblical principles" or "Reformed worship" to defend our own personal tastes in church music and to disparage someone else's tastes. As long as the music meets certain criteria of quality (again, we'll consider these another time), it should be welcomed within the church and within our worship services. Let those of us who are pastors and scholars be the first to admit that our musical tastes tend to gravitate toward more classical, traditional church music. Maybe it's because we, more than most people, appreciate history. The musical heritage of the past century still fascinates us, as do the writings and the paintings of that era. Maybe it's because in a college and graduate school environment, we pastors and scholars were exposed to classical music found in the great symphonies, oratorios, operas and the like. For whatever reason, generally speaking, most of us with post-graduate

degrees tend to look with a critical eye at most "contemporary" church music.

### VARIETY

When one turns to the Bible, he is impressed with the great variety of musical expression found there. According to the Jewish historian/philosopher Philo, Moses was educated and experienced in the art of music.<sup>1</sup> How much of his Egyptian background found its way into his music is impossible to determine, but it is likely that, once sanctified and inspired by the Holy Spirit, some of that background was helpful to him. It is worth noting that Moses credits an unbeliever, a descendant of Cain, with the invention of wind instruments and stringed instruments (Genesis 4:21). These instruments, and others, would be used later in the worship and service of God. As with all of life, there is no dualism between the holy and the unholy, sanctified in-

*"When one turns to the Bible, he is impressed with the great variety of musical expression found there."*

struments and unsanctified. Everything depends on the purpose, the reasons for our music.

#### In the Old Testament

The Old Testament displays a wide variety of musical expressions within Israel. Scholars have identified at least sixteen different musical instruments—stringed, wind and percussion—used in Israel's work and in their worship of God.<sup>2</sup>

Instrumental music was used to calm a troubled soul (I Samuel 16:23) and to stir a prophetic spirit (II Kings 3:15). Like today, musical instruments were mainly used to accompany and to embellish the singing of God's people in worship (e.g. I Chronicles 16:42; II Chronicles 5:12-13).

And what a wonderful variety in Bible songs. You can find references to and examples of celebration songs for families (Genesis 31:27) and well-digging songs for laborers (Numbers 21:17-18). Songs are sung to celebrate the beginning of a new life (I Samuel 2:1-10) and to mark the

ending of an old life (II Samuel 23:1-7). The keepers of Israel's vineyards sang their songs (Isaiah 27:2-5) as did those who kept watch on the protective walls (Isaiah 21:12) and those who treaded the harvested grapes (Jeremiah 25:30). Israel sang in praise when God gave them victory in battle, and they sang in la-

"...heaven itself is filled with a variety of songs and singers."

ment over deaths suffered in battle (II Samuel 1:19-27). They sang or were led in song during times of spiritual renewal. King David directed songs when the ark of the covenant was moved toward Jerusalem and, years later, his son Solomon did the same when the ark was brought into the newly-constructed Temple (II Samuel 6:5ff; II Chronicles 5:13).

One entire book of the Bible, the *Song of Solomon*, is an extended song with parts for soloists and choirs. Other lengthy songs, some of them in ballad form, are found as the song of Moses and Miriam (Exodus 15), the song of Deborah and Barak (Judges 5), the song of Hannah (I Samuel 2) and the song of David (II Samuel 22).

No other book in the Bible contains as many examples of Israel's worship music as do the two books of Chronicles. Here we find that a special group of "singers" was chosen from out of the tribe of Levi. They "were exempt from other duties because they were responsible for the work day and night" (I Chronicles 9:33). Serving as musical conductors and as song leaders was no easy task! Out of an original group of 4000 singers, 288 of them were later divided into 24 groups (praise teams?) of twelve singers. All of these were under the direct supervision of King David and later, King Solomon.

#### In the Psalms

Speaking of David, we immediately think of the book of *Psalms*. In the captions to these psalms, perhaps added later to the inspired Scriptures, David is said to be the

writer/editor source for 93 of the 150 psalms. The Bible scholar, Professor Gunkel, shows the wide variety of themes within the psalter. He finds at least six main varieties with several subcategories besides: psalms of praise (e.g. Psalms 8, 33, 104); individual songs of thanksgiving (e.g. Psalms 30, 116, 138); individual laments (e.g. Psalms 13, 31, 39); communal laments (e.g. Psalms 12, 44, 79); royal psalms (e.g. Psalms 2, 18, 35) and wisdom psalms (e.g. Psalms 1, 49, 119). Subcategories within these main groupings would classify some psalms perhaps serving as liturgies for the sick and others as prayers from the sick. Within the psalter we find examples of imprecatory psalms (e.g. Psalms 7, 39), psalms used in covenant renewal ceremonies (e.g. Psalm 50) and Messianic psalms (e.g. Psalms 2, 22, 110). Some are specifically listed as prayers, using a technical Hebrew word (e.g. Psalms 17, 90, 142); and others, again with the use of another technical word, could be classified as "remembrance" psalms (e.g. Psalms 38, 70). Psalms 120-134 were evidently used by the "pilgrims ascending the high city of Jerusalem at the three great agricultural festivals" and thus are known as "psalms of ascent."<sup>3</sup> Several psalms are unique and defy any easy classification (e.g. Psalms 56, 75, 80).

Again, the point is that, within the Bible, even just within the book of *Psalms*, we find a wide variety of music and songs. No one type of song will do for the people of God. Through His Holy Spirit, men and women were led to sing without regard to strict musicological rules. In fact, among the psalms, we find musical terms that show a great variety in the types of instruments used for accompaniment. Some are to be sung a cappella. Some employ a tune from a high octave, others, a lower octave.

It is clear from any objective survey of Old Testament music, that there is no one acceptable form for song, for singing or for the use of musical instruments. Variety is encouraged as God's people bring

Him the praise that is due to His name.

#### In the New Testament

The New Testament, in comparison to the Old Testament, contains relatively few references to the actual singing of God's people at work or in worship. However, we must assume *continuity* from the Old to the New. Something of a "bridge" from the one to the other is provided by the introductory songs in Luke's gospel, proclaiming the arrival of the promised Messiah. The songs of Mary, of Zechariah, of the angels and of Simeon all demonstrate the ongoing practice of praising God and giving testimony to His greatness through song. Later, Jesus and His disciples are said to have sung a hymn (Mark 14:26) — something they must have done regularly, though we're not told of it. Later still, we find the missionaries Paul and Silas in jail, singing God's praises (Acts 16:25). The apostle Paul encourages a variety of songs when he instructs the Church to "sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (Colossians 3:16). No doubt some of these songs were taken from the repertoire of the Old Testament. Other songs, however, were new songs prompted by the internal witness of the Spirit to one's inner spirit (I Corinthians 14:15-16). While the reference here may be to the special gifts given only to the early church, yet the church today continues to be prompted by the Spirit in the truths of God's Word. The ongoing "internal witness" of the Spirit continues to inspire our songs today.

We read that heaven itself is currently filled with a variety of songs and singers. The four living creatures, the twenty-four elders, the myriad of angels, the redeemed humans and every creature in heaven and earth are now or someday will praise God in song (Revelation 5:9-10, 12-13; 14:2-3; 15:3-4).

#### CONCLUSION

Having surveyed the wide variety of music in the kingdom of God as described from Genesis through Revelation, why is it that so many of us are content in our worship with only *one* instrument (mainly,

the organ), with only *one* hymnal (officially, the *Psalter Hymnal*), with only *one* song leader (customarily, the minister), and with only a *handful* of musical variations? **Our music should be no less varied than music found in the Bible!** Let's use this as a *beginning principle* for our church music and for evaluating all church music from a Reformed perspective.

There are historical and theological reasons why our church music became so limited in its variety. The next article in this series will explain some of these reasons. In the meantime, we must seek to be true to the Scriptures and only the Scriptures. In our evaluation of songs, let us avoid criticism which may arise more from our own personal preferences than from the Scriptures. And let us surround and enhance the preaching of God's Word in our worship services with an increasingly great variety of the songs of Zion.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Russel N. Squire, *Church Music: Musical and Hymnological Developments in Western Christianity*. St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1962, p. 16.
2. Foxgrove, D. A. and Kilmer, A. D., "Music," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Rev. ed. Vol. 3. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986, pp. 438, 446.
3. Foxgrove, *Ibid.*, p. 447. This and other of my comments about the variety within the psalms are largely based on Foxgrove's article.

*Rev. Lankheet is pastor of the Ontario Christian Reformed Church, Ontario, CA.*



## Why Do We Sing?

Laurie Vanden Heuvel

In response to the invitation given by God through the apostle Paul to "Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord..." (Eph. 5:19b), the Christian church has set the Psalms to music and developed a hymnody known and loved around the world.

For the next few months, we will be taking a close look at the "music-making" of the church — particularly its singing. We begin by asking the question, why do we sing? The answer can be found in 1) God's will and activity and 2) man's response.

### GOD'S WILL AND ACTS

There is no area of human existence, experience or endeavor which can or should thrive apart from the control of our sovereign God. Our song is no exception. The Bible makes it very clear that our song is rooted in the will and activity of God Himself.

**First**, we sing because God *commands* it. In Psalms 148, 149 and 150 we find a trio of exhortations to song. In Psalm 148, all *creation* is called to praise: angels, sun, moon, stars, heavens, waters, sea creatures, ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds, mountains, hills, fruit trees, cedars, wild animals, cattle, small creatures, flying birds, kings, princes, rulers on earth, young men, maidens, old men and children.

In Psalm 149, the *church* is commanded to sing. "Praise the Lord. Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the *assembly* of the saints" (Psalm 149:1).

In Psalm 150, *everything that "has breath"* must sing, using instruments at its disposal to the glory of God. Certainly this would seem to indicate that something more than just

the human voice can legitimately be used in worship. If we have problems with instruments in worship today, perhaps the problem lies not so much with the instruments, but with the *use* made of these instruments; and with that we will deal in a later article.

**Second**, we sing because God *deserves* it. It goes without saying, that had God created man and left him alone, man would still owe God a debt of praise. But in the trio of Psalms 145, 146 and 147 we have a record of all the gracious *acts* of God toward man for which He deserves to be praised out of His creatures' profound gratitude for all God has done. Psalms 145-147 describe God as "gracious, compassionate...slow to anger...rich in love...great...upholding those that fall...lifting up those who are bowed down...giving food at the proper time...righteous...near to all who call upon Him...preserver...destroyer of the wicked...keeper of the truth...relieving the fatherless and the widow...gathering the outcasts...healing the broken hearted...binding their wounds...giving food to the cattle and young ravens...blessing your children within you...making peace in your borders...filling with wheat..." Does anyone dare to withhold the praise He asks? "Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; make music to our God on the harp" (Ps. 147:7).

