

The Outlook

PREVIEW OF SYNOD
ONCE AGAIN — THE MOST IMPORTANT
ISSUE AT SYNOD
DOES THE CRC NEED A JUDICIAL CODE?



JUNE - 1977

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

once again—

the Most Important Issues at Synod

JOHN VANDER PLOEG

A year ago, I affirmed in these columns that, in my judgment, the most important issue at the CRC Synod was the question of what that Synod would say about the Bible. The question came up in connection with the approval by Classis Grand Rapids East of ordination for Candidate Allen Verhey, now an ordained minister in the CRC and on the faculty at Hope College in Holland, Michigan. The same issue is now on the Agenda of the 1977 CRC Synod and I wish to affirm emphatically that, once again, this is the most important issue at Synod. True, the entire 479-page 1977 Agenda is important—but I do not hesitate to affirm that this matter of the CRC and the Bible overshadows all others.

After Classis G. R. East had approved the request for the ordination of Candidate Verhey, the Dutton CRC consistory, on September 18, 1975, protested this decision in view of the fact that Dr. Verhey in his examination had “plainly stated in his examination that he did not believe that the serpent spoke to Eve as reported in Genesis 3 and that he believed that the earthquake reported in Matthew 28:2 should be understood as an eschatological symbol and not necessarily as a fact.”

The Dutton consistory received no satisfaction pertaining to this matter from Classis G. R. East, the Neland Ave. CRC consistory (Dr. Verhey’s ministerial credentials are at Neland) nor from the 1977 Synod to which it had appealed.

To the contrary, on June 1, 1976, Neland consistory in a letter to Synod stated as their conviction that “Allen Verhey was, at the time of his examination, and is now, firmly committed to the sound doctrine of the Scripture as set forth in the Reformed confessions and the doctrinal deliverances of the Synod of the CRC.” The Neland consistory alleged further that Classis “did judge that his exegesis, whatever else might be said about it, did not bring him into conflict with the teaching of Scripture and the confessions, and . . . that such conflict has not been demonstrated by the appeal of the Dutton consistory” (1976 Acts of Synod, p. 93).

Notice from the following how the matter stands now.

Heretofore, to the best of my knowledge, we did not have from Dr. Verhey a statement *in writing* in which he takes liberty with any plain statement of the Bible which he is reliably reported to have done at his classical examination.

But now, of his own accord, Dr. Verhey has sent THE OUTLOOK an article for publication (found elsewhere in this issue) in which he reveals beyond a doubt that he does take such liberty with the Bible. In his article, Dr. Verhey states the following (and it will be well to read and reread this carefully), Dr. Verhey writes:

“For one final example from [Rev. Peter] De Jong’s arsenal of misrepresentation, he asserts that I interpret ‘Behold, there was a great earthquake’ [Matt. 28:2] to mean ‘and there was *not* a great earthquake.’ This is a misrepresentation of my view. It is true that I think ‘Behold, there was a great earthquake’ does *not mean* [the italics are Dr. Verhey’s] that an earthquake actually happened but rather means that the significance of the event of the empty tomb is the beginning of the new age. But I emphatically reject the suggestion that ‘Behold, there was a great earthquake’ *means* there was *not* a great earthquake.”

Obviously, we can’t have it both ways: 1. That there *was* a great earthquake, and 2. That there actually was *not* a great earthquake. Now to add to our difficulty, Dr. Verhey goes on to say:

“Perhaps there is no intentional misrepresentation; perhaps Rev. De Jong’s logic failed him. But he should know that to say, ‘It rains in Spain’ does *not mean* ‘It snows in Buffalo,’ is not the same as to say, ‘It rains in Spain *means* ‘It does not snow in Buffalo.’” Allow me to observe that at this point, I am by no means convinced that it was Rev. Peter De Jong whose logic failed him.

At any rate, by this time it is clear beyond the shadow of doubt that, when Scripture says plainly that there *was* a great earthquake at the time of Christ’s resurrection Dr. Verhey wants us to believe that there actually was *not* a great earthquake. When anyone once begins to take this kind of liberty with the plain teaching of Scripture, where may we expect him to stop?

Allow me to observe that it is now time—*high time!* that the CRC must face up to this issue of whether or not Verhey’s method of handling Scripture is to be condoned in CRC pulpits or not. This issue is one that brooks no more delay.

The pure preaching of the Word is the first mark of the true church. Sow the wind in this matter of utmost importance and we will soon be reaping the whirlwind. The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands is a glaring example of what happens when, in the face of false teaching, synods dawdle and refuse to act promptly, decisively, and responsibly.

Unless the CRC fearlessly comes to grips with this basic issue of Scripture and dares to let the chips fall where they may, our problems will mount and multiply and we will have no one but ourselves to blame.

Please be assured, delegates to Synod, that we are remembering you in prayer fervently at the throne of grace that you may be given guidance and grace to decide only that which our Lord requires of you.

does the CRC need a JUDICIAL CODE?



CHARLES L. ZANDSTRA

Readers who have access to the 1977 Agenda for the CRC Synod will find that Report 41 (pp. 399 ff.) is about "A Proposed Judicial Code" which the 1977 CRC Synod will have to consider. First presented by attorney Charles L. Zandstra as an address at last September's annual meeting of Reformed Fellowship, this article deals with the matter of a Judicial Code for the CRC. Assisting in the preparation of this material, attorney Daniel G. Hoebeke, is a member of Mr. Zandstra's law firm in Highland, Indiana.

There is something missing in the Church Order. The Synod of 1974 was presented with an overture expressing the need for a judicial code in the Christian Reformed Church. The overture stated in part as follows:

"There is lacking in the Church Order sufficiently clear and explicit articles pertaining to the substantive and procedural rights and privileges of its members who may, in respect of life or doctrine, be addressed or heard by their ecclesiastical supervisors. In order to insure the matters of this sort are dealt with in a fair manner and that true justice be done, it is proposed that the following regulations be incorporated in the Church Order."

In response to this overture, a committee was appointed to investigate whether the need for such a code does exist. The committee reviewed the Acts of Synod from 1960 to 1974 and discovered that there were many instances where there were significant procedural problems which were directly indicated in the Synodical record itself, many of which could have been avoided if a workable judicial code had been enforced to protect the rights and privileges of the members and the assemblies involved.

It is my conviction that the procedural problem is capable of solution. Further, I believe that the substantive problems will be difficult, if not impossible, to solve without a fair judicial due process.

Procedural problems — The purpose of our discussion is to attempt to point out with some particularity the procedural problems with the present Church Order and to suggest ways of solving the problems.

Before we proceed further, it is necessary to define what I mean by the terms "procedure" and "substance." Procedure is the vehicle through which a legal right is enforced as distinguished from the law

THE OUTLOOK



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

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which gives or defines the right. In other words, the machinery, as distinguished from its product. Or even more simply stated, procedure is the *how* and substance is the *what*.

Particular issues of substantive concern to the Christian Reformed Church will be excluded, for example: the authority of Scripture, ordination of women in the Church, and other current substantive issues. Our discussion is limited to present procedural difficulties which preclude an accurate and complete evaluation of the substantive issues such as those just mentioned.

Article Twenty-eight of the Church Order requires that the assemblies of the Church deal with ecclesiastical matters in an ecclesiastical manner. Without effective procedural guidelines, it is often impossible to deal with substantive issues in that required manner.

The Boer case — To illustrate the magnitude of the problem, allow me to cite a recent example, that of Dr. Harry Boer. It is not my intention to plead the pros and cons of the substantive issue. Rather, by using this example, I hope to show how an inadequate procedure affects the decision-making process on substantive issues in the Christian Reformed Church.

Dr. Boer alleged that on January 8, 1976, five days before Classis Illiana met, he received a statement of the Consistory's grounds for the charges. These grounds consisted of a 20-page document, typed and single spaced. Furthermore, Dr. Boer's response to the Consistory's document was first distributed at the meeting of Classis Illiana. This document was 9 pages long, typed and single spaced. Apparently this short period of time for filing papers met the requirement of the Church Order. It is incomprehensible to me how Classis Illiana with an otherwise congested agenda could give adequate consideration to the substantive matter raised by this issue having received those lengthy documents on the date Classis met. That is a procedural problem which could have been avoided by a carefully drafted judicial code.

A second procedural problem became evident when, after 10 years of dealing with the Consistory, Dr. Boer was allowed under Article Five of the Church Order to go to Synod at a time when Classis was about to conclude the matter by having a vote on deposition. By exercising his rights under Article Five, Classis was precluded *de facto* from exercising the jurisdiction it had over the matter at a time when it was prepared to act.

It is, to say the least, frustrating to realize that the Church Order as it presently operates would allow Synod to effectively pre-empt the matter after lengthy deliberation by both Consistory and Classis.

There is certainly nothing wrong in and of itself with a provision in the Church Order that different ecclesiastical bodies have the right to consider a particular issue at a particular time. The particular facts for a given case may make it advisable to be able to choose between alternate routes.

The Boer case, however, indicates the procedural

problems involved when both routes can be used at the same time.

The civil courts take care of this problem by what is termed an "election of remedies." In essence, the courts of law require that when a litigant has a choice of remedies and begins to pursue one of them, he loses the right to proceed on the other.

An "election of remedies" provision in the Judicial Code could have eliminated the difficulties caused by Synod's pre-emption in the Boer matter. Since the route of Consistory-Classis-Synod had already been started, the rule would require that no alternate procedure could be used until the matter, as begun, was resolved in one way or another.

At this point you may be seriously questioning, as I am, whether or not such procedures are fair to all parties involved. The Supreme Court of the United States in the case of *Mullane vs. Central Hanover Trust Company* stated that at a minimum the deprivation of life, liberty or property must be preceded by *notice* and *opportunity for hearing* appropriate to the nature of the case. Again, in another landmark Supreme Court case, it was stated that the *timing* and *content of the notice* and *the nature of the hearing* will depend on appropriate accommodation of the competing interests involved.

Procedural difficulties such as the foregoing are critical inasmuch as they discourage Church members from exercising their responsibilities as prophet, priest and king. It is beyond question that every Church member has the responsibility to exercise these duties. Obviously, a large percentage of people would never exercise these duties regardless of the circumstance whether due to apathy, lack of convictions, lack of knowledge that there is a procedure available or most pitiful of all, the "Who am I to challenge" complex. How to find ways to get this large group of people off center to assume their duties as prophet, priest and king is another issue which we will not deal with in this discussion. Instead, let us focus on those people who are *potentially* willing to exercise their responsibilities but are often discouraged from doing so due to the widespread belief that they cannot obtain a fair hearing.

2. The Verhey case — It has been my personal experience in taking an appeal to Classis that the problems of procedure to which I have just alluded are very real. One thing every lawyer knows is that judicial due process denied is justice destroyed. I must say that the procedure with which I work on a daily basis virtually guarantees all parties concerned a fair hearing on the substantive issues of law.

It is with regret that I have come to an almost opposite conclusion on the procedure in the Christian Reformed Church. This conclusion has been fortified by the analysis of the Dutton appeal given by Dr. Lester DeKoster in his editorial in *The Banner* of September 10, 1976. The article laments that the substantive issues involved in the ordination of Dr. Allen Verhey could not be addressed by Synod. This is due to the confusing and incomplete procedure as provided in the Church Order for such a case.

It is my judgment after reading the various positions on the matter of procedure, including the majority and minority reports to Synod, that the Church Order could arguably be read to support either position. If such is the case, then the Verhey case is just one more example of inadequate procedural guidelines causing confusion in the church. Allow me to elaborate.

On the one hand, the procedure followed by Dutton may have been proper under Article Thirty of the Church Order, since they believed that the decision to ordain conflicted with the Word of God, by admitting a minister to the ministry of our churches who had views plainly contradictory to Scripture. Listen to Article Thirty of the Church Order:

Assemblies and Church members may appeal to the Assembly next in order if they believe injustice has been done or that a decision conflicts with the Word of God or the Church Order. Appellants shall observe all ecclesiastical regulations regarding the manner and time of appeal.

The Commentary (*The Revised Church Order Commentary*, Van Dellen and Monsma) to this Article, on page 127, states that church members may appeal to the next assembly in order, and continues by stating:

But it is often advisable that an appeal is first made to the next Assembly against which an appeal is made. In some instances it is doubtlessly altogether advisable to give the body against which objections are held the opportunity to correct itself, if correction is needed.

This appears to be exactly what Dutton did. They went back to Classis and protested the decision of Classis. Rev. Peter De Jong in the July, 1976, issue of THE OUTLOOK asserts as follows: "The Dutton Church, following proper procedure, appealed to Synod."

The other position, that being that the procedure followed by Dutton was improper, was adopted by Synod, presumably on the theory that immediately upon ordination a different set of rules became applicable. Dr. DeKoster noted in his *Banner* article that: "It was the protest itself which neglected to take note of the procedural shift involved when a candidate has become, through proper procedure, a minister."

This statement is based on the grounds of Synod for denying Dutton's appeal. According to Synod, the act of ordination changed the kind of proceedings necessary to "get at" the issue, that is deposition pursuant to Articles Eighty-nine and following.

In essence, Synod took the position that the law defines as "the case is moot," that is, the arguments and procedure which were previously used are no longer applicable due to a change in circumstances (here ordination).

Although the argument of "mootness" or "procedural shift" sounds valid, the answer is not that simple. It is my opinion that Synod had the right and opportunity to consider and decide the Dutton appeal on at least two grounds:

First: Synod should have asked itself the effect of denying Dutton's appeal.

The Supreme Court of the United States has re-

peatedly maintained that under certain circumstances it will consider and decide a case even though their decision will not have any direct effect, due to a change in circumstances, on the litigants involved. In such a case, the Court asks itself two questions

- (1) Is the issue one of substantial importance?
- (2) Is there a real possibility the problem will occur again?

Certainly, the allegation that a candidate's views of the Bible are unscriptural is a substantial issue in the CRC and, therefore, the first test was met.

Also, it is very likely that this kind of problem will occur in the future, which satisfies the second test.

Therefore, Synod had the *duty to decide the issue* so as to preclude other such ordinations from taking place if they indeed found that Verhey's views were contrary to Scripture.

Next: A second and possibly more potent answer to Synod's argument is that there was a remedy which Synod could have supplied. It is true that when Dutton *protested* to Classis, Dutton's opponent was Verhey. However, the *appeal* to Synod was directed at the *decision of Classis to recommend ordination*, not the *ordination* itself. Thus, the provisions of Article Thirty continued to apply, that is, an Assembly may appeal to the Assembly next in order if they believe . . . that a *decision* conflicts with the Word of God or the Church Order. Thus the provisions of Article Thirty continued to apply and Synod had the authority to decide whether the *decision of Classis* to recommend ordination conflicted with the Word of God.

It is not important for our purposes whether I believe that the Dutton procedure was proper or improper. What is important is that an issue as critical as the ordination of a minister in the Christian Reformed Church has become inextricably mired in procedural ambiguity.

A license to preach, like a license to practice law or medicine, is a privilege — not a right. The right is, of course, predicated upon fulfilling the basic requirements of the license. I am also well aware that becoming a minister is a calling.

If, for some reason, the recipient of the license does not meet the requirements for obtaining it, he is acting improperly, that is, he has a faulty license.

I'm sure that none here would question that it is vitally important to closely scrutinize the doctrinal and hermeneutical positions of those who are to be ordained in the CRC.

It is truly unfortunate that Synod found that there was no proper way for Dutton to oppose Verhey's ordination.

The procedure under which we now operate allowed Synod to effectively choose whether to allow or disallow the appeal.

I find this alarming, since an argument can be legitimately raised both for allowing or disallowing such an appeal.

Whenever two alternate procedures are available, as is arguably the case here, almost invariably one will encourage the examination of the substantive issues and the other will not. For example, in the

Dutton appeal, a procedure through Article Thirty would have required Synod to determine whether Verhey met the qualifications of his office, whereas the procedure Synod followed prevented an examination of this substantive issue. It is not fair to the parties involved or to the organized church to give the ruling body a choice of which of two such procedures it should follow. As I mentioned before, the purpose of a well-drafted Judicial Code is to encourage a decision on the *substantive issues*. A single, properly drafted procedure will do just that.

In spite of all of the problems we have had with procedure as recently as these important cases of Dr. Boer and Dr. Verhey, there still appears to be a reluctance to adopt a comprehensive and complete procedure to help resolve such substantive issues. This de-emphasis of procedure corresponds to an over-emphasis of good will, Christian love and forbearance. This is exemplified time and again in the commentary of the revised Church Order.

