

The Outlook

**UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
A TIME TO LAUGH?
LUTHERAN HELP IN OUR PROBLEM**

APRIL - 1978

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

that "UNITED REFORMED CHURCH" -- an ongoing challenge

JOHN VANDER PLOEG

"Are you going to write again about that 'United Reformed Church' idea and the response you received?" In words to this affect someone recently prompted me to write on this subject again.

Did this questioner speak for many other CRC readers of the editorial as well as himself? Would that it were so! I believe that he was a rare exception. If there were others, one wonders whether they (1) couldn't care less about the whole matter (2) whether they prefer to be mere spectators rather than participants in this (3) or whether, for one reason or another, they think it to be the better part of wisdom not to stand up and be counted.

As these lines were being written, a well-informed and deeply concerned former elder in a large local RCA congregation said to me: "do you know what our greatest enemy is? Apathy!" And that's exactly it! The present CRC apathy to the increasing erosion of our former staunch and vigorous commitment to the Reformed faith, together with open and ever bolder attacks upon it are nothing less than appalling. He who is "a liar and the father thereof" (John 8:44) is having a field day, while even our "watchmen on the walls of Zion" refuse to be disturbed.

But isn't the whole thing hopeless?

Some answer "yes." But they are listening to the voice of frustration and fear instead of faith. Or they argue "Why keep on beating a dead horse or trying to breathe life into a corpse?" These are the quitters who never win, not the winners who never quit. Ezekiel's vision of dry bones may have something to say to them.

Repeatedly it must have seemed to Paul that his Lord's cause was altogether hopeless. But the great apostle marched to a different drummer and he listened to a higher voice. He wanted to know nothing of the quitter either in himself or in others.

To the Galatians Paul wrote: "And let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (6:9).

And to the Thessalonians: "But ye, brethren, be not weary in well-doing" (II Thess. 3:13).

Hope thrives only when, like Peter, James and John, we see no man save Jesus only as the One Who builds His church. And if it be His will, already on this side of glory, to effect and bring forth a union of those united in the Reformed faith, He surely can and will bring it to pass.

Pity those who are always vocal among the critics

of the church but are never found among the builders. Of the Frenchman Voltaire we are told that he was opposed to all organized religion. No wonder then that Thomas Carlyle once addressed him with the scathing rebuke, "Have you only a torch for destruction? Have you no hammer for building?"

To be united and zealous only as critics of one's church will surely prove to be frustrating and counter-productive. Only those are entitled to criticize who at the same time are joined with our Lord as He goes on *building* His church to make it what He would have it be.

To pray for, to pursue, and to propagate the realization of the "United Reformed Church" should be the aim which we still cherish as a part of our Lord's building program and regard as our ongoing challenge.

Now a word about responses to that editorial

Excerpts from these may be cited.

1. From the Far West, a faithful subscriber writes: "Some years ago I wrote you about starting a new denomination that would uphold the infallibility of the Scriptures and also accept the three forms of unity as being the best guidelines available for a true church. The CRC has for many years failed to act on issues that needed prompt and decisive attention. To name a few - Report 44, Dr. Boer, 1973, and now the latest - the Verhey case. Result has been one committee after another and more and more compromises. . . . (My) brother (a retired CRC minister) assured me the CRC would set these things in order. My answer was that this would take a miracle. . . ."

2. And from a subscriber in Western Canada the following: ". . . the CRC was on trial already for more than thirty years and has failed ever since. . . . Neither do we have to be a Luther or a Calvin, but who and wherever we are we must be true and faithful to the Word of God, and then you must liberate yourself from a 'church' (that) tolerates deviations from the Word of God, such as the teachings of Professor Kuitert, Dr. Verhey, and many more. . . . 'We know that secession is a terribly serious business,' you say in your article. And it is. But secession can also be a God-given calling and task, and at the same time . . . God's doing to purify His church."

3. And this from nearer home, in Michigan: "A United Reformed Church may be exciting to you, but the hour is late. You waited too long. The CRC is in need of drastic housecleaning; but it will not happen because the foes, the experts are within the gate, and the majority of the members love the establishment. . . . It is just a dream, fantasy, on your part. I have many dear friends, also four brothers and five sisters in the CRC. They are complaining all the time. But will they leave? Oh No! They have all kinds of reasons and you know what they are too. . . ."