**Third**, we sing because *God gives this gift of song*. Psalm 40:3 says, "And he put a new song in my mouth." There can be no songs of human origin which can parallel, far less exceed the psalms in their portrait of God - a God with "a Creator's mastery over the universe, with a Father's tender pity toward



His children, with a Judge's interest in righteousness, with a Shepherd's care for the erring; a God whose glory is above the heavens, who counts the stars and names them, whose kingdom rules over all, yet whose mercy is from everlasting to everlasting. To learn of such a God is to have awakened within the heart a response of penitence, of gratitude, of reverence and of adoring love" (J.A. Lamb in *The Psalms in Christian Worship*). How regrettable that the psalms set to music have found so little entrance into the English speaking congregations of today, even those of Reformed and Presbyterian heritage who are direct descendants of reformers renown for their reintroduction of the psalms into the lives of the laity at the time of the reformation. Such neglect is a sad commentary on the past; a serious challenge for the future.

### MAN'S RESPONSE

But we sing not only because of God's will and activity, but also as a Spirit - guided expression of our response to that activity.

We sing first because we are redeemed. Proverbs 29:6 says, "A righteous man can sing and be glad." Perhaps the reason some people do not enjoy singing the "songs of Zion" is because they have no real assurance of sin forgiven and no determination to live a life totally under the kingship of Jesus Christ. God has stern words for those singers whose hearts have grown cold:

"Away with the noise of your songs. I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream" (Amos 5:23 and 24). In Ephesians 5:18-19 Paul describes God-glorifying singing as that which comes from those who are "filled with the Spirit."

**Second**, we sing because we are thankful for salvation, joyful because of it and committed to sharing it. "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (I Peter 2:9).

**Third**, we sing because by God's grace we are victorious over the trials and temptations of life. There are many passages in Scripture which refer to "songs in the night" given by God to the troubled soul as comfort and assurance of victory. One such setting is Psalm 42:7b and 8: "All your waves and breakers have swept over me. By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life."

**Fourth**, we sing because we are a part of the *body* of Christ and as such we are summoned to corporate worship. We are members of a family. The more we praise God together, the more we realize that unity among brothers and sisters for which Christ prayed. "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and

spiritual songs" (Eph. 5:19a).

**Fifth**, we sing because we want to testify to the rest of the church and to the world concerning the truth of God in Jesus Christ. Song is an effective teacher of doctrine while being at the same time a vehicle of praise. "My tongue will sing of your righteousness" (Ps. 51:14b); "Sing to the glory of his name" (Ps. 66:2); "I will sing of your love and justice" (Ps. 101:1); "He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord" (Ps. 40:3).

Are we really singing Christians? The question does not concern the quality of our voice. Even "joyful noise" pleases the Lord if the heart is right. But is our praise really rooted in the gracious activity of God and expressed thankfully and joyfully in song? A perpetually sad Christian is a contradiction in terms. Let's follow Paul's urging and "make music in our hearts to the Lord." "I will sing with my spirit but I will also sing with my mind" (1 Cor. 14:15b).

And what of heaven? "Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth" (Rev. 14:1-3).

Are you redeemed? Then "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so!"

President Elect William Clinton  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.  
Washington DC 20050

Mr. President:

When you on January 20 assume the nation's highest governing office, our prayers and those of many other Christians will accompany you for wisdom to face its burdensome responsibilities (1 Tim. 2:1,2).

This letter is prompted by your unusual invitation to citizens to express their diverging convictions about how the country's problems should be met.

The campaign and the electorate have both given top priority to addressing our economic problems. It is usually overlooked (and sometimes ridiculed) that these urgent economic matters are really moral problems. When either the individual or the country will not pay its bills, preferring to borrow until broke, this is breaking two of God's ten commandments: "You shall not steal" and "You shall not covet"! As missionaries we saw the growing chaos around us in interior China in 1947-48 when the exchange rate for US dollars which a few years earlier had been 3 to 1, inflated to 12,000,000 to 1, and the nationalist government lost control. A few years later a university course on the French Revolution documented the same kind of fiasco when the governing classes, insisting on borrowing instead of paying, lost control to a "reign of terror" that made everyone welcome Napoleon. In the long run "God is not mocked" (Gal. 6:7), even in economics.

Urgent as our economic problems are, in the Bible's teaching, others appear even more threatening. The first two thirds of the Bible traces God's treatment of a small nation, privileged and prospered beyond others (in some ways a little like the US in our short history). Their privileges and prosperity tempted them to ignore God's moral laws (not unlike our society today). After centuries of warning, the unbelievable happened. Delinquent Israel was ruthlessly swept away like trash in its captivity. If one asks what, among their many moral lapses, finally triggered the divine judgment, the Bible's record in 2 Kings 24:3,4 singles out the policy of one king as the ultimate reason ("the last straw"). Evidently more than all his predecessors, he had "filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; which the LORD would not pardon." If that is God's perspective (as your churches, like ours, still recognize), can we expect Him to prosper this country if we remove all restraints on, and even pay for the abortion of more than the 28 million children killed since the supreme Court arbitrarily called that a "right"?

From the same Bible's perspective (Lev. 18:22-30; Romans 1:27), we see God condemning homosexual relations and practices as "detestable" perversions of His having created us for proper sexual relationships in marriage, and threatening violators with "the due penalty for their perversion." Abraham, assigned a unique role in the Bible as "father of believers" and "father of many nations," must see God's spectacular destruction of the neighboring Sodom because of its intolerable vices, as a never-to-be forgotten warning about the limits of divine patience (Gen. 18: 17ff.). Even the term "sodomy" has continued through the Bible and later history to echo that warning. The destruction of the Canaanites, the fall of Rome and the collapse of many other societies through the centuries have illustrated God's penalties on peoples who thought they could get away with anything because of His past kindnesses to them. I saw as a navy chaplain, the penalties of sexual immorality in the 1/3 of our hospital wards trying to treat venereal infections. A frustrated doctor complained of the many who were reinfected before completing treatment, with infections resisting 5 times the prescribed dosage of drugs. He saw that they needed more. They needed to get back to God and His saving Word which, thank God, we saw some doing. Years later, when medicine was thought to have eliminated such problems, making old morals unnecessary, God gave us an AIDS epidemic that especially resists treatment because promiscuous living destroys the body's immunities. While trying to help the sick and treat their plagues, we must do more. We must certainly not give special "rights" and privileges which promote perverse sexual practices. Such a policy will accelerate the problems which, as God's judgments, are destroying our society.

Missionary friends are telling us how God's Ten Commandments are being posted in schools and other public places through large areas of New Guinea to build moral foundations of a society newly emerging from savagery. We ask and pray that you, as a professing Christian, will not support the outlawing of all such Christian moral testimony from our schools and public life. Our society desperately needs that remedy as we see it rapidly reverting to savagery. We pray that your administration and our country may seek a better future than that.

Sincerely yours,

Rev. Peter De Jong



## International Reformed Fellowship

W. Robert Godfrey

A remarkable meeting was held in Pasadena, California, February 18-20, 1993. It was remarkable because the meeting was devoted to the cause of Reformed ecumenicity. It was remarkable because the 80 delegates came from 10 countries, 15 denominations and 18 seminaries. It was remarkable because the impetus for the meeting came from Koreans, showing the maturity and leadership of this relatively new part of the Reformed community.

Dr. John E. Kim, president of the International Theological Seminary and pastor of the large Los Angeles Korean Christian Reformed Church, spearheaded this new project for a Reformed ecumenical organization. He, along with Dr. Luder Whitlock, Jr., president of Reformed Theological Seminary, and the Rev. Sam Sung Lee, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Hapdong Presbyterian Church in Korea, was elected co-president of the Fellowship. During a sabbatical from his pastoral duties, Dr. Kim traveled widely in Asia and established many contacts that contributed to the founding of the Fellowship. His address to the conference in Pasadena (printed in this issue of *The Outlook*) expressed his understanding of the need for the new organization.

In the course of his remarks, Dr. Kim noted the longstanding Korean frustration with the Reformed Ecumenical Council. In 1968 when the REC (then the RES) met in Amsterdam, G.C. Berkouwer spoke to the meeting and urged the RES to draw closer to the Roman Catholic Church. The Korean churches were so offended that in the next year, they withdrew from the RES.

The new IRF desires to be a conservative alternative to the REC. The hope is that various Reformed churches will affiliate with the new Fellowship. Strong interest has al-

ready been shown by several Asian and American denominations. But the IRF will seek to involve not only denominations. It will also seek members from seminaries and mission organizations and will have individuals as associate members.

Several seminaries known to readers of *The Outlook* were represented, including International, Reformed, the Korean Reformed Presbyterian Seminary and Westminster seminaries in Philadelphia and in California. Calvin Theological Seminary was invited but did not send a representative.

Basic organizational matters occupied some of the time of the conference. In addition to electing co-presidents and adopting by-laws, Dr. Ananda Perera was elected general secretary. Dr. Perera is currently a professor at International Theological Seminary. Questions about the Fellowship can be addressed to him at the seminary, 332 South Virgil Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90020. Various regional secretaries were appointed to assist Dr. Perera and to represent the cause of the Fellowship in various parts of the world. I was elected recording secretary and chairman of the theological committee.

A number of papers on theological and methodological topics were read during the course of the conference. (My paper will be printed in the June issue of *The Outlook*.) One point of missionary strategy often adopted by Korean missionaries was discussed. This strategy involves the rapid development of theological seminaries on the field so that local leadership for the emerging churches can be quickly trained for service. The strength of

this method is that it provides native leaders as soon as possible for the churches. It also points to the importance of theological education, seeing it not as a hindrance to evangelism, but a useful preparation for evangelism and a bulwark for the church's health and development.

Other papers reported on the growth of Reformed churches in various parts of the world - especially Asia. Korea certainly seems to be the most fruitful mission field for Reformed Christianity in the twentieth century. Millions have been evangelized. Presbyterian churches have grown dramatically. But ecumenical problems definitely exist. It is estimated that there are now around 125 Presbyterian denominations in Korea!

Other countries had exciting reports. Presbyterians from Thailand proudly displayed their recent translation of Louis Berkhof's *Manual of Christian Doctrine* into Thai. A Korean missionary to the Philippines spoke of how the Presbyterian church there had joined a union church in 1948 and had become a liberal body. Through mission work the Presbyterian church was reborn in 1979 and now has built the Philippine Presbyterian Seminary which is educating people from many parts of Asia. A brother from Nepal spoke of how, in the face of great difficulties, the church has grown from nothing in 1951 to about 50,000 today. Much of that growth has come from Christians

*"Korea certainly seems to be the most fruitful mission field for Reformed Christianity in the twentieth century."*

preaching and leading Bible studies in jails where they were imprisoned for their faith.

The conference was a very encouraging time for me. It was wonderful to hear what the Lord is doing in various parts of the world to build His church. It was a blessing to see new efforts to advance the cause of Reformed ecumenicity. May the Lord bless this Fellowship and use it for His glory.