For example, the commentary [Van Dellen and Monsma] under Article Thirty states as follows:

Multiplication of rules and stipulations in ecclesiastical matters often works for more harm than good. We should be very careful on this score. Let each assembly judge with good-will and Christian forbearance as to the propriety of each appeal directed to it. This is the unwritten rule which we have followed thus far and it seems to have worked well.

Again, in the commentary under Article Eighty-two —

The trial should be dignified, conducted prayerfully, absolutely impartial. The procedure should not become overly technical. Consistories do not conduct court trials in the civil sense of the word. Each case should be investigated not according to certain set and highly technical rules, but rather freely, as fairness and sanctified common sense may indicate for every specific case.

Furthermore, the commentary under Article Thirty-one states in part as follows —

In civil courts, technical terms and technical interpretation of terms means a great deal. But in the Church of God, we are first of all interested in the matter as such [substance — CLZ]. We stress spirit and content, not terms and technicalities.

This distrust of a comprehensive procedure which per force will contain a number of "technicalities" by definition, is now, again, being de-emphasized by the committee appointed by Synod to propose a new judicial code. Allow me to quote from the Acts of Synod of 1975 on pages 617 through 619.

— Accordingly, most of our efforts were devoted to a thorough re-examination and revision of the Lake Erie version with a view to providing the Church with a statement of judicial rights and procedures that is compact, workable, and *not burdened with excessive legalism*.

From page 619 I quote —

In response to many suggestions, the committee has replaced most of the terminology derived

from the civil law with simpler or more typically ecclesiastical language.

Ironically, the committee follows with a quotation from John Calvin's institutes on the same page:

We further see that in human transactions some procedure is always in effect, which is to be respected in the interest of public decency, and even of humanity itself. This ought especially to be observed in churches, which are best sustained when all things are under a *well-ordered constitution*, and which without concord become no churches at all.

Also, Calvin states:

No organization is sufficiently strong unless constituted with *definite laws*; nor can any procedure be maintained without some set form.

Ideally, the principles of love, forbearance and Christian toleration can obviate the need for a comprehensive procedure, or indeed, for any procedure. However, all of us are keenly aware of human frailty, and in those cases where people have a very personal and important stake in the outcome of the proceedings, such as deposition from office, refusal of ordination, excommunication from the Church, etc., the chances of frailty becoming involved increases dramatically. Since we have not attained perfection and since in such situations these high Christian ideals are most severely tested, the Church must take all necessary precautions to safeguard its ideals in solving the substantive problems facing the Church. The most obvious and basic safeguard which the Church can consider is a well-drafted, comprehensive procedural due process. A well-defined procedure has the function of virtually forcing a proper and fair consideration of the substantive issues, presuming of course that those who consider the matter are willing to exercise their authority in an ecclesiastical manner.

Unfortunately, the inherent distrust of procedural guidelines, per se, yields the following result: instead of emphasizing procedure to enhance the goals of good will, Christian love and forbearance, the concept of procedure is construed as being at variance with these Christian ideals.

What must be done? — If it is true that often the inability to deal with substantive issues in the Church is related to the lack of effective judicial due process or procedure, the question remains: What must be done?

It is gratifying to realize that Synod recognizes a problem with the present procedure and has appointed a committee to propose a judicial code pursuant to the original overture by Classis Lake Erie. It is further gratifying to note that many Classes and interested Church members have submitted communications and input to the committee.

I have studied the proposed judicial code submitted by the committee to Synod 1975, and conclude without reservation that it is an improvement over the present procedure in many respects. Further, I recognize that the final judicial code which will be submitted to the Synod of 1977 may be improved over the proposed judicial code submitted to Synod 1975. However, it is my judgment that the proposal does

not go far enough to insure that the procedural quagmire will become a thing of the past.

Without going into a step by step analysis or suggesting an entire judicial code, allow me to point up a few areas of weakness in the present proposed judicial code which can be easily remedied.

First: Although the proposed Code sets some time restrictions, more are needed. Article 6 states as follows:

Every charge must be presented to the assembly in writing, must set forth the alleged offense and must specify the facts relied upon to sustain the charge. Such specification shall declare, as far as possible, time, place and circumstance of the alleged offense and shall be accompanied with the names of the witnesses and the title of the documents to be cited in its support. *A copy of the charge shall be submitted to the respondent.*

The question is, "When must a copy of the charge be submitted to the respondent?" The proposed judicial code does not answer this question. Recall the example of Dr. Boer wherein he received a statement of the Consistory's grounds for the charges five days before Classis met and that his response thereto was not obtained by Consistory or Classis until the day Classis met. The proposed judicial code does not preclude a similar occurrence.

Article 16 of the proposed judicial code provides a time limit within which the appellant must give notice of appeal to the stated clerk of Classis and to the Consistory whose decision is appealed. Then, Article 20 states that in all cases the Classis shall set a time for the hearing on appeal and shall send a notice as to the time and date of such hearing to all parties. Noticeably lacking from the notice requirement is the statement of the number of days' notice to be given prior to the hearing. The lack of specific time requirements weakens the overall effect of making the procedure somewhat more definite and giving all parties adequate time to study and properly prepare for response and decision.

Article 11 of the proposed judicial code states in part:

In all cases sufficient time shall be allowed for the respondent to appear at the given place and time and to prepare for the hearing. The consistory shall decide what constitutes "sufficient time."

Once again, it would be much preferable to have an objective time limit to insure adequate notice. Absent such definite standards, the Church has no assurance that the complaint will not be raised that "the Consistory did not give me sufficient time."

Second: The proposed code needs an "election of remedies" section. In order to make the code more workable, and to avoid the procedural problem involved in the Boer matter, the code should provide that once a litigant chooses his remedy, that procedure will be followed until the matter is concluded. The time which Synod has to consider the issues before it is too valuable to even have to ask the question of whether the parties are properly before it.

Third: The proposed code needs to resolve the possible difficulties of contested ordination. As in the last proposal, there are components of election of remedies involved here, too. More basic, however, is the fact that the Consistory had no way to block ordination, even though they alleged Biblical grounds.

Just as an example, the Code would provide that a Consistory has thirty days to appeal the decision of Classis. The effect of setting such a limit would be to forestall, for a short period of time, the taking effect of ordination. The matter would remain under the guidelines of Article Thirty, and appropriate bodies would not have to proceed with the distasteful and laborious task of deposition under Articles Eighty-nine and following.

Finally: The most basic requirement of an adequate and fair procedure is a fitting and proper attitude by those who use and rule on the procedural questions. Any procedure must be employed as a means to an end rather than the end itself. In this regard, it is necessary to avoid either of two extremes, namely, either that procedure has little value within the Church or, at the other extreme, procedure is the panacea of solving all problems. Neither extreme will provide the right atmosphere for solving problems within the Church. The proper function of a good procedure is to discourage personal differences from overshadowing legitimate ecclesiastical issues. The benefits derived from an adequate procedure are that the valuable time of all persons involved as well as the assembly's will be spent resolving the substantive issue at hand in an expeditious and ecclesiastical manner, rather than spending an undue amount of time determining whether or not proper procedure has been followed.

It has long been presumed in the law of the land that an equitable procedure is necessary to protect the people and its government. Considering out additional Christian mandate, the Church deserves at least as much. ●

DR. VERHEY RESPONDS TO CRITICISM OF HIS VIEW OF THE BIBLE

Complying with his request for this, THE OUTLOOK herewith publishes an article by Dr. Allen Verhey to which he gives the title: "The Battle Over the Bible: the De Jong Case." Appended to his article is a reply by Rev. Peter De Jong.

In the April OUTLOOK Rev. Peter De Jong wrote an article entitled "The Battle For the Bible: The Verhey Case." The title is a piece of presumptuous deception; it suggests that to differ with Rev. De Jong about the Bible is to be against the Bible. My initial response has simply to be the protest of my confession: I acknowledge the authority of Scripture, believe

it inspired by God, believe it to be God's Word to mankind, believe it reveals God's mercy and will, believe that apart from the Scripture the church has no enduring identity as church. I make the confession of the church concerning these writings, and I mean it. My work is given to listening as carefully as I can to what the Bible says and to showing as fully as I can what it might mean to live in obedience to it. I am, in short, *for* the Bible, in spite of the implications of Rev. De Jong's title.

The title of my response is hopefully less presumptuous, but the implications of "the battle over the Bible" are almost equally unwelcome to me. Part of living in faithfulness to Scripture is that we welcome each other (Romans 14:7), neither judging nor repudiating each other. That leaves little room for disputing about opinions, much less battling over them (Romans 14:1), even when the differences are as great as the differences between Jewish Christianity (with their reverence for and observance of the Hebrew scriptures) and Gentile Christianity (with their lack of reverence and observance). There is, of course, room for mutual instruction and admonition (Romans 15:14), and that instructing and admonishing may presumably be rigorous and spirited, but if it ends in judging or repudiating, we have been unfaithful to Scripture.

I wish the title could have been "a conversation about the Bible." But Rev. De Jong is apparently intent not to have it so. He wants a battle. Beside the question of whether such a battle is faithful to Scripture, it may also be asked whether such a battle will serve the church or demonstrate the authority of Scripture to those outside the faith. But, of course, only our faithfulness to Scripture can serve the church or demonstrate the authority of Scripture. And part of faithfulness to Scripture is welcoming each other, not battling each other. I would not do battle against Rev. De Jong. I would not repudiate him. I think he is concerned about faithfulness to Scripture, and so I must be and am ready to be instructed by him to remain faithful to Scripture. But I also may and must admonish *him* to live in faithfulness to Scripture. If Rev. De Jong must "do battle" rather than welcome me, at least let it be done with a measure of charity and without misrepresentation, let it be done "speaking the truth in love," not bearing falsehood.

Rev. De Jong's article misrepresented my positions. I found neither truth nor love in much of what he said. The grossest distortions concerned my dissertation, *The Use of Scripture in Moral Argument: A Case Study of Walter Rauschenbusch* (Yale, 1975). Moreover, I had told Rev. De Jong that he misunderstood my dissertation. The dissertation begins with 1) the confession that the Bible is authoritative for the Christian moral life, that the church has no moral identity apart from the Bible, and 2) the acknowledgment that the Bible is nevertheless brought to bear on moral questions in many different ways by Christian moralists. It starts and ends by saying that the Bible is the primary and final norm for the Christian life. The problem that occupies the body of the dissertation is *not whether but how!* But Rev. De Jong does not

attend to that distinction. (And when I asked him in conversation how Leviticus 25:3-6 is normative for his congregation, he did not answer.) The question of *how* Scripture is to be applied and used is not answered simply by repeating *that* Scripture is authoritative. In other words, the confession *sola scriptura* does not answer (and was never intended to answer) *how* Scripture should be used and applied. I share the Reformation's insistence that the Scripture is the rule for faith and practice (*sola scriptura*), and precisely because I do insist that we be careful about *how* we use, interpret, and apply Scripture. Scripture has been *used* to provide rationalizations for slavery, "holy wars," the tyranny of Hitler, and a thousand other evils. But the problem is not with Scripture, but with our refusal to be careful about how we use it.

The question of *how* Scripture ought to be used and applied is not a new one, nor is it alien to Reformed theology. No one may doubt that Calvin acknowledged the authority of Scripture, and he refused to apply the biblical rule against interest "literally." Reformed theology—indeed the Belgic Confession (Art. 25)—distinguishes between "temporary" and "perpetual" obligations. Many examples of places this distinction has been used might be given: Is the sabbatical year a temporary or perpetual obligation? Is capital punishment a temporary or perpetual obligation? Is the veil a temporary or perpetual obligation? Is "the holy kiss" a temporary or perpetual obligation? But if we would use such a distinction, we ought to be willing to say how and why we make it. Precisely because we recognize the authority of Scripture, we need to be careful about how we use and apply it. The dissertation does not recommend how the Bible should be used, but it does show how one can be *careful* about how one uses it. Surely Rev. De Jong does not want the church to be careless about such an important matter.

Rev. De Jong also misrepresents the dissertation's analysis of the importance of experience. In the dissertation it is not a rival of Scripture. It does not take the place of Scripture as the rule for faith and practice. Experience is irrelevant to the truth of the church's confession *that* the Bible is her authority (although, of course, presumably only those who have experienced that authority make that confession with the church). But experience is relevant to *how* the authoritative Scriptures are used. Moreover, that experience, the dissertation insists, must be an experience of *the authority of Scripture* in the context of one's own moral life and in the context of the believing community. Far from threatening the church's confession of the authority of Scripture, such a place for experience insists *that* the Bible continue to be the authority.

I would welcome discussion of my dissertation in the church, but I am not happy about "battling" over it and I am offended when misrepresentations become the implements of that battle. If Rev. De Jong insists on a battle, at least empty the arsenals of misrepresentation.

If "The Battle For the Bible: The Verhey Case" were emptied of misrepresentation, many other sentences and paragraphs would be changed. For example, I did not and do not disagree with a strong condemnation of abortion; my stated position is that while abortions may be justifiable for rape, incest, and certain other indications, abortion on demand ought to be condemned. And in the book I hope to publish on the Heidelberg Catechism, I state my appreciation for the Church's prophetic stand against abortion even while I differ on some details. For another example, it will hardly do to say that I have been unable to answer objections to my views. It is more accurate to say that Rev. De Jong has not been satisfied with my answers. But for many hours I have answered questions—in the classical examination, in meetings with consistories, including the Dutton consistory, in an interview with a synodical committee—and I have answered them candidly, without deception. I have published answers to the questions most frequently asked—the questions about the nature of Scripture and about the questions appropriate to Scripture—in the *May Reformed Journal*. It may remain true that I have not succeeded in convincing Rev. De Jong, but it is simply false to suggest that I have been unable to answer. For one final example from De Jong's arsenal of misrepresentation, he asserts that I interpret "Behold, there was a great earthquake" to mean "and there was *not* a great earthquake." That is a misrepresentation of my view. It is true that I think "Behold, there was a great earthquake" does *not mean* that an earthquake actually happened but rather means that the significance of the event of the empty tomb is the beginning of the new age. But I emphatically reject the suggestion that "Behold, there was a great earthquake" *means* "there was *not* a great earthquake." Perhaps there is no intentional misrepresentation here; perhaps Rev. De Jong's logic failed him. But he should know that to say, "It rains in Spain," does *not mean* "It snows in Buffalo," is not the same as to say, "It rains in Spain" *means* "It does not snow in Buffalo."

When "The Battle for the Bible: The Verhey Case" is emptied of misrepresentations, there is not much that remains. But there is something that remains, surely. There is the question about what it means to be faithful to Scripture with respect to divorce. There is the question about whether Scripture intends to provide minute, circumstantial accuracy when it reports the events of salvation history. About these questions Rev. De Jong and I differ. I am still pleased with my articles on divorce (*Reformed Journal*, May-June and July-August, 1976) and have recently addressed the question of "minute, circumstantial accuracy" (*Reformed Journal*, May, 1977). I recommend these to anyone interested in my perspective on the question about which Rev. De Jong and I disagree. I would be happy to see these questions discussed in the church, but I would be unhappy to see us battling over them and judging and repudiating each other. I do not expect to live my ecclesiastical life free from instruction or even free from controversy, but I do

and may expect not to be misrepresented in the interest of some "battle for the Bible."

REV. PETER DE JONG REPLIES

Dr Verhey has asked for an opportunity to respond in *THE OUTLOOK* to my article in the April issue. In that article I outlined the case regarding the use of the Bible which has become associated with his name. His request has been readily granted and I appreciate being able to respond to what he writes.

The Issue Is Not Personal — Dr. Verhey begins by charging me with "presumptuous deception" even in the choice of a title. Put in simpler language, I am a proud liar! That is hardly the most ingratiating way to begin a plea for Christian charity—or a demonstration of it. Perhaps he was irritated and didn't really intend to become that personal in his writing. But the observation brings us into the real problem of his answer. He insists on making a personal issue of what we (our church and I) have gone to great lengths to avoid making one. Recall how our appeal to last year's Synod did not even mention his name! He insists on making into a mere personal quarrel what we see clearly is an episode, although an important one to our churches, in the much bigger "battle for the Bible" that is going on throughout a large part of the Christian church in our time.