4. Of special interest also is a clipping from a Canadian newspaper sent by an Alberta correspondent who writes, "Although I agree that it would be desirable to have an unambiguous, consistent, and enthu-

siastic CRC, I do not believe that a new denomination is the real answer.”

The clipping is an article with a LONDON (AP) dateline. It reports the opposition aroused in England by the recent publication of that antichristian and infamous book, *The Myth of God Incarnate*, edited by John Hick of Birmingham University referred to in the newspaper article as a “United Reformed churchman.” In view of that book’s attempt to convince the readers that the account of Jesus’ deity is a myth and not literally true, our correspondent from Alberta calls attention to the great disparity between the out-and-out heresy of someone identified as a “United Reformed churchman” and what I envisioned as a sorely needed “United Reformed Church.” We ought to consider that there is an ocean between ourselves in the U.S. and Canada, and the heretical John Hick and his ilk, whose views are as far apart from ours as the poles. I do not feel that their misuse of the name “United Reformed” should constrain us to abandon it as inappropriate for the church which our divine Lord, if He tarries, may someday yet be pleased to bring into being here.*

5. *The Reformed Record*, the Official Publication of the League of Christian Laymen (Reformed Church in America) Inc., saw fit to reprint our “Desideratum — A United Reformed Church” editorial in its August, 1977 issue.

It is gratifying and encouraging to find their attached footnote: “We feel the information and the warnings . . . are so well stated that our people *must* read it. Let us pray that God by His Spirit may turn the tide in all REFORMED churches. Without His blessing, we are helpless.” Readers are invited to contact the League of Christian Laymen (RCA) Inc., at Box 317, Stout, Iowa.

Obviously, there also are brothers within the RCA who with us are deeply concerned about departures from the Reformed heritage. We do well to cultivate a closer acquaintance with them and join hands and hearts before the throne of grace for the preservation and proclamation of the Reformed faith.

As wrong trends and developments multiply in denominations still nominally Reformed, and as those who aid and abet such departures from the Reformed faith and life become increasingly entrenched in denominational positions of leadership and power, it becomes ever more obvious that we cannot expect them to encourage the emergence of a truly United Reformed Church. One correspondent observes that, instead of looking toward such denominational leaders we would do well to regard people of the ACRL and the Christian Reformed Church (he might have included the League of Christian Laymen [RCA], Inc.) as possible supporters in seeking to realize a URC. Our Lord throughout the history of His people, has used minorities to achieve great victories for the pre-

*As an aside, attention may here be called to a recent Eerdman’s Publication, *The Truth of God Incarnate* (Wm. B. Eerdman’s Publishing Co., 1977, \$2.45) in which “Five prominent theologians join forces to defend the doctrine of Christ’s divinity against recent attacks.”

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).

JOURNAL OF REFORMED FELLOWSHIP, INC.

Send all copy to Managing Editor, Rev. Peter De Jong, Box 34, Dutton, Mich. 49511. Phone (616) 698-6267.

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This periodical is owned and published by Reformed Fellowship, Inc., a religious and strictly non-profit organization composed of a group of Christian believers who hold to the Reformed Faith. Its purpose is to give sharpened expression to this Faith, to stimulate the doctrinal sensitivities of those who profess this Faith, to promote the spiritual welfare and purity of the Christian Reformed Church particularly and also of other Reformed churches, and as far as possible to further the interests of all Christian action and institutions of Reformed character.

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

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

Subscription Policy: Subscription price, \$6.00 per year, \$10.50 2 years. Unless a definite request for discontinuance is received, it is assumed that the subscriber wishes the subscription to continue without the formality of a renewal order and he will be billed for renewal. If you have a change of address, please notify the Business Office as early as possible in order to avoid the inconvenience of delayed delivery. Include your Zip Code.

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Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 9-11 a.m.

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Mailing Address: P.O. Box 7383, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49510
Second Class postage paid at Grand Rapids, Michigan.
Published monthly.

April 1978 — Volume XXVIII, No. 4

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serving of the "faith of our fathers" and in the building of His church.