*Dr. Godfrey, editor of this department, currently Professor of Church History, is the President-elect of Westminster Theological Seminary in Escondido, CA.*

## Why International Reformed Fellowship?

John E. Kim

Ecumenicity is the watchword in church life today in every continent and country of the globe. The magnitude of the atheistic challenge, coupled with the scandal of unceasing divisions within the established church has been a great incentive to church union as Christians yearn to be united.

As a result we have witnessed the formation of the World Council of Churches, The International Council of Christian Churches and the National Christian Councils. Interdenominational and international councils have continued to organize under different names.

We as Reformed church leaders, all agree that the churches should seek to realize their essential unity. We agree that we must meet the ecumenical challenge of the present day.

Then why IRF? Can we not just join an already existing ecumenical body which has close creedal affinity with us?

Unfortunately our answer must be negative. This is so because of past experiences many of us have had. Having joined them in the past, it became necessary to withdraw because they were not faithful to the creedal Biblical tenets; they lacked an adequate social concern and often ended in the development of a personality cult. We took issue with these types of ecumenism not because we lacked appreciation for the unity of the church, but because their ecumenical striving had lost sight of the true nature of unity.

The ecumenical movement especially represented by the World Council of Churches has substituted the unity of external organization for the real unity based on Biblical faith. It tends to overlook the Bibli-

cal basis of unity because of its anticreedal bias. For them Christianity is not a doctrine but just a life. This anticreedal stance opened doors for many anti-Christian elements in the movement.

The February 1993 issue of *Reader's Digest* in a special report entitled "The Gospel According to Marx," on pages 68-73, asks the question: "Why have the interests of the World Council of Churches strayed so far afield from Christianity?" In answering that question the author, Joseph A. Harriss, said,

Before the opening worship service began at the last general assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Canberra, Australia, delegates passed through the smoke of burning leaves. This was a pagan cleansing rite. The congregation then listened to recorded insect noises and watched a pale dancer impersonate a kangaroo. The next day, as two painted, loin-clothed Aborigines cavorted, South Korean theologian Chung Hyun Kyung invoked the spirit of the dead and exhorted the audience of more than 4000 to read the Bible "from the perspective of birds, water, air, trees" and to "think like a mountain."

He also said,

To justify its political action, the WCC has encouraged "contextual theologies" to suit local conditions. These include liberation theology for South and Central America, urban theology for South Africa - all interpreting the Bible selectively to support

radicalism. "Just as it was right for Jeroboam to seek to oust Solomon" says one WCC publication, "it is right for all to throw off people from positions of authority."

The final quote we share regards financial contributions to questionable organizations.

Since 1970, the PCR (WCC's Program to Combat Racism) has distributed over \$10 million to more than 130 organizations in some 30 countries - about half to revolutionary Marxist movements in Africa. It does not check to see that funds are actually used for humanitarian purposes. One grant of \$85,000 went to the Patriotic Front in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), which had murdered 207 white civilians and 1712 blacks, along with nine missionaries and their children.

This kind of frontal attack against the basic truths of Christianity in the name of the WCC is a clear act

*"...their ecumenical striving had lost sight of the true nature of unity."*

of apostasy. Our distant disassociation with them is more and more justified.

We are also not comfortable to be associated with the Reformed Ecumenical movement such as the Reformed Ecumenical Council because of her "friendly distance" to WCC by allowing member churches to have dual membership in both organizations.

While we are not aligning with liberal ecumenism, we also stand opposed to another kind of ecumenism represented by ICCA because of "personality cultism" and extreme separatism.

Having been opposed to or rejected by these extremes, we are here today, to stand together not as isolationists, but as the Reformed ecumenists under the name International Reformed Fellowship. IRF was conceived and came into being in response to the demand created by the ecclesiastical climate of today.

Last year was my sabbatical. It was the first time this privilege was accorded me in my thirty years of ministry. I utilized this opportunity to meet the leaders of non-western Reformed or Presbyterian churches and listen to their heart beat and aspirations. Most of them had left WCC or ICCC after bitter experiences of one sort or another.

They all cried for the need of fellowship through which they could come together in order to enhance Reformed fellowship and to advance the Reformed cause worldwide.

This desire, by the grace of God, has crystallized in the formation of IRF today. We are here by the leading of the Holy Spirit, to pray together, discuss together, to provide an adequate response as we meet the ecumenical challenge. We believe that this response must derive from the Reformed perspective and create a platform from which the Reformed witness may expand, spreading all over the whole world.

Therefore it is my prayer that this conference will not only be the formation of IRF, but will also provide a forum for discussion and exploration of timely Reformed mission strategies through mutual cooperation and encouragement relevant to modern day situations.

Praise and glory to our sovereign Lord and Savior. Amen.

*Dr. John E. Kim, pastor of the Korean CRC in Los Angeles, CA, serves as Co-president of the newly formed International Reformed Fellowship.*



## Family Worship Patterns

Connie Sikma

We live in an age where the prevalent philosophies, ideas and lifestyles contain no absolutes. Professing Christians marry unbelievers, divorce is on the rise, co-habitation and homosexuality have become the norm. The established church (as an organization) of the West is quickly disintegrating into a state of apostasy. Discernment among the laypeople is pathetic because they have lost the knowledge of what God's Word says. It is imperative that we ground our future generations in the truths of Scripture (Proverbs 1). Truth is a knowable, objective reality.

### TIME

As a family, we must take the time for family worship as a way and means to instill God's Word in the minds and hearts of our children. This was God's mandate to His children that His Word would not be lost in prosperous times to come (Deut. 6: 5-7).

This is more than the church's or school's responsibility - it is our duty as parents, as professing Christians to know, share and live God's Word for our families. It should be our earnest desire (Ps. 119; II Tim. 3:16). We need to establish a time for our own personal devotions and encourage the older children to do so. We need to constantly re-evaluate our own example. Do our lives show the reality of God's presence? Do we use our conversation, our choices of activities, our handling of difficult times as opportunities to share our faith with our children?

With the frantic pace of our whirlwind society, days fly by before we realize that we vaguely remember the last time we opened our Bible

with the family. The priority of family worship has become a thing of the past. The ambition to gain every opportunity this grand life offers has squeezed out the time necessary for family worship. Our goals for leisure and recreation have become obsessions at all costs. As we budget money to remain solvent, we should also budget our time to stay spiritually alive and alert.

Agree on a time when the family is to be together. Usually mealtime (AM or PM) works. If schedules are too hectic, maybe something has

*"Use discernment when you choose devotional materials."*

to go. Fifteen years from now, Joey's success as a high school football player won't be nearly as important as his grounding in the Word of God for a solid foundation upon which to bring up the next generation. If Dad can't be there, then Mom it is up to you, or vice versa. Today (it's not too soon or too late), re-evaluate your priorities and set aside at least one or two times a day for family worship. Guard that time slot with your life (i.e., calls waiting can wait and so can Suzy's date).

### PRAYER

Along with Scripture, the necessity of prayer as an ingredient to family worship is a "must." James W. Alexander in his *Thoughts of Family Worship* asks, "...can you possibly endure a life without so much as one common prayer as a family? Have no call for domestic thanksgiving? No daily mercies? No special deliverances? No long-continued exemption from evil? It is mon-

strous that a Christian household should, on these points, be absolutely silent; we scarcely know *how it can be so.*"

How can it be so? Reread the parable of the sower. It seemed so simple when we were young; but as we grow older, the world seems to spin faster and, with all its enticements, has lured us away from the Word of God in our family life. Our choice to set a special time aside will be our stand against liberalism and the compromises it carries with it in this age.

## MATERIAL

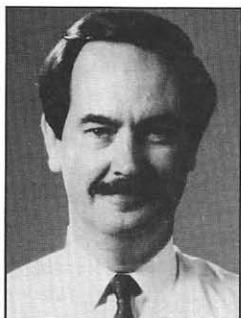
In addition to the time element and the practice of prayer, we need to conscientiously make this a *meaningful experience*. At least once a day the Bible in its purity should be read - pick a system; be consistent. Questions which highlight special verses, and subsequent discussion help to reinforce the lesson (for moms and dads too). Take into account the ages and needs of your family. Sometimes pre-schoolers need a simple picture Bible story book. If mom or dad are willing to take the time to sit down with their little ones, they are always happy and willing to listen, recite or sing. Here is an opportunity to "make memories." Start young - the babies can be rocked to sleep to psalters as well as anything else. Three and four-year-olds love to memorize. Besides making memories, you will give your children the solid knowledge of God to carry them through the storms and calms of life.

Use discernment when you choose your devotional material. In this day of advertisement, where anything can be published, it can be confusing. I once made the mistake of buying what was touted as an impressive Bible Story book only to discover that it was anti-semitic and Jesus was pictured as a blonde! Many devotional helps (especially the highly promoted ones) are watered down and insipid. The following list contains a few solid books and devotional helps that you may find helpful as well worth your while.

*Mrs. Connie Sikma, member of Seventh Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, MI, is the mother of 4 children and a part-time English major at Calvin College, pursuing a secondary degree in education.*

## Resources

1. *Bible Doctrine for Younger Children* by J.W. Beeke is a two volume series which spans the elementary age group. See the book review for more indepth information.
2. *Children's Story Bible* by Catherine Vos is a classic Bible story book in three volumes. This collection is a straightforward narrative of Bible stories.
3. *Come, Ye Children* by Gertrude Hoeksema and published by Reformed Free Publishing, 1983, is a Scriptural narrative coming from the Protestant Reformed Church. It is Biblically accurate and at the end of each story there is an application to remember.
4. *Leading Little Ones to God* by Marian Schoolland, published by Eerdmans Publishing, 1982, is a classic written for ages 3 to 7. It includes lessons about God, the story of salvation, becoming children of God, prayer, God's church and things that are to happen.
5. *Morning and Evening* by Charles Spurgeon was written by the most famous Calvinist preacher in 19th century England. It is appropriate for the older family that prefers a short devotional with their Bible reading. This obvious classic can be obtained through any Christian bookstore.
6. *McCheyne's Calendar for Daily Reading* (tract) is a helpful guide for systematic Bible reading for private devotions as well as family devotions. You can obtain this tract by writing The Banner of Truth Trust, P.O. Box 621, Carlisle, PA, 17013.
7. *Tell Me about God* (for ages 3-7) by Susan Harding was published by The Banner of Truth, 1987. Using the letters of the alphabet, Susan Harding's simple stories in the doctrine of God include a Scripture passage, text, Bible song, a simple catechism question and a short lesson to read.
8. *The Children's Bible* by Anne DeVries was published by Concordia Publishing House. Each story is written to include the promises of salvation from a Calvinistic perspective. It is appropriate for ages 4 and up.
9. *Thoughts on Family Worship* by J.W. Alexander was written over 100 years ago on a topic that is never out of date. Information on this book can be obtained through Trinity Book Service, P.O. Box 569, 160 Changebridge Road, Montville, NJ, 07045.