Dr. Verhey charges that the title of my article was "presumptuous"; "it suggests that to differ with Rev. De Jong about the Bible is to be against the Bible." Where have I ever suggested that Dr. Verhey or anyone else has to agree with me? The questions under discussion have never been about agreement or disagreement with me. The argument at his examination, at the Classis and at the Synod have been about the way his expressed views contradict the Scriptures and the churches' creeds which he says he believes.

Christian Love May Not Condone Unfaithfulness to the Gospel — Dr. Verhey's case, as he states it, is very simple. The Bible says we must love and receive one another, not "battle" with fellow-Christians. Can't we just have a friendly chat about our differences of opinion, agree to live together in brotherly fashion if some differences remain, and let this whole matter go at that? Isn't this what the Lord and His Word demand of us? It sounds plausible, doesn't it?

Do not the Lord's commands to love and receive one another, to live together as Christians in peace and brotherhood, demand that we tolerate or overlook such differences as Dr. Verhey's views reveal? Dr. Verhey's references to Romans 14 which deals with our making allowances for differences between brethren about such matters as whether or not to eat meat, overlooks the fact that the same apostle points out that there are other more basic matters which may not be so tolerated (Romans 16:17): "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned: and turn away from them."

Remember the occasion when Peter who had just

made a confession of faith in Christ which the Lord highly commended, went on to contradict Jesus' own words. Did the Lord tell Peter, "Now I differ with you, Peter, but love demands that we not make any trouble over such differences"? He said, "Get thee behind me Satan: thou art a stumbling block unto me for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men." Were these not harsh words to use against a follower of Christ? Of course, they were, but the Lord used them to show Peter and the Christian church that letting those who confess Him and are to lead His church contradict His words is a thing that may not be tolerated. That is devil's work even when the Apostle Peter stumbles into it! The inspired Apostle never forgot that lesson and later warned us that "no prophecy of scripture is of private interpretation. For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit" (II Peter 1:20, 21). Therefore the church must constantly be on guard against any who "privily bring in destructive heresies" ("self-chosen opinions" as Lenski points out). II Corinthians 10:4, 5; Galatians 1:8, 9; I Timothy 6:3; II John 9-11 are other examples of such apostolic warnings which forbid us to tolerate false teachings under the mistaken notion that Christian charity demands that we do so.

"Misrepresentations"? — Dr. Verhey might respond that these warnings against false teachings, more particularly against contradicting God's Word, do not apply to him. Hasn't he assured the Classis, the churches, and the readers of his article that he believes the Bible, believes it is inspired, makes the confession of the church concerning it, is "in short, *for the Bible*"?

Dr. Verhey has indeed said this many times. The problem arose because he in his examination and in various writings shows that he uses, defends, and promotes a way of "interpreting" the Bible that lets him contradict things the Bible plainly says. I (and others) have pointed this out, and insisted that this procedure may not be permitted. Because I have done this I am charged repeatedly in Dr. Verhey's answer with "deception," "misrepresentation," "falseness," and "distortion." Such charges should not be made or credited unless one can prove them. And proof is the one thing lacking in Dr. Verhey's article. My article was rather heavily supported by references. No one needs to take my word for any of it. Any reader can obtain the material and satisfy himself regarding the truth of anything I alleged. Where is any such proof in Dr. Verhey's answer? He gives nothing.

Let's look at the particulars. I charged that Dr. Verhey in his examination "said that he did not believe that the serpent spoke to Eve as reported in Genesis 3 and that he believed that the earthquake reported in Matthew 28:2 should be understood as an eschatological symbol and not necessarily as a fact." Dr. Verhey has admitted before the Synod committee that these allegations were true. Where is the misrepresentation? In this answer even where he charges me with representation he admits: "It is true that I

think 'Behold, there was a great earthquake' does *not mean* that an earthquake actually happened. . . ." Where then is the "misrepresentation"? He admittedly denies that "an earthquake actually happened" when Matthew said it did!

I alleged further that Dr. Verhey in his *Reformed Journal* writings on Divorce interpreted "Matthew's report that Jesus said, 'whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication . . . ' to mean that Jesus did *not* say 'whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication . . . ' and that "the strict condemnation of divorce except on grounds of fornication (which Matthew attributed to Jesus and which our churches traditionally maintained) Dr. Verhey rejects as 'perhaps' traceable to moral pride." This he does not even attempt to refute. Anyone can verify it in those articles with which he says that he is "still pleased." The answer devotes most attention to his thesis which he accuses me of misrepresenting. Dr. Verhey's method of "interpreting" and using the Bible are plainly shown in the examples already mentioned and they are easily verified. That thesis is a much bigger document (315 pages) and not quite so accessible although any borrower can obtain it from Calvin Library and verify for himself the references I made to it. The gist of Dr. Verhey's answer is that that thesis says at the beginning and at the end that the Bible is authoritative but that its only concern is to show that we must be careful how we use the Bible in moral matters. "The dissertation does not recommend how the Bible should be used, but it does show how one can be *careful* about how one uses it." Dr. Verhey appears to be forgetting about the eighth chapter of that Thesis which is devoted to his own conclusions (pp. 196-225).

It lists *nine* "conclusions" and "recommendations" which he makes about "the use of scripture in moral argument" (pp. 215-225). That includes a lot of "recommendations" to be covered by his claim that "*the dissertation does not recommend how the Bible should be used.*" (If the reader wants to find a few more statements of recommendations he can find them on pages 275-284.) I have pointed out that some of those clearly stated conclusions and recommendations — notably (1) his insistence that warrants from outside of the Bible are needed to apply any of its teachings to moral matters; (2) his attack on the "sola scriptura," the Reformation doctrine that the Bible is the supreme and final authority in matters of faith and conduct; (3) and his repeated insistence that one's own experience has a unique and *decisive* role in determining when and how we must use the Bible in moral matters — cannot possibly be harmonized with what we confess about the Bible in the Belgic Confession, Articles V and VII and about God's law in the Heidelberg Catechism. Dr. Verhey has been unable to show how these can be harmonized and he now tries to brush this all aside by accusing me, without offering any evidence, of "misrepresentations."

The Real Issue: The "Interpreter's Right to Contradict the Bible — The real point at issue in this

whole matter is that Dr. Verhey — although he says that he believes the Bible, believes that it is inspired, and believes the churches' confession concerning it — uses, defends, and teaches a method of "interpreting" the Bible which lets him (and others) deny anything that the Bible says. The examples mentioned are not just a few exceptional differences of opinion about some rare texts. They are striking examples of his way of interpreting *the whole Bible*. This way permits him or anyone else to deny, alter, or explain away any fact, doctrine, or command to be found in it.

This method of dealing with the Bible and its teachings is not new. It has been characteristic of the old liberalism through its history. It was characteristic of Rauschenbusch's use of Scripture which was the subject of Dr. Verhey's thesis. Dr. Verhey has given some indications of being more frank and honest in his personal bearing than is the method of interpreting the Bible which he defends. That method can be aptly described (to use the words that I borrow from Dr. Verhey) as "*presumptuous deception*." It always involves the *presumption* as the Lutheran Rev. Sam Nafzger (see my article in *THE OUTLOOK*, Feb. 1977, p. 17) pointed out, that today's scholar knows better than the man who was there and wrote about it, what actually happened. Its *deception* lies in using the old words while "interpreting" them to mean something other than or even opposite to what one normally assumes them to mean.

Dr. Machen in a 1923 sermon called attention to this procedure in a striking way. Whereas formerly men, faced by "perfectly plain documents," such as the creeds or New Testament, "either accepted or else denied them. Now they no longer deny, but merely 'interpret.'" And so Machen finds his "modern friend" saying, "Now of course we accept the proposition that 'the third day He did not rise again from the dead'" (Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen*, p. 358).

This is exactly the "method of interpretation" we find Dr. Verhey using. He may not apply it consistently. He may not apply it to the resurrection — he indicated in his examination that he would except the resurrection from the way he treated the "earthquake," but this kind of "interpretation" is exactly the method he uses in his treatment of the Bible passages on which he has been questioned. His using, defending, teaching, and promoting this way of misusing God's Word cannot be harmonized with the Bible, our creeds, or the decisions of our synods. Therefore we must oppose it. We must fight against him or anyone else being permitted to hold and teach such views as a minister in the Christian Reformed Churches.

If we condone and permit this kind of rejection of God's Word to enter and take over the churches we will be asking for and will get the Lord's rejection of us and our churches. Remember the blunt warning of the Lord through His prophet to one called to special office among His people, "Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee . . ." (I Sam. 15:23, 26). May that judgment not fall on us, on our churches — or on Dr. Verhey. ●

from a CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE COUNSELOR

JAMES A. WINKLE, M.A.

James A. Winkle, M.A., has a Christian Counseling Service (Individual and Family Counselors) in Hawthorne, New Jersey. Mr. Winkle served as an elder delegate to the 1976 CRC Synod. In a letter accompanying this article he was asked to write, Mr. Winkle states: "Needless to say, my role as a Christian Counselor would be much easier if I didn't have to spend half my time helping individuals 'unlearn' what was told them — both from the world, as well as the confusion and watered down rhetoric that flows from some of our pulpits."

Our back window on our house overlooks a small stream. A few mornings ago, during breakfast, I noticed from the corner of my eye three high school kids (who must have been a bit late for school) attempting to "hop the rocks" and hopefully eliminate a large distance — perhaps even make up some lost time.

However, as earnest as they were, and I must even add cautious, they all managed to get one foot soaking wet. It was interesting to note that the first jump (with right foot) landed each of these kids firmly on a rather large rock. But now, the tricky part. With a heave they had to stretch and try to reach (with their left foot) a barely visible and apparently most slippery protrusion. What each thought was possible could not be mastered!

This little episode of three kids on their way in life — hopping across obstacles — trusting they are well grounded as they jump, reminded me of a much larger scene; a scene that I'm all too familiar with — the unstable marriage relationship.

I sipped the last swallow of my coffee, and glanced at the clock now realizing I had about 20 minutes to get to the office and begin my day of counseling. As I travelled down the winding roads, I couldn't help but reflect on the scene at breakfast: one foot well secure on a firm rock, while the other helplessly submerged in slimy mud.

I knew I would be counseling Grace and her husband Al this morning. And here, with a much different set of circumstances of course, was the same concept. Shall we call it: a perplexing dilemma? Let me explain.

■ They came to me on the advice of a Christian friend. One who had heard some great things — beautiful reconciliatory change brought about in marriages, because of our Christian counseling.

Grace is a Christian. She believes in God and accepts Jesus Christ as her Savior and Lord, and worships in a church where God's Word is preached and held in sacred honor. However, Al wants nothing to do with Grace's God or any aspect of Christianity. A very perplexing dilemma.

Can you picture in your mind's eye now the scene at the window this morning? Here's a couple trying to "jump the rocks" as it were. But tragically the mutual unity and oneness of this marriage is jeopardized to its foundation. Grace is trying to live her life on the standards of God's formula, whereas Al is in a different kind of "water" altogether — the standards of the secular world.

We really don't need a Grace and Al to dramatize the reality of this kind of relationship. I'm sure that you too have met the "Grace's or Al's" in your life.

Yes, there are all kinds and all types, and unfortunately there are those who, as husband and wife, both consider themselves to be Christian, but have their lives, and their values, and their priorities in different worlds.

Yes, there are all kinds and all types, and unfortunately when one hears the call of "a different drummer," the tragic and ungodly dilemma begins.

I need not outline all the direct or subtle "tunes" the secular, evil world is playing. However, I would like to underscore a crucially important note. A note that must be played continually, loudly, and convincingly: the sound a Christian makes, within his or her marriage, as a retort to being swept away by the "sounds" and call of today.

Christian husbands and wives must be challenged and encouraged from the pulpit, in Bible groups, through Christian books and periodicals, and by the Christian "helping professions" to keep both feet firmly grounded, at all times, on the absolute Truth of God's Word. Living a life that uses the Bible as its recipe gives an entirely different perspective on our perplexing dilemmas!

Let's refer back to Al for a moment; he feels that to have a mistress on the side is an appropriate way to find deeper fulfillment in life. Or take, for example, the advice his lawyer friend gave him. His lawyer suggested that if his marriage is turning sour, then try group sex with a variety of women — all shapes and sizes — then "maybe you'll realize that the ole lady isn't so bad after all."

Maybe Al would find "these others" better than his Grace, but of course either discovery is diametrically opposed to God's standards.

The mishmash of secular advice (legal, social, and psychological) is making a diabolical impact upon untold lives and marriages. One out of every two marriages ends up "on the rocks." Here on the East coast, newspapers carry the "Dissolution of Marriages" columns; and it's usually twice as long as the "Marriage License Granted" column. Divorce is now as common as getting new tires on a car — every three years.

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■ Then too, our "perplexing dilemma" takes another interesting turn: the question of re-marriage. The voice of which drummer will the person listen to? Secular social mores lure a person into multiple divorces and re-marriages if necessary. However, the voice of God through Scripture clearly indicates that the "wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, let her remain single or else be *reconciled* to her husband) and the husband should not divorce his wife" (I Cor. 7:10-12). Consider also, the passage in which Jesus calls re-marriage adultery (see: Matt. 5:32; Matt. 19:9; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18) "but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress, and whosoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

Divorce for any other reason than that permitted in the Bible is a sinful denial of the sacred vows a couple made before God and His witnesses, and the faithful allegiance owed to the spouse "till death do us part."

■ I'm fearful however that our denomination is not standing firmly, with both feet, on this Godly principle. To be sure, the historic stand of our Church has been: "remain unmarried as long as the other party to the divorce has not closed the door to reconciliation by remarriage or persistent fornication." I, as a Christian counselor, cannot offer approval or blessing to what Christ has called adultery — and, neither should the church!

■ Well, the day came and went. Grace and Al, along with five other couples had been seen for counseling. I heard the voice of the "other drummer" over and over again in statements like: "we have irreconcilable differences," "there's no hope," "our marriage is dead," "we're definitely incompatible," et cetera. As I shared with Grace and Al, and with all the others, let me share with you. These phrases DO NOT belong in the vocabulary of those who believe that "with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26).

Yes, with God there's hope. "Old things (habits, sins, hatred, bitterness, resentment, lust, et cetera) can pass away, and we can become the person God wants us to be — a new person in Christ." Transforming power is available! Don't give heed to the humanistic view, coming from the secular arena, which denies that the Holy Spirit can bring about in either or both of the partners the kind of character change needed to restore the broken marriage.

So, dear friend, if you feel the urge to "hop to a different rock" beware! If you know someone who is straddling both, help him or her back to the firm rock of God's standards. Urge your Church Council and Pastor to underscore and maintain our historic-Biblical position. As we stand united in the harmony and unity of God's authoritative Word, we may then silence the sounds of "the different drummers." What God has joined together, let no man put asunder.

Meditation

ELIJAH'S TRANSLATION— CHRIST'S ASCENSION



REV. JOHN BLANKESPOOR

And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, which parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. II Kings 2:11

And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven. Luke 24:51

In many ways the outlook for the people of God in the days of Elijah and Elisha was dark. They had suffered much at the hands of Ahab and Jezebel. No doubt many believers had been killed. Wickedness in the form of idolatry was on the increase with all its accompanying sins. Truly this was also the church of Hebrews 11. Surely by faith she confessed over against these powers of sin and the devil and death that God always rules, and there is always hope for the people of God. But naturally she saw usually nothing of this glory—until God took Elijah into heaven.

To the Old Testament church God so often came with plain and literal revelations. The earthly Canaan was a type of the heavenly Canaan. The earthly manna and water were types of the spiritual food of Jesus Christ. So God gave a literal revelation of the deliverance of the church in the translation of Elijah.

But why did God just take Elijah to heaven, and long before this, Enoch? Was Elijah so much more godly than all the rest of the Christians of that day? The answer is a negative one; surely Elijah also was a sinner and therefore subject to death. But in his time and setting he served the Gospel of the Lord in a special way. Moses and Elijah were two great men of the Old Testament, representing the law and prophets. Moses, as a representative of the law, had to die. By the law there is no salvation (even though Moses himself surely was a child of God). Elijah however, was a prophet who pointed to the great Christ, and therefore was taken up into heaven liter-

ally. However, even though Elijah's translation was marvelous, the ascension of our Lord is far more excellent.

■ First of all, notice that Elijah's work as prophet was finished. Surely much more work had to be done. Jehu had to be anointed as king, and Hazael appointed to be king of Syria. But one prophet always followed another. Elisha, as a spiritual son of Elijah, could do the unfinished work of Elijah. So it is always with us.