6. Rev. G. Van Baren of the Protestant Reformed Church writes in a recent issue of *The Standard Bearer* (Feb. 15, 1978): "THE OUTLOOK also reports that they have a new editor. . . . Through his editorial writings, the Rev. Vander Ploeg has correctly pinpointed many of the ills of his denomination. The diagnosis, however, seemed easier to present than the cure. Perhaps that is understandable. The closest to a 'cure' that Rev. Vander Ploeg proposed was the formation of a 'United Reformed Church' consisting of conservatives of all of the Reformed churches of the land. *But this remained only a 'dream'* (italics mine). Specific action, God-required action, was not presented. . . . We as churches would also much like him (Rev. Peter De Jong, THE OUTLOOK's new managing editor) and others, to see what we have suggested for many years, that there is a clear-cut relationship also between current trends and that view of common grace adopted by the CRC in 1924. At least we would hope that the idea is no longer rejected out-of-hand."

We believe that our PR brethren are sincere in their rejection of the position which the Christian Reformed Church adopted on common grace more than a half century ago and we respect their right to reiterate their rejection of this year after year after year. They ought to manifest the same regard for our sincere conviction that our position on that matter is Biblical and is not per se the Pandora's box out of which our difficulties have necessarily arisen. There is much in the PR churches that we highly esteem. Our unresolved honest differences should not keep us from praying and working for the ideal of a truly United Reformed Church.

7. Another publication that gave generous attention to the "Desideratum" editorial is *Clarion* (The Canadian Reformed Magazine). Co-Editor C. Stam writes a "Response to a Desideratum" that is clear in its intent, pointed, and critical, but also sympathetic, expressing goodwill and assuring us of their intercessory prayer for us. At the close of his article, Rev. Stam offers the following guidelines for our consideration:

"1. Those involved should not only voice their concern and criticism about the apparent deformation in their Church, but should faithfully examine and clearly promote *the way* which God has given in His Word to reformation, even if this means inevitable, sad secession. Search the Scriptures and the Creeds!

"2. Edifying contact should be relentlessly sought with those churches which by God's grace *are* faithful to the Reformed faith, so that when secession becomes real, unity in faith can be pursued without delay. One cannot be content 'to remain by himself' (Article 28, Belgic Confession) but must seek and maintain the unity of 1892 (the union of the 1834 Secession churches and those of the Doleantie in the Netherlands).

"3. Emphasis should be placed on understanding deformation not as an isolated incident, but as an

historical process, resulting from dated derailment. The 'concerned' in the CRC should re-examine their stand on the happenings of 1939-1944 and subsequent years and give due recognition to those who in the past — again by God's grace! — stood firmly *only* for the Reformed faith" (a reference to the rise and history of the Liberated Churches in the Netherlands, known as the Canadian Reformed Churches and the American Reformed Church in North America, the movement in which Dr. K. Schilder occupied a leading role).

Finally, a few observations about our ongoing challenge:

1. As a first priority toward any real rapprochement there must be a mutual recognition and realization that the pursuit of union of all those who are honestly and unambiguously committed to the Reformed faith is a continuing duty. *What belongs together should be together.* To cherish, to pursue, and also to implement the ideal of union whenever and wherever such appears to be warranted and timely, according to Scripture is not merely an option but a divine mandate. Let no man put asunder what God hath joined together in a common commitment to the Reformed faith.

Do I now see the way to achieve such togetherness *today, tomorrow, or the next day?* Unfortunately, I do not. However, can and dare we be comfortable if we will not even move a muscle or lift a finger to bridge the unwarranted gaps that divide Reformed Christians? Our Lord's prayer "that they may all be one" (John 17:21) and Paul's inspired exhortation about "giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3) are a mandate for God's people of our day as well as for those of long ago. The Ecumenism prescribed in Scripture is not to be repudiated merely because so many of today's ecumenical churchmen disregard the sound doctrine and the godly walk demanded by that Scripture. Their pursuing a kind of union which God's Word forbids should not deter us from pursuing the kind of union His Word forbids should not deter us from pursuing the kind of union His Word commands.

2. Let it also be clearly understood then that there are precious convictions that are non-negotiable, and that the surrender of them is too great a price to pay for union. Before we proceed to organize or unite we must prepare, agree upon and proclaim a "Reformed Manifesto," a clear and unambiguous statement of basic Reformed convictions founded on the Word — convictions that are never to be compromised, curtailed or submerged.