## A License to Kill

Cal Thomas

In fiction, James Bond was given a license to kill by the British government. In reality, the Dutch government, which should know better because of its experience with the occupying Nazis, recently gave physicians their own license to kill. The Dutch parliament, in a 91-45 vote, set supposedly strict conditions under which doctors may now literally kill their patients, but an important line has been crossed for medicine and patients that will not be easily redrawn.

The Hippocratic Oath, written more than 2,000 years ago in response to a revulsion against the utilitarian motives behind abortion, infanticide and euthanasia in ancient Greece, established for the first time "a complete separation between killing and curing," in the words of the late anthropologist Margaret Mead. The oath, which was pagan in origin, would later be infused with ethical and moral principles contained in the Old and New Testaments.

Now that those principles are no longer regarded by many people as relevant for a modern age, we are regressing to that pre-Hippocrates time in which technique, skill and outcome, rather than intrinsic value, are to guide physicians as they determine who should live and who should die.

As Nigel M. deS. Cameron writes in his book, *The New Medicine*: "The real question is this: Is medicine essentially a matter of medical technique? Or is it, rather, a matter of values, of moral commitments in the exercise of clinical skills?" These are important questions with profound implications for the United States as the Clinton Administration begins to overhaul American health care.

The Dutch passed their new euthanasia law precisely because, as Cameron warns: "The medical profession has simply forgotten to reflect on the nature of the medical enterprise. It has no single governing concept of what it is doing. A fatal combination of technological advance and ethical flux has led to the progressive disintegration of the idea of medicine." Indeed, most education in medical schools today takes only a cursory interest in "bioethics."

If there is no Author of life, if there is no reason for curing (i.e., that man is a unique creation endowed with rights which he receives from a higher source than from the state), then much of medicine is worthless sentimentality, and we could save lots of money which the healthy could spend, by denying all but the "fit," access to medical care.

If this has a familiar ring to it, it should. This was precisely the view taken by German doctors who entered into an unholy alliance with Hitler. That experience shows those who will learn from it, as the Dutch clearly have not, that once doctors engage in killing to satisfy a state objective (i.e., cost containment, budget balancing), there will be no limits placed on the use of their "skills." Then, as Dr. Karel Gunning, former president of the League of Dutch Physicians, noted, an irreversible slide begins: "Our society is moving very quickly from birth control to death control."

Those who warned of such a progression in the United States when abortion was made legal in 1973 were dismissed as alarmists. That was nearly 30 million dead babies ago. Now we are busy tearing down what barriers remain to infanticide and euthanasia. As with abortion,

the hard cases will be used to justify euthanasia, which could then be as accepted by many as abortion is, especially if it is sold as a benefit to the younger, healthier and more "useful" overburdened taxpayer. Jack "the dripper" (as Rush Limbaugh calls him) Kevorkian, is doing his part to accelerate euthanasia in America.

Shame on the Dutch people for allowing euthanasia to be practiced again in their midst. Are there no history books in The Hague? Parliamentarians should have read Benno Muller-Hill's book, *Murderous Science*, in which the professor of genetics at the University of Cologne focuses on the transformation of medicine before and during the war years.

In the spring of 1937, writes Muller-Hill, a decision is made that requires "all German coloured (CQ) children to be sterilized." Hitler later backdates his letter introducing "euthanasia" to September 1, 1939, to coincide with the assault on Poland that begins World War II. The letter states: "Reichsleiter Buhler and Dr. Brandt are entrusted with the responsibility of extending the rights of specially designated physicians, such that patients who are judged incurable after the most thorough review of their condition which is possible, can be granted mercy killing."

There were, of course, no "thorough reviews," and people were exterminated when they failed to meet Hitler's standard for the master race. There is no moral difference between what Hitler did then and what the Dutch Parliament did recently. The empowerment of Dutch physicians with the right to kill is a dangerous precedent which the Dutch people will regret.

*Los Angeles Times Syndicate*



## What We Believe

### But for the Grace of God

The Significance of the Canons of Dort for Today:  
Concluding Observations

Cornelis P. Venema

Now that we have come to the end of our journey through the *Canons of Dort*, it is time to draw some conclusions regarding their continued usefulness and importance for the Reformed churches today. This will enable us to tie up some remaining loose threads in the previous articles, and to underscore what has been one of my major theses throughout: Reformed believers need to rediscover and benefit from their rich confessional inheritance in the *Canons of Dort*. Though often neglected and misunderstood, as we have seen, this confession of faith has much to contribute to the life and ministry of the church.

#### UNSWERVINGLY BIBLICAL

The first observation concerns the *unswervingly* Biblical character of this confession of faith.

In the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, a Reformed confession that comes from a period of history and an ecclesiastical context in many ways different from that which occasioned the Synod of Dort in 1618-1619, there is a beautiful statement of the Reformed view of the supreme authority of the Word of God in determining the truth. Found in the first chapter, Article X, this statement declares that

The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture.

When the dispute over election arose in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands in the late sixteenth

and early seventeenth centuries, the earliest debate focused upon Article XVI of the *Belgic Confession*. Does this article truly express the Scriptural teaching of God's sovereign, unconditional election of His people in Christ? Or, is it an un-Scriptural article of faith? When Arminius challenged the confession of election in the Reformed churches, his challenge required the Reformed churches to determine whether their confession was based upon the Word of God. The Reformed churches were confronted with a test case, in other words, as to whether they were willing to live by their own confession of the supreme authority of the Word of God.

It has been the burden of my argument in the preceding articles to demonstrate how, on each contested point of doctrine, the *Canons* admirably meet this test. Without swerving either to the left or to the right, the *Canons* consistently adhere to the line of Biblical truth.

Since the Scriptures teach that God elects His people to salvation by grace alone, and not upon the condition of foreseen faith and repentance, the *Canons* confess this truth. Since the Scriptures teach that some, though not all, are chosen, while others are passed by in God's electing purpose, the *Canons* affirm particular election as well as non-election. When the Arminians alleged that this would make God the Author of sin and unbelief, or undermine the serious call of the gospel, promising life and salvation to everyone who believes, the authors of the *Canons* steadfastly refused to draw this conclusion. Why? Because the Scriptures teach both par-

ticular election and a universal gospel summons. That the Scriptures teach both was enough; and so both found their echo in the affirmations of the *Canons*.

Similarly, since the Scriptures teach that Christ's work of atonement was provided on behalf of those whom the Father purposed to save and give to Him, the *Canons* resist the Arminian view that the universal summons of the gospel requires a universal atonement. And, since the Scriptures teach the preservation of the believer in the way of salvation and the urgent obligation to persevere in the way, the *Canons* likewise affirm both emphases with equal vigor.

Many more examples of the Scriptural faithfulness and balance of the *Canons* could be cited. What is remarkable is how the *Canons* consistently resist the temptation of *rationalism*. Rationalism, or the reliance upon human reason to competently determine and measure the truth without being submissive to the Scriptures, more than meets its

"...the *Canons* follow the Scriptures wherever they lead, while refusing to go further than Scriptures go."

match in this confession. Without attempting to delve into the mystery of God's electing purpose beyond the boundaries of Scriptural revelation, and without attempting to effect an easy resolution of Biblical emphases that may appear to us incapable of harmonization, the *Canons* follow the Scriptures wherever they lead, while refusing to go further than the Scriptures go. In so doing they are a model of the Reformation's commitment to *sola Scriptura*; by the standard of the Word of God alone we are to judge and determine what is true.

#### A ONE-SIDED/FOCUSED CONFESSION?

A second observation regarding the *Canons of Dort* relates to what might be termed the *one-sidedness* or *specific focus* of this confession.

In a previous article, I referred to this feature of the *Canons* when I observed that they address one particular aspect of Scripture's teaching which was being contested among the Reformed churches of the Netherlands in the post-Reformation period. It was not the purpose of the authors of the *Canons* to provide a comprehensive statement of Scriptural teaching in the same fashion as a confession like the *Belgic Confession* or the *Heidelberg Catechism*. The focus of the dispute in the Netherlands was quite limited; it had to do with the confession of election, particularly whether this election was in any way founded upon the condition of faith in the gospel.

This historical occasion and limited focus of the dispute among the Reformed churches in the Netherlands are often forgotten by critics of the *Canons* when they charge them with narrowing the scope of the Reformed faith. It is simply unfair to compare the *Canons* directly with the broader and more wide-ranging confessions of the Reformation period, or to judge that they have inappropriately narrowed the focus of an earlier Reformed or Calvinistic "world and life view" by reducing the compass of the Reformed faith to what are sometimes termed the *doctrines of grace*. Such criticism neglects to appreciate the deliberate focus and acknowledged limitation of this confession of faith. The *Canons* were never intended to serve the churches as a substitute for the more full confession of faith provided in the other creeds. They were intended to supplement and clarify the Reformed faith, at precisely that critical point where this faith was being severely tested.

Perhaps this can be illustrated by considering a picture of a landscape scene that encompasses a wide panorama within its range of vision. Such a landscape could be surveyed or viewed in its broadest possible scope. However, it would be possible to fix one's attention or sight upon an object that, upon closer scrutiny, has a central place and prominence in the landscape. If one looks at the landscape comprehen-

sively, this item might escape initial notice. However, if one examines the landscape more carefully, this otherwise unnoticed item comes into bold relief.

Something like this is true of the broad confession of faith, or world and life view that Reformed Christianity or Calvinism represents. Seen comprehensively, it covers a range of vision that cannot be limited to the Biblical teaching concerning election.<sup>1</sup> It includes a perspective not only upon the life and ministry of the church, but also upon the vocation or calling of God's people to exercise a responsible stewardship of God's gifts, the civil

*"This is a confession that speaks not of man's initiative and action, but of God's."*

order and task of the magistrate, the ordering of a just economy, an approach to Christian scholarship in the academy, and the like. The Reformed faith is as broad as the Biblical faith, comprising the whole of God's revelation of Himself in the creation of the world, the redemption of His people and the consummation of His kingdom.

The *Canons* represent what lies at the heart of the Reformed world and life view, namely, the sovereign initiative and grace of God in the restoration of a people to communion with Himself and to the glorification and service of His great name. But they do not encompass the whole of this world and life view. Consequently, when the *Canons* are evaluated, they should not be charged with restricting the compass of the Reformed faith too narrowly. They do not claim to set forth the whole of the Reformed faith. Nor do they claim to provide the answer to questions to which they are not addressed. They aim only to confess salvation by grace alone in terms of the Biblical teaching of election. With respect to this aim, they are on target.

## A GOD-CENTERED FAITH

Perhaps the single most important reason the *Canons of Dort* are not as popularly known or appreciated as they should be, has to do with their God-centeredness. Or, to state the matter negatively, because the *Canons of Dort* are *anti-humanistic* through and through, they do not find a congenial home in an age which has inherited an Enlightenment spirit which emphasizes man's autonomy and liberty.