Man after man serves his generation and then is gathered to his fathers. And a new arm grasps the mantle to smite the Jordan river. Men soon recognize the successor and forget about the predecessor. But with Christ all this was and is so different. There was no mantle falling from His shoulders, and He had no successors. Christ left no unfinished work that man had to carry on by someone taking His place. Doesn't Luke in His Gospel narrative tell us what Jesus *began* both to do and to teach, and in the Book of Acts teach what Jesus *continued* to do and teach? And He does this throughout the entire New Testament. Christ entered heaven to continue His work from there, with heaven as His "headquarters."

The ascension was no withdrawal of the Captain of our salvation from the field of labor and battle. No, He still works and always will do so, having the Word preached and gathering sinners into His church. At the same time, by the power of the Holy Spirit He is with His people even unto the end of the world. What a Savior!

■ Christ also ascended as Lord and King. Also this was typified by the translation of Elijah. He was taken up in a whirlwind, which very likely was a great storm, accompanied by wind and lightning. In the midst of this storm there were fiery horses and a fiery chariot. What a tremendous sight and experience this must have been for Elisha! The horses and chariot spoke of power and glory. Elijah's God is the God who rules over the forces of nature as well as men and nations. This Elijah had also showed in his life with judgments brought upon wicked Israel.

But Christ is really Lord and King, in Himself. With His ascension there were no horses and chariots. Neither was there a big "launching pad" here, with mighty "rocket boosters" to send Him up into the heavens above. All was so quiet on the Mount of Olives and yet there was a mighty spiritual power. In His own power and by the power of the Lord He quietly and slowly left this earthly scene in the sight of the disciples. All this surely was symbolical of the power that is in God and later was given to Christ on Pentecost. And so He ascended, calmly, serenely, with Divine majesty. Here were no blazes of fiery chariots, no agitation or the forces of nature necessary to bear Him heavenward.

■ Elijah left the militant church in this world without, of himself, being able to leave something

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with the church. He did leave his mantle with Elisha, but this was not of himself, it was of the Lord. Elijah's work was finished. His work was done. But Jesus, O blessed Jesus, *while* He was parting from them He blessed them. The blessing given by the highpriest in the temple (Numbers 6) was symbolic of this. Christ's outstretched arms dropped the dew of spiritual benediction upon this little company of men; but it also means that as highpriest who would continue His work He will always bless His people in the midst of this life whatever the circumstances may be. As our highpriest He still blesses us with all spiritual blessings.

Elisha was so sorrowful. Understandably so, as he cried out, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof." Elijah had been his spiritual father, and for the church he had been like a king with a mighty chariot and horsemen. But how about the disciples with Jesus' ascension? Luke tells us that they worshipped the Lord and returned to Jerusalem *with great joy*. He does not leave His people as orphans, comfortless. As our Chief Prophet, Only Highpriest, and Eternal King, He is still with us.

But how can we as God's people enjoy this comfort and glorious truth? Millions of Christians have asked this question, how they can possess more of the power and joy of this wonderful truth, as they lived their lives in this world.

How? With that of which the mantle of Elijah was symbolical and prophetic. It was the mantle of the presence and power of God, which we have in the Word of God. It was the mantle of power that divided the Jordan River for both Elijah and Elisha. This showed that this power was not vested in their person, but a power given of the Lord. And as it was passed from Elijah to Elisha so God still passes it on, as long as the church is on this earth, and the world exists.

But this mantle we have in a far more excellent way. With Christ everything is more excellent. He has given us the mantle of the complete, infallible Word, with the accompanying power of the Spirit of Pentecost. Living out of and by and according to this Word, we have Jesus, the heavenly Lord with us always.

Finally, Elijah left and was gone. Never would he come back. Jesus however, as He left said: "I will return." He will return to take all His own unto Himself. Until that day He is working, to have the Gospel be preached to the ends of the world, to gather His church, and strengthen His people with the spiritual mantle of the Word.

Elisha went on, and by faith with the mantle he divided the Jordan. If he, with his limited knowledge had such faith, how great should be our faith in the use of this Word! May God give unto us and our children such faith, to continue the battle of faith, and to enjoy the comfort of His presence and power until our Lord returns! ●

fourteen / june, 1977

WHAT WE *Believe*



(4)

REV. ELCO H. OOSTENDORP

OUR SOVEREIGN GOD

This is the fourth in a series of articles on Reformed Doctrine, under the heading *What We Believe*. The familiar question-and-answer method, used so effectively by Bosma's *Reformed Doctrine* of a bygone day, is being followed. Rev. Elco H. Oostendorp of Hudsonville, Michigan, is the writer.

What is meant by the decrees of God?

The decrees of God are His eternal purpose and plan according to which He created all things and in His providence directs all things. The Bible speaks of the Lord having determined things from before the foundation of the world, and repeatedly mentions His eternal purpose. It describes many events as the outworking of God's plan. An outstanding example is the central event of all history, namely the death of Christ of which Peter says in Acts 2:23, "This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men."

Should the decrees of God be discussed under the first division (locus) of theology?

It has often been pointed out that John Calvin in his *Institutes* writes about predestination in the third book which is about the Holy Spirit and the application of salvation. Also the Belgic Confession Article XVI introduces it after speaking of the fall of man into sin. The Heidelberg Catechism mentions election in the answer concerning the holy catholic church, very much in the same context as Calvin does. In view of these facts it is asserted that placing the doctrine of the decrees under theology, or the doctrine of God, transfers the emphasis from where the Reformers placed it and introduces a "decretal theology" which is scholastic and theoretical rather than biblical and practical. In an article such as this we cannot discuss this at length, but point out that this can easily be exaggerated. Although Calvin discusses it in another context, his language about election and reprobation is very similar to that of the Westminster Confession which places it in chapter III after discussing the Holy Scriptures and the Trinity.

Where do we find the main confessional statement about God's decrees concerning predestination?

In the First Head of Doctrine of the Canons of Dort concerning Divine Election and Reprobation. This is the official confession of the Reformed Churches on this vital subject. The Synod of Dort represented not only the Dutch churches, but Reformed churches from several other European nations; and, even though these churches did not adopt the Canons, their confessional standards agree with their teaching (e.g., Westminster Confession).

What is meant by Predestination?

In *The Institutes* (III, xxi, 5) John Calvin states: "Predestination we call the eternal decree of God, by which he has determined in himself, what he would have to become of every individual of mankind. For they were not all created with a similar destiny; but eternal life is foreordained for some, and eternal damnation for others. Every man, therefore, being created for one or the other of these ends, we say, he is predestinated either to life or to death." Thus we believe in *double* predestination. There are those (e.g., the Lutherans) who confess that God elects men to salvation, but refuse to accept the teaching of Scripture that He also decided from eternity to pass others by and decreed their condemnation. It would seem only logical that if some of the fallen human race are chosen by God to "inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34) those not so chosen are not elect and are the objects of wrath instead of grace and love. The Reformed faith is not based on this deduction, however, but on the teaching of Scripture. As Paul teaches in Romans 9-11, God said, "Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated." Election conferred salvation on some, while the rest were hardened.

Are election and reprobation alike in every respect?

No, for while God's election conveys saving grace to His people in a positive way, it cannot be said that reprobation produces sin in those who are lost. As the Conclusion of the Canons of Dort say among other things, the Reformed Churches "detest with their whole soul" the idea that the doctrine of Predestination "makes God the author of sin," or that "in the same manner in which election is the fountain and cause of faith and good works, reprobation is the cause of unbelief and impiety." While our main interest is in election, and Scripture stresses it much more than reprobation, it is important to maintain the double nature of predestination. As L. Boettner points out in his *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, Arminians and others who object to this doctrine always center their attacks upon reprobation. This is true historically, and is so today. Those who claim to retain belief in election while rejecting reprobation end up by believing in and teaching a different concept of election than that confessed by the Reformed faith.

Does the Bible always speak of election or choice in the same sense?

No, there is a national election of Israel from all other nations, election for special offices and privileges. Election does not always mean election to salvation and eternal life. It is important to bear these differences in mind; Judas Iscariot, for example, was chosen as one of the twelve, yet he was "the son of perdition" and was lost (John 17:12; NIV "the child of hell").

Israel is the chosen nation, but "not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel" (Romans 9:6).

Why do we believe that election to salvation is "unconditional"?

Election is God's choice of those whom He has ordained to eternal life in Christ from before the foundation of the world. In choosing some to be saved and passing others by God was not moved by anything in men. Election is not based on faith and good works, but these are the gifts of grace to those whom God has elected to receive them. So the ground of election is to be found in the good pleasure of God. Election is an act of sovereign choice. The Canons of Dort teach this very clearly, not only in a positive way, but also in the rejection of errors, where several teachings basing election on some kind of human condition are rejected. Arminianism teaches that election is based on foreseen faith. There are also many who make election a matter of God's choice of faith as the way of salvation, and not a selection of persons at all. There are those who appeal to texts like I Corinthians 1:26-31 to maintain that God does not elect persons, but certain classes of men as the special objects of His favor and concern. All such conditional views of election are rejected by the Synod of Dort on the basis of Scripture, and unconditional election is taught very positively in Article 9 of Chapter I: "Election is the fountain of every saving good, from which proceed faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation, and finally eternal life itself, as its fruits and effects, according to the testimony of the apostle: He hath chosen us (not because we were, but) that we should be holy, and without blemish before him in love (Eph. 1:4)."

Is the doctrine of sovereign, unconditional election a source of comfort for the believer?

Indeed it is! "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" (Rom. 8:33). Compare also Romans 8:28-30. In Ephesians 1 Paul makes election the theme of a doxology of praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as does Peter in I Peter 1:3-5. Christ's death is the manifestation of God's electing love which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:1-11). One who realizes that as dead in sin he would never have chosen God, sings with the poet: "'Tis not that I did choose Thee, For Lord, that could not be; This heart would still refuse Thee, Hadst Thou not chosen me. Thou from the sin that stained me Hast cleansed and set me free; Of old Thou hast ordained me, That I should live for Thee" (Psalter Hymnal, No. 385:1).

WHAT'S COMING UP at the CRC SYNOD?



REV. PETER DE JONG

Beginning June 14, the 1977 CRC Synod is to meet at the Fine Arts Center of Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. To assist our readers to know what is coming up, Rev. Peter De Jong is once again giving a preview of Synod's business. Rev. De Jong is pastor of the Christian Reformed Church of Dutton, Michigan.

Again it is time to look over the *Agenda* for the CRC Synod about to meet. Every consistory member is given a copy, but how many will read it? Even for many delegates working through its 479 pages may appear to be a hopeless job. A review of it may help them as well as interest other readers.

Although this year's book contains no long reports and introduces little new material, it brings up some matters which are important to every member of the church and to any outside of it. Instead of following the order of the book (reports of boards, standing committees, representatives, and study committees, overtures and appeals), it may be more interesting and useful to group its items under some general subjects, even though that means beginning at the back of the book.

Faithfulness to the Bible and its Doctrine — One of the first items of business of every Synod is the reading of the declaration of agreement with the forms of unity and the assent of all of the delegates to it. That might seem to be only routine, but it is not. The agreement with the Bible and its doctrine is what brings and holds the churches together. Without it there would be no real reason to meet at all. The Lord has promised to build and rule His church, but He told us that He would do this through His Word.

Our place and service in the church depends on our faith in and obedience to God and His Word. Without such submission to the Lord and His Word, churches and their leaders become blind leaders of the blind, and the Lord will repudiate them and their works (Matt. 15:14). Therefore it seems appropriate that we begin our survey by looking at items that deal with this fundamental matter.

The Verhey Case — What turned out to be the most discussed matter at last year's Synod was the

appeal against the decision of a Classis to approve ordaining a candidate to the ministry after he had denied and questioned events of biblical history. The Synod after long discussion dismissed the appeal without deciding on its merits because the man was already ordained and then by a very close vote of 72 to 69 approved the action of its representatives in sanctioning the ordination. (See articles on this subject in the April and May issues of *THE OUTLOOK* as well as this issue.)

During the past year a number of other churches and classes throughout the denomination have been disturbed by these decisions. The Synod's dismissal of the appeal and approval of the ordination brings the denomination's own faithfulness to the Bible as God's Word into question. In the *Agenda*, two overtures and an appeal bring the matter before this year's Synod.

Classis Alberta North (Overture 4, p. 462) asks the Synod to examine "Dr. Allen Verhey's view of Scriptures, in particular regarding his acceptance and interpretation of scriptural historical data in the light of our confessions." Grounds include: (1) the concern of the denomination at large as it has learned of these views. (2) "The concern of the churches regarding faithfulness to the Scripture on the part of her ministers demands synodical action," and (3) Dr. Verhey as a CRC minister "is presently working under a cloud of suspicion because of public allegations neither sustained or denied."

Classis Minnesota South (Overture 23, p. 477) also asks for an investigation of Dr. Verhey's view of Scripture. It expresses its grievance against the approval of the work of the Synod's deputies in permitting the ordination. It observes that the Synod's approval was given "with full knowledge of" the "erroneous views in regard to biblical facts" and that therefore the Synod failed in doing its own duty under the Form of Subscription. "When it had sufficient grounds for suspicion," it "did not require a full explanation from Dr. Verhey concerning his views of biblical facts" as the Form of Subscription places the responsibility for making such inquiry on "consistory, classis or synod." It also quotes the Van Dellen and Monsma *Commentary's* (p. 40) observation that in such inquiries "The major assemblies need not wait for minor assemblies." It therefore asks this Synod to require Dr. Verhey to appear and explain his views on biblical facts, specifically in the two passages mentioned, if it finds them unscriptural and anti-confessional that it [shall] try to dissuade him from his error, and if that is not successful, that it advise the Neland Ave. Consistory to begin discipline under Art. 89 and 90 of the Church Order. Its ground is that last year's decision endangered the "foundations of our faith . . . in God's Word, and . . . failed to uphold the confessions. . . ."

Classis Pacific Northwest (Appeal 2, pp. 478f.) asks the Synod to reconsider the Dutton appeal because it was dismissed last year on the ground that proper procedure had been followed, whereas the issue was not proper or improper procedure, but the rightness

or wrongness of the classis' decision. It asks the Synod to decide whether the Classis decision was right or wrong, and to reconsider the Synod's approval of the work of its deputies because no ground was given for that approval of the ordination of a candidate whom the deputies said "expressed ambiguous and imprecise views of inspiration." The Classis is convinced that "the many voices heard both within our churches and in other churches concerning interpretation of Scripture demand a clear and unequivocal voice from Synod on this matter."

We are informed that there have also been other overtures or appeals dealing with this matter but that they have been denied a place in the printed *Agenda*. (Another article elsewhere in this issue deals with this violation of the right to overture and appeal.) (Passing Classis Hamilton's Overture 9, p. 466, to exclude items not printed in the *Agenda* from Synod's consideration would make this abuse even worse.)

"Report 44" on Biblical Authority — The Verhey case has been one of several matters which have exposed the unsatisfactory ambiguity ("doubletalk" if one likes a blunter word) of the 1972 Synod's report on the Nature and Extent of Biblical authority. It has been cited both to forbid and to defend Dr. Verhey's views. Classis Zeeland in Overtures 6 and 7 (pp. 463-465) asks the Synod to appoint a committee to provide a more popular and simpler version of that report and to answer a number of questions about what kinds of views it permits. It points out some of the evident inconsistencies in the report and the confusion which it increases rather than removes. The matter was brought to the classis' attention by an overture originating with an elder, Mr. Thomas Spriensma, which asked that the 1972 report be repealed. Mr. Spriensma, who was also a member of the Classis' committee which worked on the matter still felt after the study that the church would be better served by repealing the '72 decisions than by trying to popularize and simplify them. The Rules for Synod Procedure list among "matters legally before Synod," "D. Overtures, or communications which have failed to gain the endorsement of Classis but which the consistory or individual sponsoring the same desire to submit for Synod's consideration." Despite this rule Mr. Spriensma's Overture to repeal those decisions was denied a place in the printed *Agenda* although its existence is indicated in the list on page 479. Because his Overture sheds light on those of the Classis, it appears to be in order under Synod's rules, and it is both right and desirable that the church and the delegates in particular, know what it is. It may be found elsewhere in this issue of *THE OUTLOOK*.