3. Allow me to suggest also that those who may come together to consider the possibility of a United Reformed Church should begin by exploring the convictions they do have in common without demanding that the *first* order of business must be a reconsideration and a resolving of controversies of a bygone day. Even though considering old controversies may later be unavoidable or necessary as we move down the road together, to make settling them a prerequisite for

any common action could result in our being hopelessly stalled before we begin. To avoid insisting or making initial meetings a clearing house for conflicting views, or for airing our hurts and injuries of the past, will probably demand a self-denial which can be made possible only by grace that will be given to all who earnestly seek it. Meanwhile any who, after sincere soul-searching, may find themselves to be conscience-bound to have no part in this should be regarded with Christian esteem by others who do feel free to act together, in the hope that those who remain aloof will reciprocate by showing Christian esteem toward any and all who feel free to proceed without them.

4. The ongoing challenge for those who are truly Reformed to close ranks and to present a united front should be sharpened by the realization that there is no hope for today's largely apostate Christendom apart from what the Reformed faith has to offer. If we are unwilling to bestir ourselves for this cause, our Lord may well say to us what Mordecai once said to Queen Esther: "For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then will relief and deliverances arise . . . from another place" (Esther 4:14).

Together with William Carey who, before he became a renowned missionary, had a map of the world tacked over his cobbler's bench, we too, when confronted by apparently overwhelming obstacles, should say: "Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God."

This then is our challenge. While others may disparage or even scoff, shall we not press on, knowing that life without a challenge is a life not worth the living.

(Note: When the writing of the above was almost completed, word from a correspondent was received calling attention to the fact that in October 1972 the United Reformed Church in England and Wales came into being. I hope to write more about this later.) ●

TEACH THEM TO OBEY

CORNELIUS VAN SCHOUWEN

In the training of children, there is often a one-sided emphasis on love. Is it true that if children are sufficiently loved they will automatically obey their parents? This common assumption brings trouble for it lets the children decide whether or not they will obey their parents. We must never forget that children are born with the principles of disobedience in their hearts. To obey means to love and obedience must be learned. Only those who have been trained to obey will honor, respect and love. Instruction received in the school of obedience will do more for the proper development, the happiness and success of

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children, as viable members of the church, and as citizens of society, than all the instruction received subsequently in the schools they will attend.

Solid foundations for the establishment of a Christian home are found in the fifth commandment, which says, "Honor thy father and mother that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." Paul says in Ephesians 6:1 that this commandment is the first commandment with a promise. It is the first commandment, for it is the first commandment that we can teach our children, even before we can teach them it is wrong to steal, to lie, to covet, etc.

Even in the state of righteousness, Adam and Eve were commanded to obey the probationary commandment. Christ had to learn to obey the will of the heavenly Father and the Bible says that He was obedient unto the death of the cross. Every page of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation emphasizes the importance of obedience. In these days of lawlessness and apostasy, we must do our utmost to reinforce the moral and the spiritual structures of our Christian homes by teaching obedience.

Is Love More Important than Obedience?

For the past fifty years, educators have condemned almost every form of restraint in the class room. They assume that every child is basically good and self-expression is necessary for his development. Educators believe that if teachers will only love their pupils sufficiently, no discipline problems will emerge in the class room, and many parents harbor the same illusion. However, when police are necessary to protect the teacher and to maintain a modicum of order in some schools and vandalism plagues many schools throughout the land, it is obvious that this approach is disastrous for society.

In homes where love takes precedence over obedience, the children are pampered. Little forms of disobedience are tolerated at first and little forms of disobedience develop into larger forms, in the home, in the school and on the street. Some parents are even amused when their children proudly relate how they put one over on the teacher. And others become angry when the teacher has found it necessary to punish their child.

Finally, when their teen-ager comes home drunk or becomes involved in the drug traffic and criminal activity, those parents feel humiliated, frustrated and disillusioned. Pleading with tears in their eyes they may reproach their teen-ager saying, "Why did you do this to us? We provided everything for you; we fed you; we clothed you; we gave you an education; we gave you all that you wanted. We sat up all night when you were sick." This scene is beginning to be repeated increasingly in many of our Christian homes. Those parents gave their teen-ager everything he wanted and they thought that this was love. They failed, however, to give the child a most important thing he needed for time and eternity and that was the training in obedience which God ordered them to give. ●

the decline of excellence: **A PRONENESS TOWARD MEDIOCRITY**

AGATHA LUBBERS

The public schools of the U.S. are under fire! But, why?

Do you recognize the apathy and disorder of this classroom in your school? I hope not.