It is not possible to underestimate the extent to which the spirit of the Enlightenment has made its inroads in Western culture and societies, and in the churches as well. This spirit chafes under the Biblical teaching that all men are constituted sinners in Adam, born and conceived in sin, worthy only of condemnation and death. The Biblical teaching that all men are wholly incapable of

doing any saving good—spiritually blind to the truth of God's Word, spiritually enslaved to the dominion and principle of sin, spiritually dead in trespasses and sins—is regarded by many as an intolerable assault upon the dignity of man and his place under the sun.

Furthermore, it is regarded as sacrilege that man should not be free to determine his own destiny, to "pull himself up by his own bootstraps," and to forge for himself a future of his own making. If God should have any role to play in all this, it can only be that of a co-laborer or fellow-traveler, not that of the sovereign Creator and Lord of history who administers all things in accordance with His holy will (Eph. 1:11). If credit is to be assigned, God will receive His due, but only if He is regarded as One who helps us along the way but leaves to us the initiative in beginning as well as finishing the course!

Sadly, this spirit also enjoys a warm reception within many churches. In an age of "consumer religion," which tailors the gospel to the tastes of the religious public, many of the Biblical notes sounded in the *Canons of Dort* are muted at best, wholly silenced at worst. In an age devoted to "church growth," not so much by the simple preach-

ing of the Biblical gospel, calling sinners to true faith and genuine repentance, but to those methods which will attract a crowd and garner the most traffic, the sober emphases of the *Canons* do not appear particularly attractive. Won't the preaching of sin and grace be too threatening to many contemporary seekers? Won't the gospel summons to repentance put off more than it attracts? Won't the emphasis upon God's gracious provision for needy sinners through the atoning work of Christ and the working of the Spirit through the gospel tend to displace and diminish the religious desires and interests of many contemporary people?

I raise these questions to illustrate again how different is the emphasis and approach of the *Canons* to the proclamation of the gospel. According to the *Canons*, the chief end and fruit of all gospel preaching is the glorification of the living God, the Triune Creator and Redeemer. The first, middle, and last word of this confession of faith addresses the reality of the Triune God's gracious initiative, provision, application and preservation of His people in the way of salvation in Christ. This confession does not speak first of man and his aspirations for God, but of God and His free decision to choose a people whom He gives to Christ, His Son. This is a confession that speaks not of man's initiative and action, but of God's. It is a confession that begins and ends, celebrating the grandeur of God in His sovereign purposes and works, whether in the merciful election of His people or just condemnation of the sinful and unbelieving.

### THE "GOD OF ALL COMFORT"

In his second letter to the church in Corinth, the apostle Paul blesses God by saying, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction..." (2 Cor. 1:3-4). In this blessing, the apostle describes the God and Father of our Lord Jesus as the "God of all comfort," as the One who encourages and sustains the believer in all circumstances.

A sympathetic reader of the *Canons of Dort* will notice that this too

lies at the heart of this Reformed confession: only the Father who sovereignly elects His people in Christ, His Son, can provide the comfort, the solid joy and lasting treasure which sinners need. Were the believer to find his comfort in his own faith, in his own "choice" for God, in his own ability to continue to run the race with perseverance—what an empty comfort or consolation this would be! Believers who know themselves in the light of the Word of God have no desire to place their hope and prospect for salvation in their own hands. Much better to place their hope in the capable and faithful hands of God the Father who, for the sake of Christ, His Son, will permit nothing to snatch His people from His hands (John 10:28)!

Here it needs to be observed that the *Canons'* God-centeredness does not diminish their comfort. For the *believer's true comfort resides not in himself but in His God!* When our salvation is made to depend, even in the slightest measure, upon our own initiative and persistence in the course, it hangs not from the thinnest of threads but from nothing at all! Nothing could more certainly steal from the believer his hope and confidence, whether in this life or the life to come, than to rest upon or place his trust in his own resources, pluck or self-determination. The only solid comfort, by comparison, is to be found in God the Father's gracious election of His people, God the Son's perfect provision and atonement on their behalf and God the Spirit's calling them into and preserving them in fellowship with Christ through the gospel.

The God-centeredness and solid comfort of the *Canons*, then, are two sides of a single coin. Calvin was correct when he opened his *Institutes* by remarking that all Christian wisdom is comprised of the *knowledge of God* and the *knowledge of ourselves*. The one always influences and shapes the other. What we believe concerning God has everything to do with what we know about ourselves. What we know about ourselves must derive from what we know of God. Consequently, when Reformed believers confess that the God and Father of

our Lord Jesus Christ has loved His own with a perfect love from all eternity, they seek to live to the praise of His matchless grace, knowing that in Him they have the fullness of joy.

The authors of the *Canons* understood this correspondence between emphasizing God's sovereign grace and finding solid comfort in the gospel. They remind us of it in the words of their conclusion, a conclusion which is fitting for us as well.

May God's Son Jesus Christ, who sits at the right hand of God and gives gifts to men, sanctify us in the truth, lead to the truth those who err, silence the mouths of those who lay false accusations against sound teaching, and equip faithful ministers of his Word with a spirit of wisdom and discretion, that all they say may be to the glory of God and the building up of their hearers. Amen.

### FOOTNOTE

1. See H. Henry Meeter, *The Basic Ideas of Calvinism* (6th ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), for a readable and concise statement of a Calvinistic world and life view. Meeter argues that the sovereignty of God is the "basic principle" of Calvinism. Though this principle comes to magnificent expression in the doctrine of election, this doctrine, while expressive of what might be termed "soteriological Calvinism," does not comprehend the whole of Calvinism's application of this principle.

*Dr. Venema, editor of this department, teaches Doctrinal Studies at Mid-America Reformed Seminary, Orange City, IA.*



# The Shepherd's Staff

## Wolf's Teeth III

John R. Sittema

*"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter."*

(Isaiah 5:20)

*"...God...gave them over to a depraved mind...they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless... Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them."*

(Romans 1:28-32)

In recent issues, I have been challenging the elders who read this column to become more consciously aware of the teeth of the satanic wolves that the flock of God faces each day. To shepherd God's people requires a sensitivity to the enemy with all his stratagems.

In the first article in this series, we discussed the fact that our culture has surgically and ruthlessly removed the eternal from its consciousness, focusing instead and exclusively upon the here and now. I called that **secularism**, after the Latin word "seculum," and observed that our people live in a world that only worries about the now and gives little or no thought to the eternal: either eternal values, or eternal life, or eternal consequences for sin.

In the second article we followed up with a recognition that our world directs the love of its heart and the energy of its pursuits in a headlong rush to accumulate things in the here and now. I called that **materialism** and observed that it is a dominating temptation, attacking believers all over North America, wearing down their commitment of trust and contentment in the gracious

blessings and provision of God.

Today, I direct your attention to the ethical approach taken by such a world. In a secular and materialistic society, what about right and wrong? Surely there is such! Donahue and Geraldo Rivera become indignant at the drop of a hat (or is it the cue of the cameraman?)! They do so based upon some ethical values. What are they? How are they determined?

### RELATIVISM

A culture that focuses only on the here and now, and that pursues material things in a desperate search for meaning, will always possess values. But those values will be shaped by its heart convictions. To say it a bit differently, secular materialists are religious and they have ethics, but their religion and their ethics are shaped by their secularism and their materialism!

Cannibals eat the flesh of their enemies, but they do not eat their fellow tribesmen. Al Capone killed many people, but never without stopping off at the Cathedral in the morning for morning prayers. And so it goes. Everyone has a set of values, a way of determining right and wrong. But in a world in which the eternal has been denied, in which the here and now has been elevated to glorified status, those values are determined by the individual by himself and for himself! No longer can we appeal to the divine and sovereign God, Whose Word is law, is absolute, is wise, is non-negotiable (Psalm 19:7ff) and Whose Word gives us the absolute

standards for right and wrong. No, in a culture that denies the eternal, so too is any eternal law rejected, any absolute standard denied.

Surely you have noticed the heated discussions surrounding recent Supreme Court nominees. Robert Bork and others like him were excoriated and pilloried because of their belief in "strict construction." That is, they believe that the Constitution, as the framers wrote it, is normative. It does not evolve in meaning with each passing generation. So too with ethics. Try standing firmly on the text of Scripture and watch society mock you! To think that the Bible, penned over 2 millennia ago, could be the absolute standard of right and wrong, is viewed as nonsense.

Such a view is most accurately called **relativism** when applied to personal values. That is, right and wrong are relative to the individual, to the situation. Recently, I caught a few minutes of a "Donahue clone," Sally-Jessy Raphael. She was interviewing a mother and her 13 year old daughter about the daughter's insistence on having sex with her boyfriend in her room without interference from her mother. The interviewer/host's only comment? "I hope you are using protection!" Not a word about sin, let alone moral wrong choices. Not a word

*"Those of us who believe there are absolutes are absolutely wrong!"*

about the destructive effect of such behavior upon the family, the premarital relationship or the body. Not a word about the corruptive effects of such behavior upon a society choking on its permissiveness.

In fact, as Chuck Colson observes in his wonderful book **The Body**, the only thing which our relativistic society holds as absolute truth is that there are no absolutes, and that those of us who believe there are absolutes are absolutely wrong! Always! Listen to the applause a studio audience member receives at such a program when he/she observes: "You have a right to your own behavior; we mustn't tell you

what to do." And listen to the jeers and the mockery one receives when he/she suggests that some behavior (no matter how outlandish!) is wrong, period! Try it. Think about programs you've seen dealing with the subject of homosexuality, for example. Observe the reactions of the crowd when someone calls the behavior sinful.

## FOR THE SHEPHERDS

All of this has profound effects on the work of the elders. Your people live in a relativistic age, in a time in which TV, radio and the print media scream the values of relativism at the top of their lungs. And some of it sinks in. Consider:

- Many people have no respect for church discipline. "After all, who are you to judge me or my behavior? Along with that, many churches show no respect for the discipline of other bodies of elders. Many will take sinners under discipline into full and free membership without so much as a raised eyebrow.
- Many have lost the conviction that the Bible is *Truth*. Replacing such conviction is the relativistic notion that the Bible contains one kind of truth, but that other religions do too. Even the recent revelations that the Soviet KGB had infiltrated the World Council of Churches at the highest levels with their own agents has done nothing to change the relativistic approach to the truth that this organization has promoted for years.
- And remember the corollary: if the Bible is not absolute truth then there is also nothing that the Christian church may declare to be absolute error. Preachers ought not to condemn sins of doctrine as heresy; they may not condemn sins of the flesh as wickedness and evil. "Who do you think you are, telling me that abortion is wrong!" cries the relativistic Catholic. "The Christian faith is about love, not judgment!" cries the homosexual pastor of the "gay church" in every major city.