The Boer Case — In 1973 Dr. Harry Boer attacked the Form of Subscription by which everyone who holds office in the Christian Reformed Churches must promise to be faithful to the churches' creeds, as too restrictive. In 1975 he also, in violation of his own promises in signing that form, publicly questioned the biblical grounds for the doctrine of reprobation

as it is expressed in the Canons of Dort. Last year's Synod, after three years of discussion, decided to keep the old form but to change the way in which it would function. It recognized two kinds of formal objections to the creeds, or "gravamens," one a *confessional-difficulty* gravamen to be handled pastorally and personally without publicity in which the "burden of proof" does not lie on the subscriber to defend his objections to the creeds, and the other a *confessional-revision* gravamen which does place the burden of proof on the subscriber who wants to change the creeds and which must be handled in a more judicial way. Having made this distinction, the Synod decided that the attack of Dr. Boer on the doctrine of the Canons should be classified as a "confessional-difficulty" (of the first kind) and be handled pastorally and personally by a committee which it appointed. This committee in a report of less than one page (p. 460) informs the Synod that its work was cut short by Dr. Boer who informed it, "I declined the offer of counsel on the ground that no amount of counseling could meet the one irreducible demand that I lay upon the church, namely that it, i.e., the denomination, *either* make an official and public statement of the scriptural basis for the doctrine of reprobation *or* declare the doctrine to be no longer binding on the church and its officebearers." A concluding note (p. 479) states that Dr. Boer's Confessional Revision Gravamen will be sent to all the Synod delegates. That "gravamen" together with especially whatever biblical grounds it may advance will have to be studied.

It ought to be observed that De Boer, up to this point, has not attempted to argue the case about scriptural teaching. He merely stated that "the two texts adduced in Article 6 are certainly not perspicuous in teaching what they are alleged to teach" (Acts 15:18 and Eph. 1:11) and "Scriptural support adduced for it by Reformed theologians does not impress me and in any case I am not bound by their exegetical judgments" (*The Reformed Journal*, April 1975). It ought to be remembered that Dr. Boer last year also publicly attacked the infallibility of the Bible as meaning free from errors and defended "higher" criticism of it (*The Reformed Journal*, March 1976; cf. also my article in *THE OUTLOOK* of June 1976).

While the Form of Subscription demands that *the objector prove from Scripture that the creeds are wrong*, Dr. Boer has been demanding that *the church prove to his satisfaction that the doctrine of the creeds which he has promised to uphold are right*. Although his gravamen must be studied, he must be held responsible for living up to his promises of faithfulness to Scripture and the churches' creeds and not permitted to attack them with impunity as he has flagrantly and repeatedly been doing. A church which will not maintain the discipline of God's Word will be disciplined by Him (Rev. 2:2, 6, 14-16, 20ff.; 22:18, 19).

Confessions — The Committee for a new confession (pp. 449-457) recommends that we keep Catechism Answer 80 as still valid and that we prepare a "testimony" against modern secularization of life.

The Lodge Issue — We have an exclusive religion. Our Lord said, “No one cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6) and “No man can serve two masters” (Matt. 6:24). Therefore our churches have always said that a Christian may not belong to a lodge which involves a religion that is not Christian.

This view has been attacked as too exclusive. Especially Classis Lake Erie over a period of 5 years, repeatedly attacked this stand of the church. In 1975, despite the reports of 3 synodical study committees and Synod’s decisions it again asked for a new committee to restudy the matter, and got its way. The Classis, although it “accepts the position of the church regarding the false religious character of the lodge” (p. 373), argues that lodge members should be admitted into our churches because *they* may not “feel” that the lodge involves such a religious commitment.

The committee now brings a 21-page report (pp. 371-392), which shows that the oaths of various lodges do involve a religious commitment which cannot be reconciled with membership in Christ’s church. It also presents an abbreviated version of the 1975 statement of the position of the church without the cartoons that decorated that document. It asks that the Synod maintain the stand that church-and-lodge membership cannot be reconciled and approve the summary statement for publication.

Classis Columbia (Overture 15, p. 471) while admitting that lodge membership is wrong in principle wants the Synod to be lenient in enforcing the rule arguing that “It is important not to insist that new members make a choice before he/she is ready to make that choice. To force the issue before he/she has become mature enough to face it could cause him/her to break his/her relationship with the church.” Similarly the Avery Church of South Windsor, Connecticut (Overture 19, p. 475) asks the Synod “to allow exceptional cases for lodge members to be members of the church . . . where membership in the lodge carries no confessional, religious commitment for the individual involved.” The Conrad Church (Overture 21, p. 476) asks the Synod if it adopts the overture of its classis (Columbia, No. 15), to add to that a third point that also provides for partial or “selective participation in membership” in the church. The argument is that if we are going to allow for people being half-way lodge members we ought also to permit them being half-way members of the church. Conrad’s approach is unusual, but it may help to expose the fallacy of the lodge defenders’ argument.

While the Lord was patient with people, did He ever scale down His exclusive claims to accommodate their prejudices — or the competition of other religions? Faithfulness to Him and His Word demands taking a firm if kindly stand, not the compromise that some advocate.

Marriage Guidelines and Divorce — The Report on “Marriage Guidelines” (pp. 306-344), carried over from last year when the advisory committee was too busy to deal with it, now comes up for decision. In

1973 the Synod rejected a report that broadened the grounds for divorce because it was “not convinced” that this was “in accord with the biblical teaching concerning marriage.” Now this Synod finds itself confronted with a report which, while it makes many strong-sounding statements concerning marriage, at the critical point again throws the door open to other unspecified reasons that will justify divorce. After saying that “physical infidelity” is the “unique possible ground for divorce” the report immediately contradicts itself by suggesting other kinds of “actions, situations and conditions” which a consistory may judge to be the *equivalent* to it (p. 324).

Objections to stretching our Lord’s teaching in this way are aptly pointed out in a POSTSCRIPT by Rev. A. Persenaire, one member of the committee. While he agrees with much of the report on the Bible teaching concerning marriage, he strenuously objects to stretching the statements of our Lord to cover the *equivalent* to unrepentant unchastity so that “each consistory can make its own interpretation of what constitutes the equivalent of pornea” (p. 337). By this kind of word-juggling and further bringing in the question of people’s “intention” (p. 341), something which does not enter into Jesus’ teaching on this point at all, “the committee recommends that the church can even bless what Jesus calls adultery!” And so divorce, instead of being recognized as “a gross, public sin, giving great offense to both God and His church” becomes for the committee merely “a serious shortcoming among many others” (p. 343).

Classis Zeeland (Overture 5, p. 462) also asks the Synod to “affirm Christ’s singular exception to the permanency of marriage as that of fornication . . . and [to] reject the proposed and broadened scope of fornication” in the Report because the latter lacks biblical ground.

Classis Hackensack (Overture 17, p. 472) asks that the report’s recommendations about remarriage be rejected because at a number of points they evade biblical teachings and misuse consistory authority. Bethel Church of Paterson objects to the report because with its talk of “mutual submission” it denies the submission the Bible demands of a wife to her husband, it denies the biblical fact that “headship” implies authority (Eph. 1:22), and it makes the wife’s respect for her husband depend upon his “merit” instead of on the Lord’s will. It also asks “the Synod maintain that adultery alone is the biblical and therefore only permissible ground for divorce.

At this point the church is again under great pressure to conform to the spirit of the age and let those who want to divorce and remarry do so with its permission and even blessing. Even the texts in which the Lord most strenuously denounced such conduct are getting twisted to justify it. If our churches are to be faithful to the Lord and His Word they will have to reject the report’s unbiblical concessions even though that may incur the Herod-like wrath of those who are irked by the churches’ daring to resist their desires. (Note also the articles in the May and June issues of THE OUTLOOK on this subject.)

Liturgy: A New Marriage Form — The pressure to conform to the spirit of our age which detests every kind of authority also comes to expression in the new marriage form which the liturgical committee asks the Synod to approve (p. 217ff.). In it the emphasis falls on covenanting of the two partners who each promise to lovingly serve the other and who each promise exactly the same thing. Must the church be so fearful of the current unisex fad that it hardly dares to suggest that there is any God-ordained difference between a man and a woman even when it marries them? Victorian prudishness at its worst could hardly have reached this level. And must we tell the Lord how to counsel them when they get bored and give them “perpetual renewal” like Cana’s “choice wedding wine”?

Form for Adult Baptism — The new form for adult baptism (pp. 213ff.) is a modernization in style of the old one. Although the wording is improved, unfortunately some of the faults of the old one are retained. Why do we have to make unwarranted concessions to Baptist ideas by saying “baptism, whether by immersion or sprinkling” when as Dr. John Murray showed “baptism” does not mean immersion? Why not drop that phrase that refers to method since it adds nothing here? “Third: Because all covenants have two sides, baptism also places us under obligation . . .”, (like the old form) expresses a bit of scholasticism that is, strictly speaking, not true. It is just not true that “Baptism places us under obligation *because all covenants have two sides.*” The reason why we are placed under obligation is not found in any necessary structure of “covenants,” but because God placed us under obligation. Dare we say God could have not made a covenant with less or more than two sides? That phrase ought to be dropped. When the phrase “evil lusts” is replaced by “evil attractions” (p. 215) doesn’t that change the meaning?

Women’s Liberation — The pressure to conform to the spirit of our time comes to expression again in the “Report on the Use of Women’s Gifts in the Church” (p. 395). The committee which produced it was, historically, a by-product of the unsuccessful effort to get women’s ordination approved by the Synod of two years ago (*Acts 1975*, p. 78). Despite the restrictions of its mandate (“biblical guide-lines” and “Church Order”) it has tended to be a pressure group for the “woman’s liberation” movement. Its report repeats with emphasis what it said last year, that society is radically changing, and it threatens the church with dire consequences if the church does not try to ready people for those changes. The report therefore asks that this committee be replaced by *two* new committees, one for “service” and the other for “study” to do this job. That the churches should seek to encourage all of their members to use their gifts in the Lord’s service is undeniable. That they need or could profit by having one more such pressure-group committee, let alone two of them, appears very unlikely. Those who are convinced that we need

an “ERA” in the church don’t need further convincing. Those who believe the trend is unbiblical must resist it. The activities of such partisan committees threaten to further divide the churches.

The committee to study hermeneutical principles on women in church offices (p. 345) which was to have reported at this synod is unready and asks for an additional year for study.

The Ministry — Classis Chicago North (Overture 9, p. 466) asks the Synod to reconsider the question of the offices to which evangelists should be ordained, and Classis Hamilton (Overture 10) raises essentially the same question. Classis Cadillac (Overture 20, p. 475) wants to authorize evangelists to administer the sacraments.

Classis Northcentral Iowa (Overture 11, p. 467) wants some provision made for a “tentmaker ministry” (for a minister who like Paul works at some trade).

By way of contrast with this last suggestion, the Fund for Needy Churches Committee recommends that the minimum salary paid to ministers in subsidized churches be raised another \$1000 (it was raised \$1500 last year) to \$12,000, plus \$500 per child, plus \$800 for car allowance with another \$800 for the same cause required from the church.

Classis Minnesota North (Overture 1, p. 461) wants the Synod to fund half the cost of ministerial student internships through the seminary budget.

Classis British Columbia (Overture 22, p. 476) would increase ministers’ pension benefits as the cost of living rises.

Article 13A of our Church Order deals with ministers engaged in extraordinary work. It permits such work as long as it is judged to be “spiritual in character and directly related to the ministerial calling.” A study committee on this matter (which now involves 12% of our ministers) recommend extensive changes in the Church Order (pp. 440-448) Articles 11-13. The committee wants to limit such ministerial work to that which is under the officially approved supervision of the church and to stop considering it to be “for life.” Although the suggestions have merit the problem with the committee’s view is that following the exclusively functional and pragmatic approach of the 1973 report on the nature of church office, it assumes that “the nature and extent of ecclesiastical office is what these church says it is” (p. 447). While the Bible may not give us a detailed church order it certainly gives us more guidance than this. In this view, what the Presbyterians have called the “regulative principle” of the Bible is being discarded to throw us back into Roman Catholic authoritarianism. This matter needs wider, careful study.

Church Order Changes — Classis Grand Rapids North (Overture 2, p. 461) would have changes in our Church Order ratified by vote of 2/3 of the classes to make them valid. Such a rule might be desirable.

The Committee on the Proposed Judicial Code (pp. 399-409) brings a revision of that code which it desires that the Synod adopt. While some improvement of our church procedures in dealing with appeals may be in order one wonders whether such an

elaborate system of regulations as this, copied from the practice of our civil courts, is desirable. The injustices perpetrated by the courts and their endless appeals, so often based on technical arguments regarding procedure, have become notorious. Will such a heavy dose of that medicine improve the churches' health?

Church Education — The Publication Board (pp. 88-122) reports in some detail on its educational materials, giving special emphasis to that which is being prepared for young adults. It is evident that much planning and work is going into this material. No matter how well the details of this curriculum may be worked out, they will likely be of little concern to many of our churches because those churches are still convinced that the over-all "one-track" framework as it has been set up cannot provide the kind of Christian training we need for our children and therefore they will not use it.

Last year's committee report stated that only 41% of the churches used the whole curriculum; I could find no figures in this report. The general complaint seems to be that the new system does not teach children and young people to know either the Bible or its doctrines as well as the older system did and does. Recall that the general plan of the new materials provides a variety of lessons for younger children which do not teach them to know the Bible and its history in any systematic way, shortens the systematic teaching of its doctrine ("catechism") to two years, and then in the young adults' program here outlined includes many individual subjects. The lists include music, film, TV, sports, work and leisure, school, dating and sexuality (p. 113) and "world hunger . . . poverty, abortion, euthanasia, war, ecology, truthfulness, self-abuse, racism" (p. 117), "marriage," "divorce," "remaining single" (p. 118) "vocation" (p. 118) etc. (The suggested definition of the Bible's "Inspiration" also seems very inadequate: "Scriptures are the product of the Spirit of God. The writers of Scripture preserved God's purpose without error" (p. 114).)

Many of the churches are convinced that the older systematic teaching of the contents of the Bible first and then of the Bible's doctrines, each spread over a number of years (with the many practical matters the new curriculum tries to treat separately brought in connection with the Bible and doctrine teaching) is a simpler and more effective way to train children and young people in the Christian faith than the complex mix offered by the Publication Board. These churches are asking for "catechism books" to help them do the job. If the denomination will not supply the need, others are having to do it. One must also question the fairness of expecting the many churches who do not find the material suited to its purpose to pay a quota (even though reduced) for producing it.

Calvin College and Seminary's Board (pp. 27-41) was instructed in 1975 to study the return of the examination of candidates for the ministry to the Synod. The Board now recommends that the board continue to do the examining. Its proposed list of ap-

pointees for teaching positions also should get some attention by the Synod. (Note the article in last month's issue of *THE OUTLOOK* about the expressed views of one appointee.)

Social and Political Matters — Christians are all called to honor and serve their Lord also in their political and social relationships. It is a question, however, whether or to what extent churches should officially involve themselves in these matters. The Lord said to a man who wanted Him to divide an inheritance, "Man, who made me a judge or divider over you?" (Luke 12:14). And our Church Order states (Art. 28) that church "assemblies shall transact ecclesiastical matters only." One notices a widespread tendency for churches as they become less concerned about the Bible and its teachings to become increasingly engrossed in social and political action. It seems that as they become less sure about the gospel they become more sure of their political wisdom and ability to tell the world how its business must be run. And those expressed church opinions usually follow the current humanistic fads rather than the teachings of the Bible.

War — The Committee Report on "Ethical Decisions about War" (pp. 346-370) is a product of the anti-Vietnam war hysteria of a few years ago. Begun in 1973, referred back for study in 1975, it now returns with some alterations, some added Scripture references and a recommendation for approval. It still contains a lot of sweeping generalizations often with little support: "(2) God is for peace and is determined to end all war" is declared to be a "biblical principle," "not negotiable" which "must underlie all decisions about war," but no proof is advanced for it. Pacifism is said to be mistaken (p. 355) and yet is called an old and respected position which the church should tolerate (p. 365). The report lists a series of nine questions about the nation's motives and the legality of its actions and the propriety of the weapons and strategy it uses which the Christian is supposed to ask before he consents to work for "companies that . . . in any way stand to profit from war" or even decides to pay his taxes (p. 367, item 2 and p. 369, items 14 and 15)! The questions might be useful to diplomats although it is doubtful if any of them could answer them. The report elsewhere also admits that it is "extremely difficult, if not impossible, to determine the pertinent facts that must be known in order to judge the morality of participation in any given war" (p. 366)! In other words, we must all answer unanswerable questions before we pay our taxes! What has happened to the Bible's plain instruction to pay "tribute to whom tribute is due" (Rom. 13:7)? Despite the true things it says, this report because of its unsupported and sometimes anti-biblical generalizations and its ambiguities and contradictions offers little help to anyone and might better be laid aside.