And don't even mention the insistence of the local elders upon holy living! To discuss the possibility of removing a member from the body of believers because of unrepentant sinfulness is to enrage the sensitivities of every relativist in sight. Not to mention bringing down the wrath of the American Civil Liberties Union upon your neck!

## PRACTICALLY SPEAKING

In such a time as this, it is incumbent upon the elders of the local church not to flinch, nor to throw up their hands in hopelessness. Most importantly, you may not run from your duty to pursue holiness within the body, no matter what the society, and maybe even the laws may say! Christ demands that His Body be holy (1 Peter 2) and entrusts you with the pursuit of holiness, both doctrinally and in terms of lifestyle.

Allow me to make a few suggestions:

1. Make clear, both from the pulpit in your church and in private pastoral meetings with the people of God under your care, that your church firmly holds to the Bible as the Word of God, as the absolute and infallible standard for both doctrine and living. Combat relativism with the strong affirmation that because God has spoken His Word, it is Truth!
2. Whenever the Bible is contradicted by your people either in doctrine or in life, make clear precisely what Biblical teaching is being compromised. I'm often amazed by how many people drift into unbiblical beliefs and practices because they don't know what the Bible said in the first place! (How did the prophet say it? "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.") Pastoral care for sinners demands a clear reference to Scriptural teaching; you may not rebuke or call for repentance without pointing out the violation of the will of God

that demands your pursuit of holiness in their lives.

3. Make sure that in the educational ministry of your church there are clear standards for evaluating the quality of what is taught. Be sure some courses deal with the ethical issues facing the people of God today, and make sure that the teacher stands with Scripture. Be sure that the training of the youth reflects clear Biblical standards of doctrinal truth. No child

*"... if the Bible is not absolute truth then there is also nothing that the Christian church may declare to be absolute error."*

will grow to stand firm for Scripture unless he/she has been clearly taught what it says.

4. Make especially sure that your church teaches very carefully the doctrines concerning the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture. It is one thing to lament the loss of the authority of the Bible. It is quite another thing to combat it by positively raising up generation after generation of men and women who stand for God's Word without compromise. You must attend to the patient and careful instruction of your people. And this duty especially rests upon the pastor. I believe that not only his work in the classroom with the children, but especially the example of the careful exegesis and exposition he brings into the pulpit will do much to contradict the growing plague of relativism in our age.

*Dr. Sittema is pastor of the Bethel CRC, Dallas, TX.*



## In Spirit & Truth

### A Visit to Korea

W. Robert Godfrey

Last November I flew to Korea. It was my first trip to that part of the world and I was eager to discover what this land was like. I have taught many Korean students through the years and was intrigued to learn something of their homeland. I was in Korea a week and so now I am an expert.

I arrived at Kimpo airport at night and my first impression of Seoul during the trip into the city was the large number of red neon crosses that lit up the sky. Korea has witnessed the remarkable growth of Christianity in this century. Approximately 30% of the Korean population is now Christian.

Dr. Myung Kim, the president, and the faculty of the Hapdong Presbyterian Theological Seminary invited me to give two lectures at a special conference in Seoul and then to give some lectures at the seminary in Suwon (a city about 40 miles south of Seoul). It was a wonderful opportunity to get an introduction to the Korean church.

The conference was an annual one to honor the memory and work of Dr. Yun Sun Park. Dr. Park was remarkably used of God to advance the cause of Christ in Korea. His life is in many ways a microcosm of Christianity in Korea.

He was born in 1905 in a land that was occupied by Japan from 1906 to 1945. He grew up in the midst of a revival of Christianity in his homeland that had begun in 1905. He studied for the ministry and in 1934 left Korea for further study in America. The persecution that Christians suffered from the Japanese led many to study the Book of the Revelation with its promise of Christ's victory. Park determined to memorize the book as he made the long trip from Korea to Philadelphia. This accomplishment is one indication of a life of remarkable discipline and dedication. He graduated with a Th.M. degree from

Westminster Seminary in 1936 and after further study returned to Korea to take up pastoral work in very difficult circumstances.

He became an influential teacher and scholar. He wrote commentaries on the entire Bible, commentaries that have had a profound impact on the development of Korean Christianity.

His influence was also great by the model of prayer that he offered to the church. Each morning after early morning prayers in the church, he spent an additional two hours in prayer. The commitment to prayer among Korean Christians is believed by many to be the source of the remarkable growth and vitality of the churches. Dr. Park was one of the key founders of the Hapdong Seminary.

From the times of persecution (including not only the Japanese occupation until 1945, but also the Korean War) developed the institution of early morning prayers among the pious Korean Christians. Each morning in the Korean churches a service is held with a brief time of singing, a sermon and at least one half hour of prayer. The method of prayer is very interesting. Everyone prays aloud at the same time.

At the Hapdong Seminary early morning prayers are held at 5:30 each morning. My initial response to all praying aloud together was negative. It seemed so confusing to me. I found it difficult to concentrate on my prayers. But I realized that as one got used to this method, it had advantages. I remembered that "mental" prayer, what we call silent prayer, was really a rather recent practice (probably since the 17th century) among Christians. I also noticed that the Korean form of prayer allowed considerable range for emotional expression. Most people prayed softly, really

muttering as they spoke to God. Some, however, shouted. Others wailed as they prayed. From excited praise and petition to lamentation a full range of emotions could be expressed. Perhaps this is a way that more expression of emotion can be brought into our prayer meetings.

My time at the seminary was a treat as I enjoyed most gracious Korean hospitality. The faculty and students were very friendly and I enjoyed an excellent student concert marking the anniversary of the seminary's founding. When I returned to America, my children were fascinated to learn of the staples of the Korean seminarian's breakfast: rice with black beans, hot cabbage soup, seaweed and kim chi. It was good.

On my way to the airport as I left Korea, I was taken to tour the largest Presbyterian church in Seoul. The Choong Hyun Presbyterian Church has 22,000 members. It has 23 ministers and 22 evangelists on its staff. It meets in a huge Gothic building that seats 5500. It has 4 morning services and a total staff of 200. Its senior pastor, Dr. Sung Jong Shin, a Westminster graduate, gra-

*"...the Korean form of prayer allowed considerable range for emotional expression."*

viously showed me the marvelous facilities of the church which included kitchens to feed 7000 each Sunday and a multi-level parking garage. The tiny Christian community that faced severe persecution in the early twentieth century has been blessed by the Lord with most remarkable growth.

One of my favorite passages of Scripture came to mind, "Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few" (1 Samuel 14:6). The Lord has done a wonderful work of grace in Korea. Those who suffered and prayed have seen the windows of heaven opened and grace after grace showered upon the churches. Surely there is much that we need to learn from the Korean Christian experience.

*Dr. Godfrey, editor of this department, is Professor of Church History at Westminster Seminary in Escondido, CA.*

## Protests Mount Against Deposition Status for Seceding Christian Reformed Ministers

GRANDVILLE, MI  
(February 24, 1993)

Classis Grandville's January 21 regular meeting voted down a proposal to lift the deposition status of Beverly CRC (independent) pastor, Rev. Art Besteman. After twice closing its doors for a two hour long executive session, classis also authorized its "ad hoc assistance committee" to "engage appropriate legal counsel, and if necessary pursue legal action with the approval of classis" to assist in "bringing about a just and appropriate settlement" between the Beverly CRC and Beverly CRC (Independent) churches "as envisioned by the intentions and decisions of the October 22, 1992 meeting of Classis Grandville."

However, at least two classes have sent overtures to synod on the deposition matter and several other classes have not declared seceding ministers to have the status of one deposed.

Classis Grandville's ruling that Besteman would be declared to have the status of one deposed from office after 33 years in the CRC ministry has antagonized many conservatives who argue that the CRC only disciplines conservatives who leave the denomination, not liberals who dissent from the denomination's teachings.

Although 23 pastors of independent churches held ministerial standing in the CRC when they seceded, only Rev. Paul Murphy, Rev. Arthur Besteman and Rev. John De Koekkoek of Agassiz Independent Reformed Church in British Columbia, have been declared to have the status of one deposed from office.

Rev. Steve Schlissel, pastor of Messiah's Congregation in Brooklyn, N.Y., was deposed while still a member of the CRC. The other 19 pastors were processed in a variety of ways by their classes; some parted on fairly amicable terms and none involved any form of deposition.

However, Rev. Tymen Hofman, synodical deputy from Classis Grand Rapids East, argued that ministers leaving the CRC under present conditions were guilty of sin and should be disciplined as schismatics.

In speeches advocating deposition status for both Besteman and Murphy before their classes, Hofman cited the original CRC Lord's Supper liturgical form still used in many conservative churches. The liturgical form bars various types of idolaters, sorcerers, "despisers of God, His Word, and of the holy sacraments, all blasphemers, all who seek to raise discord, sects, or mutiny in Church or State, all perjurers, all who are disobedient to their parents and superiors, all murderers, quarrelsome persons, and those who live in hatred and envy against their neighbors, adulterers, fornicators, drunkards, thieves, usurers, robbers, gamblers, covetous persons, and all who lead offensive lives" from participating in the sacrament of Holy Communion.

"I quoted from the form for the administration of the Lord's Supper that thirty years ago was used in all Christian Reformed churches, that 'all who seek to raise discord, sects, or mutiny in Church or State' are to be barred from the Lord's table," said Hofman. "My reason for quoting from the Lord's Supper

form is that some think schism is not a sin; they think that ministers can go around raising discord in the church and not sin."

"It is my opinion that these men, beginning with Schlissel and including Besteman, are raising discord in the church and not only among churches but within churches," said Hofman, noting that a minority of Beverly CRC did wish to remain in the denomination.

"I do not single [Besteman] out alone as being schismatic, but classis declared that the Beverly movement is schismatic and he is part of it," said Hofman. "Schism is a sinful thing. That means he has sinned, judged by classis."

Not all Christian Reformed ministers agreed with Hofman that Besteman, Murphy, and De Koekkoek should be declared to have the status of one deposed or barred from participating in the Lord's Supper. In Classis Grandville itself, Rev. Robert Ritsema of South Grandville CRC proposed that classis replace its previous decision and declare that classis "regretfully acquiesces in Rev. Arthur Besteman's request to be released from the office of minister of the Word and sacrament in the Christian Reformed Church, since he is now serving the Beverly Christian Reformed Church (Independent)."

Ritsema's motion received strong support from Rev. Tom Vanden Heuvel of Byron Center First CRC. "I pleaded with classis to bring our action into line with most of the other classes, which was to simply accede to their request to withdraw from the ministry," said Vanden Heuvel. "I was really pleased with Ritsema. He stood up and fought for this thing."

After questions about whether the motion was proper, a majority declared it legally before classis but voted it down following Hofman's speech on schism and the Lord's Supper form.