Race — One gets a somewhat similar impression from reading the dispirited report of the Race Committee (SCORR) (pp. 235-247). Given the mandate to seek to "eliminate racism, both causes and effects . . . through the world . . ." (p. 236), the committee

complains of "frustrations" (p. 235) as members have resigned, "mainline denominations have dismantled much of their social justice machinery" (p. 237) and "SCORR has failed to capture the interest and support of the church" (p. 244). It has helped some minority students get into college, and has given some support to activities of other agencies. A questionnaire circulated among its friends brought some expressions of support and it recommends that Synod continue it with an increased quota of \$1.60 per family. Is it not time that this committee too be dismissed? Does this mean condoning racial injustice? Of course, not. But the financial report (p. 248) shows that the committee, burdened with an impossibly broad mandate and no assigned job, has had to spend half of its budget on administration and the other half mostly on gifts to other agencies which could as well be financed directly. Do the committee's expressed frustrations after six years on such operation not suggest that we seek more effective ways to combat injustice?

Political Power — The most direct efforts to involve the churches officially in seeking political power come in the form of two overtures from Classis Hackensack (No. 16, p. 472) and from Alpine Ave. Church of Grand Rapids (No. 14, pp. 468-471). The first would have a Standing Committee on Social Justice to help the plight of the powerless throughout the world especially through a lobbyist in Washington; the second would have the World Relief Committee appoint a denominational ambassador to deal with international poverty through such lobbying in Washington and Ottawa. This proposal maintains that "the redemptive work of Christ is, among other things a political redemption" and therefore "political evangelism . . . is a task to which the church is called." It maintains among other things that the U.S. must be made to stop discriminating in trade against the socialist countries!

In 1975 the Synod rejected an overture from Classis Lake Erie (p. 107) that would have a committee study the "inequitable distribution of wealth and power" because the classis had not demonstrated "that a task of this scope and magnitude belongs to the instituted church rather than to concerned groups of Christians." That position needs to be reaffirmed as more people among us seem to be forgetting about what the Lord and His apostles said was the work of the church and the nature of its gospel.

World Relief — The work of the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (pp. 123-139) gains wide interest and support as it brings help in many parts of the world to people who are hard hit by floods, earthquakes, famines and other disasters.

Problems arise in this work, in the words of the Board of World Missions (pp. 46, 47) from "a noticeably increasing tendency toward the separation of word and deed, particularly in the arena of the programmed or long-range benevolent activity." The compassionate deed should not . . . be divorced from the call to repentance and faith."

One wonders about the Relief Committee beginning to finance literacy work and basic adult education (pp. 127 and 128), and has even more misgivings about it financing a family and marital counseling program in the city of Edmonton where we have eight mostly good-sized Christian Reformed Churches. Is this proper denominational help of the poor?

Interchurch Relations — Since 1974 we have dropped the old restrictive term "sister churches" to replace it by a looser more comprehensive expression, "churches in ecclesiastical fellowship." This had certain practical advantages since interchurch relations between denominations varied so widely, but it also involved a real danger of becoming more careless about our relations with a variety of other churches. Such increasing carelessness is becoming apparent. It is seen in the recommendation that the regular certificate for membership transfer within the denomination (or to sister churches) from now on be recommended for normal use in transfer to any church in ecclesiastical fellowship (p. 178). The number of those churches increase, as now the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church is being recommended for inclusion (p. 177). The North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council of which we are members has tightened its commitment to the Bible as "the infallible Word of God" and as "in its entirety . . . the Word of God written, without error in all its parts . . ." (p. 185).

The Reformed Ecumenical Synod has been putting some pressure on the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands because of their continuing membership in the World Council of Churches and because of their failure to discipline their leaders who deny fundamental doctrines of the faith (pp. 196 and 197). On the other hand there are indications that our increasing associations with the Reformed Church of America are not likely to strengthen our biblical or doctrinal integrity. An "Evangelism Manifesto" (pp. 434-439) drawn up by a joint commission of the denominations, has had some Scripture references added to it, but is mainly devoted to social and community activity and cooperation.

Missions — The World Missions Report (pp. 42-70) gives an over-all glimpse of the many foreign fields in which we are denominationally seeking to bring the gospel. Our involvement in the big Nigeria field is in a number of ways declining as the churches there take over the work or the government moves into the hospitals and schools. One is surprised at how few ministers are at present on the staff. The evangelistic work has long been mostly done by the native churches. Much of our work now is assisting the schools and hospitals. On the other hand, especially in Latin America the report is one of increasing activity in many countries, including training of pastors. The expansion of our missionary efforts has raised a number of problems, especially in connection with relations in various places with the work of the World Relief Committee.

These problems occasioned the appointment of a

committee on "Mission Principles" (pp. 410-433). Its report is concerned especially with correlating the work of the missions with the relief work by putting the work of relief under the leadership of the mission's evangelistic effort, so as to avoid needless tension and conflict. We can appreciate that purpose, but at some points the statement of mission principles raises questions. "God is seeking to liberate his people from evil's grip" (p. 415). The doctrine of election is almost completely overlooked in the emphasis of man's activity, and men are to be addressed as "honorable redeemable creatures of God" (p. 418). "There are biblical norms which we must obey, but the Bible nowhere spells out the 'how' of the missionary enterprise" (p. 419).

The report raises the question whether the chaplains' committee which was once a part of home missions, but was expanded during the war, should now not be placed back under home missions instead of remaining a separate agency (p. 431). This suggestion too seems to make sense when one notices the relatively small number of chaplains now in various kinds of service.

We notice that the Home Missions Board raises a question about the propriety of a union of a Reformed Church (pp. 77, 78, 87).

Radio — One of the most encouraging reports prepared for the Synod is that which deals with the radio work of the Back to God Hour which now includes separate broadcasting efforts bringing the gospel in eight different languages and to all parts of the world (pp. 11-26). Read about the remarkable response beginning to come in from the Moslem world in which other missionary efforts are so restricted, and the Christian literature which is being sent out in the various languages to those who ask for it. No report is yet available on the direction in which the new venture into television will develop.

Conclusion — Although the survey of the Synod's *Agenda* unfortunately has to give special attention to problem areas which require decisions, the glimpse one gets even in this way of the extent and varieties of openings God has given us to bring His gospel is a wide and exciting one. The very extent and number of those opportunities, as well as the problems that arise in connection with them, all direct attention to the thought with which this survey began, the need to be faithful to that gospel if we are to have anything to bring.

Trying to evaluate these materials from this point of view, we began our review at *the end* and we end at *the beginning* of the book. On the covers in which it (as well as the *Acts* of '77, supposedly) is bound is a striking picture of the meeting of the Synod of Dort. Wouldn't it be ironic if between those covers we could read of the rejection of Dort's biblical doctrines? Let us pray and work that the Lord may keep us as faithful to the "whole counsel" of His Word as He kept those Dort fathers whose faces appear on the *Agenda*.

*O may His holy church increase,
His Word and Spirit still prevail. . . .*

DIVORCE and REMARriage

*in the
CRC*

(2)



REV. JELLE TUINGA

This is the second and concluding installment of Rev. Jelle Tuininga's article on "Divorce and Remarriage in the CRC." Rev. Tuininga, pastor of the Christian Reformed Church of Smithers, British Columbia, served as a delegate from Classis British Columbia at the 1976 CRC Synod.

It is particularly in the area of remarriage that I take exception to the 1976 Report. While up till now our stand has been that only the innocent party in a legitimate divorce (on grounds of adultery) could receive the blessing of the church in a remarriage, the Report recommends that this be extended to *both* partners, including partners to a divorce on grounds other than adultery.

It ought to be noted that the Report is not saying that guilty parties in a divorce (whether on the grounds of adultery or not) ought to be accepted as members of the church once there is genuine repentance. Nor are they saying that previously divorced people who were sinfully remarried ought to be welcomed as members of the church if there is solid evidence of genuine repentance. That has always been the stand of the church. Any sin, including adultery and murder, can be forgiven. And where there is repentance and forgiveness, there the way is open to fellowship within the church. We live in a world where many things take place that ought not to take place, including divorce and remarriage. The church must warn and discipline its members, but repentance always opens the door to forgiveness.

But that's not what the Report is asking for. The Report asks that the church *give its blessing* to marriages (remarriages) which until now the church has always condemned, and which, as I see it, the Bible clearly forbids. Of course, this stems from the committee's view of divorce. If there are other legitimate, biblical grounds for divorce than that of adultery, then of course that would also open the door to other remarriages. But that's precisely where I find the committee's argumentation unconvincing.

In any case, the Report is recommending not that the church *acquiesce* in remarriages that take place

contrary to God's Word, and that it try to make the best of these broken situations, but that the church "extend the blessing" to such remarriages. In other words, ministers of the CRC would be asked to solemnize such marriages and invoke God's blessing on them.

It would seem to me that the relevant passages in the gospels alone forbid such remarriages. And in dealing with these, the "exegesis" of the Report is far from convincing. One reads such phrases as "by inference," "very few churches . . . maintain this unconditional stand against the remarriage of divorced persons," "a more common interpretation," "perhaps a further qualification can be defended," "this qualification centers around the intention of the persons involved," "but even this statement should not be taken out of its historical context" etc. All of which suggests to me that the committee is grasping at straws in order to make a case for their viewpoint. But it clearly lacks an exegetical basis.

What is more, Paul has something to say on the matter too. And what he says leaves little room for doubt (cf. Rom. 7:1-3; I Cor. 7:10-15). The first passage, though used by Paul to illustrate another point, nevertheless states a basic principle about marriage. Says Murray: "Paul asserts in Romans 7:2, 3 a *basic* law respecting marriage, a law as universal in its obligation as is the general principle that the law has dominion over a man so long as he lives." And, contrary to what the committee says, the exceptive clause in Matthew does not violate this basic unconditional law:

It is our thesis that divorce for adultery does not interfere with the unmitigated obligation and unrelenting principle to which Paul gives expression in the passage concerned.

What Paul is stressing here is the binding law that governs marriage. There is, it must be emphasized, in reality no exception to that law, and that is just saying that there is no circumstance under which the woman may regard herself as free from that law and at liberty to violate it.

It should not be regarded . . . as incompatible with this emphasis . . . to conceive of the woman as being relieved from this law of her husband by some kind of action . . . which involves a complete dereliction of fidelity and desecration of the sanctity of the marriage bond on the part of her husband. . . . For, if adultery gives to the innocent spouse the right of divorce and remarriage, it means that the action on the part of the guilty spouse has so radically affected the relationship that release is thereby secured from the law that previously bound the innocent party" (pp. 90, 91).

However, Paul says something even more explicit than this. He says in I Corinthians 7:10, 11: "To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband) and that the husband should not divorce his wife."

Well, on the face of it, that seems clear enough. There are only two possibilities open: Either remain

single (after separation) or be reconciled. But the committee has a way out of this one too:

The question can be raised, however, whether the advice to remain unmarried represents a universal principle that must be maintained over against all those who seek remarriage.

There is some evidence in the text that the advice to remain unmarried should not be regarded as a principle of universal application (p. 479).

The "evidence" for this you can find in the Report. Ingenious, but far from convincing. And on one point definitely wrong: the sharp distinction between what Paul says (the parenthetical phrase) and what Jesus Himself said. Paul's word is as authoritative as Christ's. For a more thorough and convincing exegesis, cf. the Postscript by the Rev. A. Persenaire. Let me quote from Murray once more:

He is saying in effect, "If separation has actually taken place, then certain provisions must be adhered to. Let the breach be healed. Failing that, under no conditions may another marriage be undertaken. In other words, the parenthesis simply regulates the wrong when it has taken place, but does not in the least legitimate the separation itself (p. 62).

The parenthetical statement in verse 11 — "but and if she depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband" — simply provides that if, contrary to this commandment, separation actually takes place, another marriage must not be contracted. . . . The parenthesis does not *sanction* separation; it simply recognizes that it may take place. . . . The divine institution is that those united in the bond of marriage are bound to the mutual discharge of all marital debts until the bond is severed by death or by dissolution on a proper ground" (p. 104).

In much the same vein Calvin says:

that even those who are not received by their husbands, continue to be bound, so that they cannot take other husbands. . . . For if a wife would fall into a protracted illness, the husband would, nevertheless, not be justified in going to seek another wife. In like manner, if a husband should, after marriage, begin to labor under some distemper, it would not be allowable for his wife to change her condition of life" (quoted by Murray, p. 104).

In conclusion, it's one thing to have compassion for people who have marital difficulties or even resort to divorce. They need the concern, love, and advice of the Christian community. Too often that kind of compassion has been and is, lacking. It's one thing for the church to acquiesce in circumstances beyond its control. But it's another thing to *justify* sinful actions and extend the blessing of the church to those who have been involved in such actions (through divorce) by remarrying them again. Then the church sets its seal of approval upon such actions, actions which the Bible itself forbids.

Someone might say: If a person is forgiven, then the consequences of his sin should also be taken away, and he should be allowed the opportunity of a new beginning. We ought to remember, however,

that though David was forgiven for his sin with Bathsheba, the child still died. And though the thief on the cross was forgiven, he still had to suffer the consequences for his misdeeds. Sin leaves scars, and forgiveness does not remove responsibility for past sins. It does not hold that a person divorced on unbiblical grounds who sincerely repents of his sin and is forgiven, should therefore also be allowed to remarry. The guilt may be removed, the results or consequences are not.

It ought to be said yet that no rules or guidelines adopted by the church will ever be able to be applied in an across-the-board manner. Life is too complex to be able to be subsumed under rules. In divorce and remarriage too each case must be judged to a certain extent on its own merits. All the church can do is give certain general guidelines. Practical life is more complicated than our theory often admits to. And the church should never give its approval or assent to divorce regardless of what the grounds are.

Divorce is contrary to the divine institution, contrary to the nature of marriage, and contrary to the divine action by which union is effected. It is precisely here that its wickedness becomes singularly apparent — it is the sundering by man of a union God has constituted. Divorce is the breaking of a seal which has been engraven by the hand of God (Murray, p. 33).

One final comment: Here if anywhere the proverb is true: An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. We must begin the treatment at the *beginning* of marriage. Young people need instruction about the nature and responsibilities of marriage, and, before they embark upon the sea of matrimony they had better make sure they have a seaworthy craft.

Synod of 1976. In this article the undersigned is expressing his concern over the treatment the appeal of the Dutton consistory received by Synod. Without judging anyone's motives, the writer hopefully anticipates that these thoughts may be helpful in leading the mind of Synod to a solution that is Biblically sound, God-honoring in intent, and contemplating the spiritual well-being of the body of Christ.

The issue — The issue at hand has its beginning in the approval of the ordination of Dr. Verhey by Classis Grand Rapids East on September 18, 1975. At this meeting the candidate clearly stated that he did not believe that the serpent spoke to Eve, and that the great earthquake recorded by Matthew as accompanying the resurrection of Christ did not necessarily have to be understood as a fact but as an eschatological symbol. Since Classis Grand Rapids East admitted Verhey to the Gospel ministry in spite of his unscriptural convictions, the Dutton consistory lodged with Classis a protest against this decision. Classis received the protest for information and the consistory consequently appealed it to Synod.

To begin with, were the charges made against Dr. Verhey in the Dutton protest true or mere allegations as frequently referred to? Of this it may be stated that in all the deliberations of both Classis and Synod in the matter there is not a hint of their being false; but on the contrary everything points to the fact that the charges are true. And Verhey himself does not deny them. Therefore this article proceeds on the assumption that they are true.

Irregularities at Classis G. R. East — Was the Dutton protest legally before Synod? Let it be said at the outset that for the Dutton consistory there was no other course open. But how about the conduct of Classis Grand Rapids East in the matter?

In the informative material leading up to their recommendations Synod's advisory committee made this statement: "We observe that the appeal now calls Synod to act on a matter that was not properly dealt with at the minor assemblies." These minor assemblies were the consistory of Dutton and Classis Grand Rapids East.