Delegates in the classis where Besteman served before accepting a call in Classis Grandville were more favorably disposed toward their former colleague. Two churches in Classis Zeeland came with overtures

objecting to declaring ministers to have the status of one deposed: Lamont CRC asked that Classis Zeeland overture Classis Grandville to reconsider their decision and North Street CRC in Zeeland — Besteman's former church — asked that classis overture synod to standardize the language for handling seceding pastors.

Classis first took up the Lamont overture. Rev. Jim Stastny of Rusk CRC led off the classical debate noting that classis voted to send fraternal greetings to the leaders of two seceding churches within the bounds of classis at its previous meeting. "For us to stand by and watch while Rev. Besteman is given the status of one deposed while we send fraternal greetings to churches in our own classis which have left for much the same reasons smacks of hypocrisy," said Stastny.

Rev. Ray Lanning, pastor of Lamont CRC, passionately defended Besteman. "They had the opportunity [in Classis Grandville] to do justice to the man's character, standing and reputation. This seems to be an unwarranted act," said Lanning. "I have to dissent from the idea that there is some sort of neutral deposition; we have to recognize that a disciplinary action was taken by giving him this status and we have to dissent from that act."

"It was the hostile and punitive actions on both sides that put the bitterness into the Protestant Reformed disruptions of seventy years ago," said Lanning, noting the last major secession from the CRC in 1924.

However, matters in Classis Zeeland were complicated by the arrival of a new pastor, Rev. James DeVries, from Allendale Second CRC. DeVries, who told classis he "was in up to my eyeballs" on Classis Thornapple Valley's declaration that Murphy would have the status of one deposed, accepted a call to the Allendale church several months after a number of families seceded to form a new independent church.

"We're dealing not with a situation in which we are involved; we are dealing with a situation in which

we are not involved," said DeVries. "I was in another situation with regard to Paul Murphy in Dutton, and I feel we may be evaluating decisions Classis Grandville made without having the information Classis Grandville had."

Rev. Kenneth Van Wyk of Haven CRC in Zeeland asked whether Lamont CRC had corresponded with Classis Grandville before bringing the matter to Classis Zeeland. When Lanning said the action and grounds were public and did not require first contacting Classis Grandville, Van Wyk proposed that action be withheld so Lamont could correspond with Classis Grandville. After discussion, Van Wyk's motion carried.

North Street CRC's proposal, however, met with little opposition. After a brief discussion, Classis Zeeland overtured synod to "standardize the terminology used when ministers resign from office in circumstances which are not an attempt to avoid discipline" and suggested that the language be changed to "Classis X dismisses Rev. Y from ministerial status in view of his resignation from ministry in the CRC." The proposal passed with no audible dissenting votes.

"It's just uneven; some guys leave and classis almost says God's blessings to them; others leave under what appear to be almost identical circumstances and classis acts toward them in a negative manner, one can almost say in a punitive way," said Rev. Bernard Tol, pastor of North Street CRC, in a later interview. "These continue to be people in the Reformed faith and to use language of deposition is to erect walls and barriers, which isn't wise or necessary to do."

"What has been done, to me, is water under the bridge but maybe we can prevent damage like this from being done in the future," said Tol.

In Classis California South — home of Westminster Theological Seminary's California campus and a number of large conservative churches — even stronger language was used in an overture to synod.

Escondido CRC and Ontario CRC

both sent overtures urging an end to the deposition status for seceding ministers asking that "ministers resigning from the ministry of the Christian Reformed Church because of conscientious theological objections to developments in the Christian Reformed Church should be regarded as having been honorably released, not as having been deposed."

In the grounds as amended and sent on to synod, classis cited the precedents of the Protestant Reformation and the two secessions which produced the Christian Reformed denomination, noting that the leaders of those secessions are honored by the CRC for their conscientious stand.

Arguing that ending the deposition status of seceding ministers "would serve the peace and harmony of the church," Classis California South noted that "the deposition of an officebearer, by definition, is a disciplinary action applied to a church leader guilty of a public and serious sin in doctrine and life."

"The brothers who have been deposed by their respective classes for conscientious theological objections are not guilty of any public or serious immorality," according to the overture. "Particularly for those pastors who have left the denomination quietly and not created widespread public scandal, the disciplinary action does not seem to fit the perceived (or actual) 'sin' of separation from the CRC."

"Unless we assume that the Christian Reformed Church is the only true church, how can we criticize people who feel they should serve the Lord elsewhere?" asked Dr. Robert Godfrey, professor at Westminster and vice-president of the Escondido CRC council. "I would hope that people on the other side who talk so much about behaving in a loving and understanding way and speak of justice and mercy would see the essential wisdom of this overture."

"The overture was inspired in part by what happened to Rev. Besteman as a particularly striking example of mistreatment of ministers," said Godfrey. "Besteman has provided

long and faithful pastoral care in the Christian Reformed Church; he has not been a controversial figure, and there would be clearly to my mind no grounds for declaring him to have the status of one deposed."

Professor H. David Schuringa, Besteman's predecessor at Beverly CRC who left to become a professor at Westminster, concurred that deposition of seceding ministers was inappropriate. "It would be my hope and prayer that synod would adopt the overture that Classis California South is bringing so that the status of men like Rev. Besteman can be set right," said Schuringa.

Noting that the CRC's *Belgic Confession* describes the false church as one which "persecutes those who live holily according to the Word of God and rebuke it for its errors, covetousness and idolatry," Schuringa warned of much worse consequences if conservatives continued to be declared to have the status of one deposed.

"I would say that the CRC must be very careful how they treat these ministers and churches which leave for conscientious reasons," said Schuringa. "The *Belgic Confession*, Article 29, is very clear that the mark of the apostate church is reverse discipline."

Darell Todd Maurina  
Reformed Believers Press Service

## Book Reviews

*Bible Doctrine for Younger Children, Bible Doctrine for Older Children and Bible Doctrine for Teens and Young Adults*, by James Beeke, published by Book and Publishing Committee, Sioux Center, IA. Reviewed by Linda Lanning.

One thing about being a minister's wife is that you get to know many people and experience life with them. You share in their joys, struggles and goals in life. Something I have been hearing over and over is that parents are finding it increasingly difficult to obtain good material with which to teach their children the sound doctrines of our faith.

However, there is a solution to the problem. The solution is found in the Bible study books that I have reviewed. These are called *Bible Doctrine for Younger Children*, books A & B for ages 8 - 10, *Bible Doctrine for Older Children*, books A & B for ages 10 - 12 and *Bible Doctrine for Teens and Young Adults* in three volumes. These study books have been written by a Christian school principal, himself a father of five children, Mr. James Beeke. Mr. Beeke wrote these volumes over a period of years and used them successfully in the classroom.

I am using these study books with my children and am amazed at what they cover and how well they adapt the great doctrines of Scripture to the hearts and minds of children. The volumes for the younger children have 20 chapters of Bible doctrine. They contain more than 150 examples and stories to help explain the truths being taught. The high school volumes address the key doctrine of Reformed thinking in the same clear, precise style as the first two volumes. They contain numerous illustrated stories and informative charts. They have proved to be helpful to many teachers. Much more could be said! I suggest you obtain copies for yourself.

The need is great for simple, clear doctrinal teaching. The cornerstone of Christian education is Bible history and doctrine. These books cover all of that. My hope is that parents will make use of these special books to clearly teach the truths of Scripture to our children,

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleights of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ (Eph. 4:14-15).

Parents and teachers, what can be more timely for our children and students as they must live during the confusion and turmoil within our denomination. Order these special books today!

# Peter Beyerhaus: Missionary Prophet Against Ecumenical Antichrists

## *God's Kingdom and the Utopian Error: Discerning the Biblical Kingdom of God from Its Political Counterfeits*

by Peter P.J. Beyerhaus, Crossway Books, 1300 Crescent St., Wheaton, IL 60187, 1992, 221pp. (paper), includes bibliographical references and index. Reviewed by Peter De Jong.

### A UNIQUE ROLE

Dr. Peter Beyerhaus is a phenomenon too generally overlooked in evangelical and particularly Reformed circles. Acquaintance with him might help us to better understand and deal with some of our most threatening problems. He is undeniably an authority on world missions and ecumenical developments. He was a Lutheran missionary in South Africa for 8 years, a Professor of Missiology and Ecumenical Theology of the University of Tubingen, Germany and an observer and speaker at virtually all world missionary conferences. In view of his roles, we might expect him to be generally sympathetic with the main trends in world ecumenical and missionary movements. But what distinguishes Dr. Beyerhaus is the fact that his long and profound involvement in all of them has driven him to become one of their most incisive analysts and critics! Anyone who wants to know what is really happening to the Christian faith and mission throughout the world, and evangelicals in particular, should at least listen to what he has to say.

Dr. Beyerhaus' position and role appear even more surprising when one considers his university. Tubingen was the earliest source and center of the modern "higher criticism" of the Bible, pioneered there almost 2 centuries ago by F.C. Baur. A leading professor there might be expected to conform to the "critical" tradition of modern Bible studies which in two centuries spread from that school to dominate seminary scholarship all over the world. Amazingly, Dr. Beyerhaus' convictions, through long and intimate acquaintance with the critical consensus have become fixed and confirmed in an exactly opposite direction. His ca-

reer is the more extraordinary in its contrast with the confusion and compromise that have spread through the religious and "Christian" world of our time, even softening and weakening the convictions of long-time evangelicals. (This development Frances Schaeffer in his last book signaled as *The Great Evangelical Disaster*.) Beyerhaus' stand against this almost universal current, (like an "Athanasius against the world") demands our attention and study.

Four years ago he gave important (but poorly attended) lectures at Calvin Seminary, maintaining that conversion must be at the heart of Christian missions. In world missions he saw the call to conversion becoming obscured and replaced by other aims such as humanizing social structures and dialoguing and merging with other religions. Thus the faith itself was being lost in its "missions"! I reviewed the lectures and three of his books in the December 1988 and January 1989 OUTLOOKS. Now after four years, Dr. Beyerhaus' new book includes materials covered in his earlier studies, and outlines their further developments in present world ecumenical and missionary activities.

How could Dr. Beyerhaus for a third of a century hold and aggressively promote in churches, schools and missions a Christian testimony exactly opposite to the enormous, seemingly irresistible two-century tide of critical attack that has been threatening to overwhelm them? That question engages our attention. The author answers it in the first sentence of this volume's preface. He says this book "follows up on" those of the early seventies in which he showed the "fundamental crisis into which the world missionary movement had run because of the deep erosion of its biblical foundations." On those foundations he stood and stands. In his 1973 book,

*Shaken Foundations*, he showed how the Christian church and its mission, betrayed and disintegrating because they are no longer built on those foundations, must again, like Martin Luther, in a church in trouble for the same reason, return to the "Bible only" as our "bed rock of evangelical faith and action" (pp. 2ff.).

"...The future advance or downfall of our churches is dependent on our readiness to say a clear 'yes' to the inspiration of the Scripture. Only in this way will our minds regain that unity and authority lost to us by our misdirected hermeneutical approaches...God's Word does not need to be rewritten or reshaped in every cultural change...That which needs to be changed is not the text but rather the inner attitude of men which causes their difficulty in understanding" (pp. 15-17). Beyerhaus urges our need to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit through the Word which He inspired, citing 1 Cor. 2:14, 12. "The unspiritual man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." The Christian, however, is entitled to confess: "We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that comes from God, in order that we may know the things which God has freely given us" (p. 17). "Theologians can never claim to be teachers of the Church as long as they act as autonomous interpreters of the Bible who respect only the thorough application of their 'scientific' methods...They must humbly join the chain of witnesses, not so much as historical critics, but rather as the faithful stewards of God's mysteries" (p.18). Later he wrote movingly of the "thrilling experience" of spiritual and "biblical renewal that blew like a refreshing breeze through our churches and seminaries" during the seven difficult years (especially in defeated Germany) after WWII. He saw how that revival moved some to become "the most dedicated" of missionaries.

### THE NEW BOOK

As a Christian, deeply concerned with both the Lord's prayer and call for the unity of His people and for His commission to them to bring His only saving gospel to all the world, the professor of "missions and ecumenical theology" shows in brief but striking detail how he has

seen the dominant ecumenical leadership working to destroy gospel, churches and missions. The preface recalls how this development compelled the world missionary movement to divide into 2 opposing camps in '73 and '74. Efforts to bridge the differences by trying to balance the two viewpoints were futile because the differences were about the very nature of Christ's gospel and kingdom. Whose "kingdom" were these people talking about, God's or men's? A first chapter recalls how the conservative Lausanne Movement's second International Congress for World Evangelization adopted as its theme, "Proclaim Christ until He comes!" Evangelicals confessed Christ's return as a reality, while liberals, if they used the term, made it a mere "decoration, a piece of high-sounding rhetoric, giving it an existential, mystical, ethical, evolutionary or political interpretation."

Despite differences among evangelicals in their views of the millennium, Beyerhaus does not see these as deep enough to interfere with their common expectation of the Lord's return (pp. 15f.). That expectation gives them joyful assurance, a sense of urgency, hope, reliance on the work of the Holy Spirit in planting churches, patience, alertness against the spirit of antichrist, and persistence in prayer (pp.18-20).

The evangelicals' evangelization must envision the Kingdom of God promised in the Old Testament and proclaimed in the New, as centered in Jesus Christ (Ch.2). It is realized now by *spiritual regeneration*. Although it brings transformation of life, society and creation, it is not established by political action, group dynamics or ideological indoctrination, but by the Word of God. That not only saves individuals, but puts them into Christ's church for their growth and Christian service in anticipation of Christ's coming kingdom of glory.

The opposition between God's kingdom and that of Satan involves us in *warfare*. The world to be evangelized is not "a neutral territory," but "in a state of active rebellion"; its religions, and personal, cultural and social life are "under demonic captivity" (p.30). The author fears "that many evangelical Christians are not yet prepared or equipped to fight this battle" as "today Satan at-

tacks churches, missions and individual Christians by heretical movements which threaten them with spiritual confusion." Therefore he sees a need for "clear-cut confessional statements which are binding on our evangelistic activities and identify us in the eyes of our Christian supporters" (pp. 32f.).

After these introductory chapters, the author traces the way he has seen this Biblical gospel of Christ's kingdom and missionary commission being subverted by their "political counterfeits," as their Liberal promoters captured leadership of the world ecumenical movement. In these rather complex movements, we may note "two wings" (p.50). A prominent representative of a "left wing," "messianic Marxism" or "Christomaxism," was a late Tübingen professor, Ernst Bloch. Although appealing to the Bible, he made its secret theme "the complete denial of God," using what came to be called "materialistic exegesis," interpreting Jesus to be a man who "set himself in the place of God, a Messiah against God and for man" (p. 44). While some moved to promote communist revolution in this way, others, in a right wing such as WCC's Secretary General, Philip Potter, are working to merge all peoples and religions into one new world order. Using the "contextual method," they cite the Bible to support their universalistic social-political program.

A chapter is devoted to the "Theology of the Poor." Claiming that God "has a preference for the poor," "liberation theologies" have been developed (promoted especially at the Melbourne Conference in 1980) which cast Jesus in the role of political organizer of a revolution against the rich oppressors. The author shows how radically these claims misrepresent the Lord's gospel. Although its results bring social transformation, the gospel *first reconciles us to God in Christ*, calling all, rich and poor alike, to repentance and faith in Him, not to mere violent class revolution.

Two following chapters further explore the way in which the Biblical gospel has been perverted into social-political "liberation theologies." Although these are alleged to be indigenous developments provoked by the injustices in Latin America, South Africa and other particular societies, a closer exami-

nation shows their real incitement not to have been local, but by the doctrinaire advocates of political revolution in the WCC (p. 129). When the social-political programs of these Marxist promoters of violent revolution failed to appeal to many, they sought to sell them to naive Christians and churches by fraudulent appeals to the Bible and to Christ to justify their perverting God's Kingdom into a Kingdom of Man. The extreme length to which this movement has been carried in the WCC is seen in its example of the notorious Dorothee Solle, avowed atheist, who later "democratized the idea of God" to mean "the movement of the people" (p.115). An extreme example of the opposition in the WCC to carrying out the Bible's missionary commission to bring the gospel to the whole world was the promotion of a complete "moratorium" on missions in its Bangkok Conference in '73 (Beyerhaus' *Bangkok 73*, chapter 5, pp. 85-93). The author observed in these ecumenical developments "a consistent estrangement from the biblical message" in which "all scriptural terms are filled with a new, often opposite meaning" (p. 125).

Dr. Beyerhaus, who since 1957 was involved for eight years in missionary efforts in South Africa, critically assesses *The Kairos Document* addressed from South Africa in 1985 to the world Christian community. This document (including among its sponsors, Dr. Allen Boesak and Bishop Tutu) calls, not for reconciliation of opposing groups, but for violent, Marxist-style, political overthrow of the government. Although the author is far from minimizing the sins of the white ruling classes against the non-white majority, he calls for repentance and reconciliation of all to God and then to fellowmen through the gospel of Christ (2 Cor. 5:19) as the Christian message for South Africa.

The final chapter deals with *martyrdom* in the message and mission of the gospel. The word which means to "testify" has come to refer to those who died to maintain their testimony to the gospel. The author sees much of Christendom today forgetting the Lord's call for such testimony and compromising in an effort to escape suffering (Matt. 16:24ff.; John 15:18-21). The Bible

REV WYBREN DORD  
6200 120TH AVE  
HOLLAND MI 49424  
BD

warns us to expect demonic inspired persecution to increase as the time of the Lord's return approaches. In connection with that, we should also observe the little known fact that "Our twentieth century is the bloodiest in the entire history of Christianity" (p. 166). Church history often shows how the Lord, according to His promise, sustains His people through their persecutions, using those experiences to strengthen their faith and to be effective means to spread His gospel.

An Appendix reflects on the world missions' crisis in the light of the 1990 Frankfurt Conference. That meeting highlighted the same unbridgeable rift between gospel believers and unbelievers shown throughout this book. It observes strengths and weaknesses of evangelical efforts and gives a 10-point summary (prepared by the author, who presided at the conference) of the gospel call to faithful missionary testimony until the Lord returns.

## CONCLUSION

Especially impressive in these 200 pages are the author's thorough familiarity with his big and important subject, both the ecumenical movement and world missions, and his effort to be fair to show accurately and with documentation his sharply stated conclusions. The reader will undoubtedly notice some points of difference with his views. On the millennium for example, he notes the strengths and dangers in each of the three views, and fairly acknowledging uncertainties about unfulfilled prophecy, his own inclination to a "modified" premillennialism (pp. 15f.; 33ff.), including a special role for Israel in final world evangelism. While the author acknowledges that we must not expect "great revival movements" or "the complete Christianization of the nations," but that "only an elect minority will endure and be saved" (Matt. 24:22,25), his

presentation occasionally suggests Arminian perspectives (pp. 26, 31). Despite our differences on such matters, we cannot stress too strongly that the message of Beyerhaus' whole career and books is as rare as it is urgently needed, especially by all who as "evangelicals" love the Lord and His gospel.

In our time we face ever increasing pressure to discard traditional views and practices and join the surrounding world community. In the churches we are urged to adjust our views of the Bible, its teachings, general application and missionary promotion to the radically changing world culture, in order to "contextualize" or make "Christian" influence "relevant." It is striking that in Beyerhaus' career, we see him increasingly brush these considerations aside as the insincere trivialities and irrelevancies that he, through years of intimate acquaintance, has found and shown them to be. In one controversial development after another, he begins with and holds unflinchingly to the Bible's own claim to absolute authority as God's Word. This fact is the more impressive by its contrast with what we have been seeing, to our regret, not only in the wider church world, but recently in nearer Reformed circles.

Two recent books illustrate what is happening around us. Henry Zwaanstra's 1991 *Catholicity and Secession* (Eerdmans) is a case which argues for a traditionally separate Reformed church (CRC) to break out of its long inhibition by confessional restraints and to join the ecumenical movement. Although these CR churches have up to the present stayed out of the WCC and World Alliance, their 1987 *Ecumenical Charter* committed them to rather uncritically join the ecumenical movement, and their increasingly demonstrated indifference to Bible and creed obviously show them moving toward this course.

More surprising and disturbing is another 1991 publication, *Evangelical Reunion: Denominations and the Body of Christ* (Baker) by John M. Frame of Westminster Seminary (Escondido). Reacting from a separatist tradition, this book too presses for church unity. Although there are some limits, these are not clearly defined! It is curious that neither of these books in its index, makes any reference to Peter Beyerhaus. There could hardly be a more knowledgeable expert!

The trouble is that in such academic, "scientific" discussions, the field of discussion is usually under the control of and limited by the assumptions of the academic "scientific" community. Therefore before well-intentioned participants realize what is happening, they get trapped into arguing along the lines of their opponents. The tactics of the opponents are like those with which the Sadducees tried to trap our Lord (Matt. 22:29). Few have described this deceptive process more aptly than Harry Blamires did in his 1963 *The Christian Mind*. Facing a 200 year tradition of "critically" misinterpreting the Bible, few, if any, have in our time been addressing some of these "ecumenical" problems more consistently and perseveringly over 3 or 4 decades than has Peter Beyerhaus. Although his stance has not made him popular in the church world, all evangelicals who love the Lord and His gospel, His church and its world mission, should learn from and be encouraged by Beyerhaus' decades of devotion to the gospel's missionary testimony against the opposition of counterfeiters. Thank God for that record. May many learn from and take courage to follow him and his colleagues' obedience to our Lord's missionary orders to His church to "Proclaim Christ until he comes!"