However, nowhere has it been shown that the Dutton consistory defaulted in any way in the handling of their protest. It has been hinted that Dutton should have protested the decision of Classis before Verhey's ordination. But this reasoning falls when one bears in mind that the protest was not against Verhey, but against Classis. And the consistory lodged their protest with Classis at the earliest possible date, even presenting it at an earlier special Classis meeting.

Therefore, if there is truth in the committee's statement (and there is) it can apply only to the minor assembly of Classis Grand Rapids East who must bear full responsibility for the irregularity referred to. And to the truth of the committee's observation that the Classis did not deal properly with the protest the following will testify: (1) It seems rather strange that a protest with which Classis was confronted

VERHEY, DUTTON, CLASSIS G. R. EAST AND SYNOD 1976



REV. RING STAR

By this time the matter of Dr. Allen Verhey's view of Scripture and the disposition of it at the 1976 CRC Synod is well-known to readers of *THE OUTLOOK*. Rev. Ring Star, writer of this article, is a retired CRC minister living in Jenison, Michigan.

This June, the CRC Synod undoubtedly will have to cope with the disposition made of the Dutton appeal re the ordination of Dr. Allen Verhey by the

should be accepted for information with no more adue. And (2) What adds to the strangeness of the situation is that several months after the above mentioned decision was made grounds were formulated in support of it. Finally (3) To make matters worse one must have a careful look at these grounds:

Ground (a). It reads: "That Classis could see no formal basis for either sustaining or rejecting the protest since the decision to admit Candidate Verhey was on the basis of a majority ballot vote and did not involve the approval of specific positions held by him." In other words, to use an example, when the nation voted President Carter into office that majority ballot vote said nothing about the principles the voters believed the man stood for. Transparently the very opposite is true. One cannot vote meaningfully on any matter without having clearly in mind the content of the matter voted on. Candidate Verhey was thoroughly examined on the matter of doctrinal purity and integrity of Scriptural exegesis. And when time for balloting came each voter was faced with the question: what do you think of the man? And the answer to that question he expressed in his ballot. Therefore Classis must assume full responsibility for permitting Verhey to be ordained with his unscriptural views.

Ground (b) fares no better. It reads: "The protest against the action of Classis was not accompanied by an appeal or request for action on the part of Classis, but was intended as a necessary step in the process of lodging a protest with Synod." But the truth of the matter is (to use virtually the words of the pastor of Dutton) that the first appeal was made to the Classis not to Synod. Only after the Classis failed to take any corrective action was the consistory constrained to appeal to Synod. Consequently, since these grounds fall, the intended justification of the decision under which they are placed falls with the grounds.

And there is another aspect confirming the irregular treatment of the protest by Classis. Only such matters are to be taken up by Synod that cannot be finished in the minor assemblies. When Classis Grand Rapids East was confronted with the Dutton protest the following lay open for the Classis: to examine the truth or falsity of the charges the protest contained. If found false, Classis was then in position to exonerate Verhey. If found true good Christian sense would dictate that to have favored the ordination of Verhey was an error and for Classis to admit this. This is all the protest required, and Dutton could have expected no more of it. And the point can in no wise be argued that this course of action did not lay open for Classis Grand Rapids East.

Synod's action — Consequently Synod should have viewed itself as confronted with this rather unique situation: to accept from the hand of the Dutton consistory their appeal as legally presented, and to disapprove of Classis shunting Dutton's appeal into Synod's lap. And from this perspective there was for Synod but one justifiable course to take, namely, to send Dutton's protest right back to Classis Grand

Rapids East for Classis to deal with the protest properly.

But Synod chose to act differently which in the judgment of Editor De Koster ended in nothing. (See his observations on the matter in *The Banner* of Sept. 10, 1976). The main ground for rejecting the Dutton appeal reads as follows:

"Candidate Verhey was approved for ordination by Classis Grand Rapids East according to proper procedure. He was approved by majority ballot vote of the Classis with the concurrence of the synodical deputies after a thorough examination. This decision stood unprotested up to and including the time of his ordination."

The last statement has been dealt with before in this article. As for the main thought this implies that meticulous and thorough observance of procedural rules guarantees the rightness of a decision based upon such procedure. Note the fallacy of this reasoning. (1) Any decision thus made cannot be contested. And therefore takes away the possibility of protest and appeal for which provision is made in the Church Order. (2) All ecclesiastical decisions based upon thorough and accurate procedure must be tolerated no matter if the resultant situations present angles that are contrary to God's Word. (3) More specifically, the decision to permit Dr. Allen Verhey's ordination had to be acceptable even if immediately after his ordination his unscriptural views called for disciplinary action against him.

Action recommended now — One final suggestion. That Synod give serious thought to the following considerations based upon the above, and possibly declare: (1) That the views mentioned in the protest of the Dutton consistory and charged against Verhey and not denied by him, are unscriptural and therefore stand as a threat to the correct interpretation of Scripture generally.

(2) That since Verhey was permitted to be ordained to the ministry of God's Word, holding the views mentioned by Dutton in their protest, this action of the Dutton consistory was justified.

(3) That consistories are alerted to maintain a watchful eye against any unscriptural views of the kind that prompted the Dutton protest; and where such views persist to apply the disciplinary rules prescribed by the church for that purpose.

(4) That it is not too late for Classis Grand Rapids East to deal properly with the protest of the Dutton consistory; and that Synod strongly urges the Classis to attend to this matter. ●

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*There's not a word we cannot roll,
Across the tongue and say it whole.
But when it comes to Christian creeds,
We stumble like tripped centipedes.*

S.C.W.

June, 1977 / twenty-five

Overture

to REJECT REPORT 44

TOM SPRIENSMA

This overture asking for the rejection of the familiar Report 44 on "The Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority" does not appear in the Agenda for Synod. The writer, Mr. Tom Spriensma, is an elder at the Christian Reformed Church of Jamestown, Michigan.

Having studied the 1972 Synod decision to adopt Report 44 on "The Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority," I respectfully overture Synod to reverse that decision and reject this report.

Ground: Report 44 violates the holiness of our Sovereign God by infringing upon the authority of His Word and thereby undermines the foundation of the Church. It does this in the following ways:

A. While it rightly states that "The Entire Scripture — its whole extent, all its parts, its very words — is the *inspired authoritative* Word of God" (p. 506, *Acts of Synod 1972*) it immediately thereafter wrongly qualifies this statement by adding, "While the entire Scripture speaks with divine authority, this divine authority is understood concretely and specifically only when one takes account of what God said, how He spoke, to whom He spoke, etc. Thus a description of biblical authority requires an understanding of the content and purpose of the divine message as well as the acknowledgment of the authority of the divine author of Scripture." These qualifying statements really make the authority of the Bible depend on its contents and on men's understanding of it. The *authority* of the Bible is neither derived from nor dependent on its content. It is derived from and depends *only* on its Author, the Holy God. Even less is it conditioned by the way men understand or apply it. Whether we accept or reject Scripture, its authority as God's Word remains unchanged and eternal.

B. Report 44 improperly curtails the authority of Scripture by insisting that it is solely and exclusively *redemptive* in character (p. 537). This claim is incorrect. The Bible teaches that it transforms and hardens, brings life and death, redemption and judgment (Isa. 6:9 ff., Matt. 13, Acts 27:24 ff., II Cor. 2:14-16). The Heidelberg Catechism also teaches this in Lord's Day 31, question and answer 84.

C. Under its guidelines and pastoral advice Report 44 allows a variety of views on such Scripture passages as Genesis 1-11. It states, "Anyone who claims that other details involved in the biblical description of these great events are figurative expressions, will have to present his position by means of careful exegesis and sound biblical exposition" (p.

528). This statement, despite its qualifications, is opening the door for false teachings for it may be understood to imply that they are legitimate if they are only backed by sufficient arguments. Some of the present problems of our denomination result from or are aggravated by the weakness of the guidelines of Report 44. The views of Dr. Verhey, denying that the serpent spoke to Eve and that the earthquake in Matthew 28 was necessarily real, were defended by the Neland Ave. Consistory's letter to our last Synod, as permissible under the guidelines of Report 44. Dr. Harry Boer appealed to Report 44 to justify his use of higher criticism in interpreting the Bible and in attacking the doctrine of its infallibility (*Reformed Journal*, Feb. 1976, p. 18). When Report 44 can be used to defend such views, is it not in fact nullifying our Form of Subscription and confessions? We must bow in subjection to God's Holy Word and may never become judges of Holy Scripture. In Report 44 there is a compromise of God's Word and such compromise we may never accept.

D. Report 44 confuses rather than enlightens the reader. The difficulty encountered in reading the report arises not so much out of the scholarly style as out of the contradictory positions it advocates. Throughout the argument, "authority" is often confused with "interpretation." Whereas God's Word is "a lamp" and "a light" (Psalm 119:105) the report makes Scripture dark, difficult and confusing.

E. Report 44 is disturbing our relationships with some other orthodox denominations. Because of it they distrust our faithfulness to the Word of God. The Free Reformed Church (formerly the Old Christian Reformed Church) has removed its students from our seminary. Our correspondence with the Canadian Reformed Church ("Art. 31") has stopped and our relationship with the Orthodox Presbyterians has also been shaken.

F. Our unity as a denomination is in danger and it appears that we are approaching a split because of the differences which Report 44 was supposed to resolve, which it has actually increased.

Brethren, let us wake up and take corrective measures before it is too late, before the candlestick will be removed from our denomination. May the Almighty God lead you in dealing with this important matter.

• • • • •

*God uses shattered health to show His grace.
A weak and helpless invalid, His truth may trace.*
S.C.W.

• • • • •

*T.V.'s mesh of silver sin,
Seeks to uproot us from within.*
S.C.W.

HIERARCHISM IN THE CRC?

JELLE TUININGA

Which matters are legally before Synod, and therefore have a right to appear in the printed *Agenda*? And who determines this?

You say: Synod sets the rules for this, doesn't it? Yes, it does, and you can find these rules in the booklet, *Rules for Synodical Procedure*.

However, the matter isn't quite that simple. Who interprets these rules? Who applies them in particular instances? Is there a danger that synodical rules are arbitrarily applied at times, and that the possibility is even there that rules take precedence over the Church Order itself?

I believe the answer to the last question is, Yes. That danger is definitely there. Classis Grand Rapids East saw that danger in 1974 (cf. Overture 7, p. 635 in '74 *Acts*). That danger has not diminished since that time.

The Smithers CRC consistory sent two communications to Synod of '77: One protesting the action of Synod '76 in connection with the Dutton appeal; the other asking Synod not to adopt the Marriage Guidelines Report as printed in last year's *Agenda*.

Much to its surprise, the consistory received a letter from the Stated Clerk of Synod informing us that our communications would not be printed in the *Agenda*, since they had not been carried "as far as possible in the minor assemblies" (referring to a synodical rule, cf. *Acts* '59, p. 23). (The Smithers consistory did not ask Classis to endorse either of the communications.)

Is the Stated Clerk applying this rule fairly in this case? We believe he is not. (It ought to be pointed out that the Stated Clerk asked and received the endorsement of the Synodical Interim Committee for this action.) A look at the context of the 1959 decision will, I believe, confirm our opinion. Overture 8 (p. 512, *Acts* '59) states:

"One of the major problems which afflicts our ecclesiastical system is that Synod is overloaded with work that should be done elsewhere. . . . The most obvious form in which his violation of good order shows itself is in the many overtures asking Synod to study various matters. Frequently classes ask Synod to make large sweeping studies without giving evidence of the Classes having carried such studies as far

as possible. Classes ought not to ask Synod to study the matter. They ought to study it themselves."

Now, I fully endorse this overture. I have been saying this myself on other occasions. Synod tends to become a "dumping ground" for all our ecclesiastical problems. Still in 1977. We've had study reports galore, one after another. It's time that stops.

However, that whole problematic is neither here nor there with regard to our communications. And the rule which the Stated Clerk referred to simply doesn't apply. We *are not* asking Synod to study a new matter. We are simply asking Synod to do something which *Synod alone* can do, since both matters have been before Synod previously, having gone the normal route of consistory, classis, synod. What can classis do about this? Nothing! That's one of the reasons we didn't present it to classis for endorsement. We didn't have to. We never doubted our right to send these communications directly to Synod. That is a basic right of Reformed church polity. "Our Synodical Agenda is . . . distributed . . . throughout the denomination to encourage free and wide study and discussion in order that Synod's decisions may be made with the knowledge, consideration, and support of the churches" (Overture 7 of Cl. G. R. East, '74 *Acts*). That is a very important principle of Reformed church polity, and we must be careful not to violate or curb the freedom and autonomy of the local churches *in any manner whatsoever*.

What I'm saying is that I believe the Stated Clerk erred in making the judgment he did, and that the danger of arbitrarily deciding what does and what does not get into the Agenda is too great. When in recent years synod after synod was presented with requests to study or reconsider the matter of Women in Office or Lodge Membership (the exact problem that the 1959 decision was meant to deal with), the Stated Clerk dutifully included it in the Agenda. But when a protest regarding a very important matter comes to the first following Synod after the original decision, it is omitted from the Agenda. I see this as a very dangerous precedent, and as a trend toward hierarchism in the CRC. We'd better take a good hard look at the matter before it gets out of hand.

(Note: For those who wish to pursue the matter a bit further, we refer to Monsma, *The Revised Church Order Commentary*, p. 130, 1st column.) ●

* * * * *

*Instead of seeking God,
We often clutch the clod.*

S.C.W.

* * * * *

*Beneath the jewelled snow,
Vital life is still aglow.*

S.C.W.

Rev. Jelle Tuininga is pastor of the Christian Reformed Church of Smithers, British Columbia.

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Alcoholism - SIN or SICKNESS?

FRED H. BAKER

(2)

The writer of this article, of which this is the second and concluding installment, states: "If there are only 10 who read this who are exercising their Christian liberty in drinking, as I did, I want to add a personal word. Don't assume you can walk the road at no risk. One of you already is in trouble, but not yet ready to say so. I know. . . ."

Since February 1, Mr. Baker's address is: Box 177, 7567 Warner St., Allendale, Michigan 49401. His business is: Fred H. Baker and Associates, Management Counseling.

No Christian can deny drinking into drunkenness is a sin.

I know of many who have consumed countless more gallons of alcohol than I, who enjoy getting a little drunk or even sloppy drunk, who haven't become alcoholics. They can still make a decision to stop at will. On the other hand, I know many who drank far less than I who are dead alcoholics.

As it happened, I never sought to become drunk — I detested that feeling. My pattern was an ever-increasing reliance on alcohol as a tranquilizer — eventually seeking total oblivion with alcohol — when I could not cope with problems that proved beyond solution. One time, with several months of abstinence after admitting I was an alcoholic, in my pride I gulped a few drinks to meet a crisis, thinking I could "still" handle a few and remain sober. Relief from my emotional crisis did not come fast enough and I took more. I almost killed myself drinking when I felt myself getting "drunk" and sought oblivion.

I do not deny I was a sinful fool on that April Fool's day in 1969. The next day I learned I had consumed almost a quart of booze — enough to kill a person only four inches shorter than I and about 25 pounds less in weight. A year earlier, tripping but remaining sober, I could have met the crisis with no more than a drink or two. I do not minimize the sin involved. Yet, I must add that my impulsive drinking to avoid "feeling drunk" at some point became insanity. My last memory of that night was a feeling of becoming tipsy and gulping a little more so I would not care. Am I making light of sin in saying my drinking had made me a sick sinner?

Let nobody think I am now "cured." For reasons we do not yet understand, I can never be "normal" again and "take it or leave it." As an alcoholic, both my *psyche* and my *soma* are permanently and ir-

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reversibly warped. All the alcoholics I know who tried to prove otherwise are dead.

As some approach salvation, right to the point of admitting I was totally defeated, beyond any human hope, I had included God in my prayers so I could claim victory over booze. Now my only hope of not dying as a drinking alcoholic is to admit always my powerlessness over alcohol — day by day, and as necessary, hour by hour or minute by minute. A victor? No, I'm still an alcoholic. Today, again, I was sober, but can take none of the credit. That is God's.

As many know, I received recovery from alcoholism at Calvary Rehabilitation Center in Phoenix. I went there for "help," still thinking of victory. I remember Rev. Duane Visser, then chaplain, telling me he was as powerless as I had proved I was over alcohol. In complete surrender, God would give sobriety day by day. Others had tried so hard to "help"; here was a man of God saying he could not help give me sobriety. The power was God's.

He then pledged he would do what he could to help me regain the wholeness that had been shattered. He dedicated himself to the healing ministry. No quibbling over wounds, sickness, or consequences. He knew where I "hurt"; helped me see the damage; and, under God, did what he could to help in restoration. At no time did he claim any part of the credit for my new-found sobriety. That he gave to God alone. I owe lifelong gratitude to Chaplain Duane in his ministry of healing, and lifelong respect for his humility in not even trying to "help" where God alone was needed.

This may help understanding — I haven't had a drink since two days *before* I entered Calvary Rehab. I was not drunk when I entered, did not drink, yet needed treatment and did not feel fully normal for two years. Dry before, during and after — recovering from alcoholism the sickness. Alcoholism is not the sin, but the result of sin.

When I graduated from Calvin College in the mid-40's I was a total abstainer. When I was assumed by many to deny thereby the Biblical principles of Christian liberty, I became a social drinker. At that time about 1 in 20 became alcoholics. When I received sobriety, it was about 1 in 13; now, 1 in 10.

I sometimes wonder what Paul would have said about Christian liberty if one in 10 eating meat offered to idols risked death.

Every drinker assumes the same position I did: "Not me." I took the cocky stance of a Peter when warned about the cock-crowing deadline: "I will not." Peter, too, had majority support in his pride: "and so said the rest of the disciples."

Somehow 9 of 10 can drink and not become alcoholics. In the story of Peter, however, the emphasis is on the 1 in 12 (or had it become one in 11) who was the most sure of immunity.

I approached alcohol as Peter approached the cursing courtyard. They, yes. Me, never.

While retyping this I took a break to use a machine to make photo-copies of something I had written on alcoholism. The heading of each page was obvious

to the man next to me, the damning word: ALCOHOLISM.

In a potentially-embarrassing moment, where many react as though I could set off an epidemic, I have found it best to admit casually, "I'm an alcoholic."

"So am I," he said. "Watcha doin?"

"Trying to gain a better understanding among church members about alcoholism," I said.

"To hell with churches," he shouted. "All the church told me was that I was going to hell. When God gave me sobriety, they wanted no part of me as long as I said I was still an alcoholic."

I started to speak; he cut me off.

"God gave me sobriety; I won't let the church take it away."

I do not share his view, but I "understand."

I remember the Graham column ultimatum: No alcoholic can enter heaven. I know Christians who are bitter their "help" did not help; the sober alcoholic gives all credit to God alone. Some regard any alcoholic as no more than a drunken bum, a blot the body of Christ does not need. Those who have had little or no contact with a Christian alcoholic see the word "alcoholic" as a camouflage for "sin." Some, who emphasize the sin, make clear the real problem was stupidity. (I can now find it amusing when some Christians talk to me as though English were not my native tongue, explaining even the simplest words to me.) I have discovered that if only I had claimed victory over a temporary problem, a winner rather than a total loser, I could be more "acceptable." I know from personal experience as well as from the reports of others the condescending "even-though" welcome to a worship service.

I went "public" knowing all this, seeking understanding where it should be most Christlike. When I use the word "I" it is as a spokesman for others. I know Christian alcoholics who have taken non-Christians into their confidence, but would never dare shed their anonymity in the church of Christ.

There are Christian alcoholics who have given up on the church; they sought fellowship, got insults and rebuffs. There are ministers of the gospel who have spent hours and hours trying and failing to "help" the alcoholic back into sobriety; and then A. A. pointed the way: Only God; no human power, yours or that of others. Is the resentment the alcoholic feels real or imagined?

I must keep my perspective; in seeking to gain understanding, I seek out the problem areas. They involve some — certainly not all — Christians.

One thing does "disturb" me as an alcoholic-Christian reared in a Calvinist heritage and still a Calvinist. In this era of super-super-bowl winners, there has been a ruboff on the church — a disdain for losers and a craving for winners.

Even the amazing grace I received in defeat does not make me somebody special, you see. Any alcoholic can be given it, as a loser. That grace is infinite; none ever "used up." Any sinner can be given it, as a loser.

With the co-founder of A.A., an outspoken Christian alcoholic, it is no wonder that the prayer of our Lord is used by A.A. the world over. Alcoholic Christians sense "surrender" in every phrase.

Last night one of the much-earlier grads of Calvary Rehab Center said to me, "Isn't it wonderful how God can make our past into such a daily blessing?"

As I reviewed the list in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (verse 10, chapter 6), I realized how easily most could claim victory. Sexual immorality can be stopped; idolaters can drop their faith in false gods; homosexuals can abstain; thieves can become ex-offenders; the greedy can become philanthropists; slanderers can keep their mouths shut. Drunks can sober up — at least until they become alcoholics. Alcoholics are, by definition, totally powerless. No human victory.

As said, I seek no arguments; I do seek understanding.

If there are only 10 who read this who are exercising their Christian liberty in drinking, as I did, I want to add a personal word. Don't assume you can walk the road at no risk. One of you already is in trouble, but not yet ready to say so. I know. One of you may be drinking "a little too much" because of problems. All of us know exactly what you mean. You know you aren't going to be so stupid and get as sick as I did. Well, you don't have to find out, you know. Maybe like me, you're not a quitter, still planning victory. Going on the wagon for a while proves nothing, except that a person with no problem has nothing to prove.

Excuse me for writing so personally in what is really a postscript. Today I got a letter from a minister in Texas. Something I had written had entered his home. He realized it was never too early to admit defeat, and it could be too late. He gave up. God took over. This minister of the Gospel can be more grateful than I — he did not have to hurt so bad, he lost nothing — except his pride. "Recovered," he wrote with joy. As only we can understand, he does not "need" a drink today. God has forgiven and forgotten, and nobody needed to know. Just God. ●

PREVIEW OF SYNOD

WHAT — A preview of 1977 CRC Synod

WHEN — Thursday, May 26, 8 p.m.

WHERE — Oakdale Park Christian Reformed Church

WHO — Rev. Anthony Rozendal
Delegate from Classis Zeeland
Rev. Harlan Vanden Einde
Delegate from Classis G. R. East

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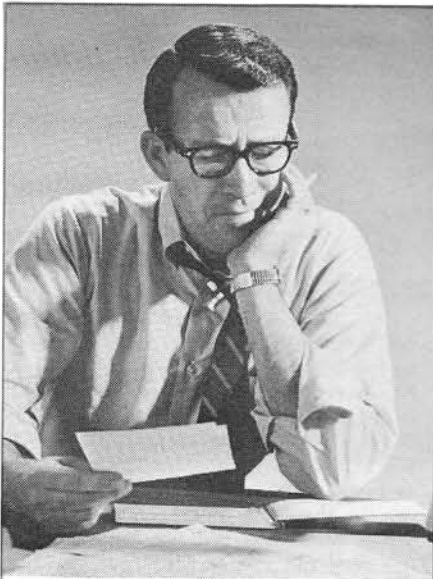
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*Martyrs?
We suffer agonizing minutes; then,
Are much relieved when the Pastor says, Amen.*
S.C.W.

.

*The knocker (is it you or I?)
Can't see the beam in his own eye.*
S.C.W.



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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

DR. DE KOSTER QUESTIONS DR. PALMER'S DECLARATION ABOUT THE BIBLE

Dear Editor:

I found myself as astounded as I think the "liberal" mind was delighted by Dr. E. H. Palmer's flat declaration, in the January, 1977, issue of *THE OUTLOOK*, as follows: "To be very clear, let me assert with all the force that is in me that the King James Version that Dr. DeKoster has on his table is *not* the infallible, inerrant Word of God. And no translation of the Bible is without error—not even the best of them all, the New International Version! Of course not! All translations without exception have errors in them."

He goes on to say that only the original manuscripts of the Bible (*now lost*), called the autographa, were inspired and without error. In short, the inspired and infallible Word of God, according to Dr. Palmer, no longer exists.

Can Dr. Palmer be serious? Does the CRC base its synodical decisions, sermonizing, consistorial discussions, and Christian life on an errant and fallible Bible? When we confess of the Scriptures, "believing without any doubt all things contained in them" (Belgic Conf. V) do we mean, either: 1) believing error? or, 2) believing a Bible which no longer exists? When the Belgic Confession characterizes Scripture as "this infallible rule" (Art. VII) does it really mean, *that* infallible original now lost?

I, for one, would be happy to have Dr. Palmer's answer to these questions.

LESTER DE KOSTER

DR. EDWIN PALMER REPLIES TO DR. DE KOSTER

In response to Dr. DeKoster, permit me to give the background of the discussion. Dr. Harold Lindsell, the editor of *Christianity Today*, wrote a very important book, defending the inerrancy of the Bible. It was called *The Battle for the Bible* and should be purchased by every church library and should be read by every adult in the Christian Reformed Church. That is how good and important I think the book is.

But beginning with the August 20th

issue of *The Banner*, Dr. DeKoster began to attack and attack that book in seven editorials. In my judgment the attack was irresponsible and thoroughly misinformed. (I write these two adjectives with care and thought.) As a matter of fact, in the original draft of the previous article, I had titled it: *Incredible!!!* But my ever-loving and wise wife said I should soften my words—and she was right. I did soften it.

But now I can no longer refrain from stating as plainly as I can how I view Dr. DeKoster's ideas on the Bible. For he still persists in the most extreme naivety that I have experienced among any leader in the Christian Reformed Church. If his words were the words of an un-informed layman, I would keep silent. But here is the editor of our denominational paper, writing article after article on one of the most important subjects of today and misleading tens of thousands of readers.

It would not bother me so much if he goofed the way President Ford did about the freedom of Eastern European Communist countries. We all goof. But then, after discussions, a debate with Dr. Lindsell and reading my article, to repeat the same confusion, as if nothing had ever happened, is simply incredible.

In fact, it is so incredible that I phoned him and asked if that is *all* he wanted to say. Didn't he want to enlarge on the letter or answer some of my statements? I wanted to be gracious to him, helping him to put his best foot forward, or even to withdraw the letter. But, no, he said he did not want to change anything.

Well, with that as a background, I will again attempt to answer him, but this time on the one narrow issue that he raises, namely: Are the translation of the Bible that we possess the infallible, inerrant Word of God? It is truly a shame that he did not reply to what I wrote on that in the January issue of *THE OUTLOOK*, for I answered his present questions clearly and without equivocation. And the reader could have profited by a good interaction on this issue. But I still hope the reader will profit.

Let me answer Dr. DeKoster's questions one at a time.

1. "Can Dr. Palmer be serious?"

Answer: Yes, I am. I will say again what I believe: The Bible that Dr. DeKoster has on his table is not, I repeat, not, the infallible, inerrant Word of God. And it is most important to realize this. Yes, I am serious.

2. "Does the Christian Reformed Church base its synodical decisions, sermonizing, consistorial discussions, and Christian life on an errant and fallible Bible?"

Answer: No, it does not. It bases them on the inerrant, infallible Word of God—the originals. It has always distinguished between the autographa and the apographa, between the original writings that the Holy Spirit inspired and the countless copies and translations that are based on the original. For example, Dr. Louis Berkhof in his *Intro-*

ductory Volume on Systematic Theology (1932), pp. 158-159, is crystal clear at this point. This elementary truth has been taught to all the ministers who have gone to Calvin Seminary under Professor Louis Berkhof and is still being taught right now by Professor Fred Klooster.

Only what was written by the men inspired by the Holy Spirit is infallible. Only what Jeremiah, David, Paul and Peter actually wrote is inspired.

Sleepy monks who skipped lines or added lines as they copied the manuscripts were not inspired. And printers who set up the type for Psalm 119:161, making it read "Printers [instead of *princes*, the way it should be] persecute me without cause" were not inerrant. The King James is wrong when it says that blind guides "strain at a gnat" (Matt. 23:34). What Matthew wrote was that they "strain out a gnat." The Living Bible could not be more wrong when in Acts 13:48 it makes Paul say "as many as wanted eternal life, believed." Paul really said, "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed." And whatever a person believes about certain verses that are in one version, but not in another, both versions cannot be right. One translation is correct, and the other is wrong. You cannot have it both ways. (There are plenty of verses or parts of them that the King James added to the Word of God, e.g., Matt. 6:13b; Mark 7:16; 11:26; 15:28; Luke 18:36; 23:17; John 5:4, etc., and modern versions do not have them.)

Now the reader may think that it is impossible for anyone to really believe that the present-day translations are infallible and inerrant, and that it is so obvious that the errors of monks, printers, and translators are not part of the inspired Word of God. It is so obvious that where they change, omit, or add to the original they must be wrong. But this is exactly what Dr. DeKoster believes.

And that is why I telephoned him to make sure he wanted me to reply. I thought it must have been some temporary lapse of thinking, but he assured me that he was serious and that he believed the current translations were inerrant. I said, "Even the Living Bible?" Well, fortunately, he drew the line there. That could not be the infallible Word of God, he said, but the other translations were.

I said to him, "Boy, you make me scared. You put me on the same level as Isaiah and Paul and John. But if

you only knew. We New International Version translators make all kinds of mistakes. We try not to, but we are fallible. We are not divine. If you could only see my translation manuscripts with all the scribbles, erasures, and corrections written in, you would not put us in the same category as the authors of the Bible. In no way!!!" We are good. We have some of the finest scholarship in the world. But we are not on the same level as the Biblical authors. We have the illumination of the Holy Spirit, but they had the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We make mistakes, they did not. We only try to copy and translate faithfully what they wrote.

One vivid example of our fallibility comes to mind. In the Old Testament at one time we were dealing with a whole series of living creatures, and we came upon a word that is a *hapax legomenon*, that is, this is the only place in all Hebrew literature that this word occurs. Well, at one editorial meeting we translated it as *porcupine* and at the next we changed it to *owl*! We had no Spirit whispering in our ear which one was right, and the context did not help us out. We just do not know what is right. Now no one can be dogmatic at this point and say the translations are right. Which translation? They all go in different directions. And they cannot all be right. A porcupine is not an owl!

So I am just flabbergasted when *The Banner* editor can assert that translations are the inerrant Word of God. Incredible!!!

3. "When the Belgic Confession characterizes Scriptures as 'this infallible rule' (Art. VII) does it really mean, that infallible original now lost?"

Answer: Yes. It cannot be the King James that added to the original and now says "nephews" when "grandchildren" are meant (1 Tim. 5:4).

Oh, the dependability of the Word of God! It is all true, down to every jot and tittle (Matt. 5:18) — not the translations, mind you, but the original writings that the Holy Spirit inspired. And not just the ethical and salvational matters. But all of it. It is all one hundred per cent the Word of God and therefore true, trustworthy, dependable, without any errors of any sort. And not only in theological areas, but in the matter of history, science and geography—when correctly understood.

Let no one—I say, no one—be at all disturbed and upset because his King James or New International Version is

not the originally inspired text. Because of the grace and providence of God, we have very good translations (not all of them, mind you, are very good; several modern ones are not dependable). And you can have more confidence in them as being close to the originals than you can in the King James. For the King James translators did not have some of the fine, old manuscripts that we have today. But even with the King James, for all intents and purposes, we have the Word of God (if you can understand the King James!). There are really not many errors in the King James.

Now I have spoken plainly as to what I believe. Some may take plainness of speech as being unkind. Please do not. As I wrote the previous article, I toned it down at my wife's suggestions, to be kind. I called Dr. DeKoster on the phone to let him off the hook or to enlarge his ideas. But he did not want to change anything. Well, then, when the editor of the influential publication, *The Banner*, persists in seven editorials, plus an open debate with Dr. Lindsell, plus his response to *THE OUTLOOK*, then it is important to speak up. But the response must be done in love. And I want to say that I respect Dr. DeKoster's complete sincerity, and realize that many good men have struggled with this issue. But I do believe that he is sincerely wrong.

ANOTHER NEW CHAPTER

B.C., Canada, March 2, 1977 saw the institution of another Chapter of the Reformed Fellowship Inc. The name for this Chapter adopted is:

"B.C. Fraser Valley Chapter."

Realizing that we but have a beginning of wisdom, yet it is the earnest desire of our membership that under the Lord's blessing and guidance of His Word we may be a blessing to His Church, to each other, to the Reformed community, as well as to those who are "outside."

On behalf of the Board,
A. VENTE, Pres.
J. F. C. STRUIK, Sec'y