"Morning at a West Coast high school. The first-period bell rings, barely audible above the classroom din. 'O.K., everybody settle down,' says the soft-spoken teacher of the course called Modern Problems. Her two dozen students, grouped around seven tables, pay scant attention. She switches on a video machine by her desk; a neatly categorized outline flashes on the board. 'Have you already copied this down?' she asks, pointing to the topic headings. A few heads bob yes, several more shake no; the rest of students merely carry on with their private conversations. The subject of the day is not terrorism, energy, or Watergate. Aptly enough, the topic is 'The Problem of American Education.'"

* * * * *

It appears that the chief problem in American Education is apathy and mediocrity. Neither the teacher nor the student comes to school to do that which the school is intended to do. The teacher does not come to teach and to discipline or disciple the student, and the student does not come to be disciplined — i.e., to be taught. We live in a day of anarchy when everyone does that which is right in his own eyes.

American democracy and its exaltation and glorification of the twin doctrines of man's inherent goodness and individual freedom has defied the more excellent way.

However we must not point the finger and then be complacently swept along with this seemingly irresistible undertow of mediocrity.

The paragraph describing the West Coast high school is, I fear, a "normal classroom" in many a high school in the U.S. This paragraph begins a major feature article which every reader of *Beacon Lights* ought to read. *Time* magazine, November 14, 1977, contains a documented description of the educational scene in the U.S. today. This frightening scene found in the high school portrays a severe indictment of education in the U.S. This is particularly true when one contrasts education in the U.S. high school with that given in similar institutions in European countries.

The conclusion one must inevitably reach after reading the Tale of Three Cities — Medford, Mass.; Coos Bay, Ore.; Iowa City, Iowa, in *Time*, November

14, 1977, and the article "Why American Education is Failing," *Reader's Digest*, January, 1978, is that schools, and not just the big city schools, are not doing the job they should. American education in the '70's according to these writers is in deep trouble. There are 25,300 high schools in the U.S., which enroll 19 million students and carry a million teachers on their payrolls. Public education will cost \$144 billion in 1977. This 152% increase over the 1960's is more than the country spends on national defense. The higher teacher's pay and the soaring costs per pupil coupled with tumbling test scores have caused Americans to become justifiably concerned about the decline and what seems to be the eventual fall of American education to complete mediocrity. *Time* writes, ". . . never have more Americans worried about whether they are getting their money's worth from the institutions that were once the symbol of the nation's dedication to democracy."

But what are American analysts and leaders going to do about this educational malaise? Can a system that is fathered by the American way of life really be corrected? Can the society which spawns the system and the failings of that society which cause the failures in the system correct the system?

Former Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz has headed a panel of experts that has spent two years studying the problem and has "concluded this fall that U.S. education has been 'off stride for ten years.'" President Carter in his campaign for the presidency called for a creation of a separate Cabinet-level Department of Education to help remedy the situation.

What, however, will a proliferation of federal departments do to correct the problem which exists at the grass-roots of American society and causes failures in our public systems of education?

What according to *Time* and other analysts are the most serious problems today?

The most serious problem is *declining performance!* Declining performance is at least the most noticeable symptom of the real problem. In spite of the advances made in textual teaching materials and audio-visual materials, today's students are more poorly equipped in basic skills than were their predecessors. Simply stated, this means that students who graduate from today's high schools cannot read, write, and cipher as they could have, if they had graduated from the high schools of the past. In addition, they lack the other basic study skills such as map reading and graph reading which they need in order to gather information. They depend almost entirely upon electronic gadgets and calculators and lack the ability to compute accurately the smallest column of figures in arithmetic classes. The average scores on the College Entrance Examination Board's Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) have been falling slowly but steadily since 1962. Verbal ability (ability to read, write, and speak correctly) has fallen by 10% while average math skills have declined by 6%. Despite the infusion of vast sums of money and technological skills into education, the number of high achievers on SAT tests (those scoring

over 600 on a 200-800 scale) has been dropping. Graduates, who claim they are illiterate after thirteen years of schooling, have taken school boards to court. This has been emphatically dramatized in the last year in the State of Florida where graduates claim they are functionally illiterate. Colleges complain of entering freshmen who read at the sixth grade level.

Other indictments, which indicate the deviant pre-occupations of the American student, are rising violence and mounting absenteeism. The problems caused by the student are compounded by the teachers who band into unions and through strikes, cause school shut-downs.

James Fenimore Cooper writing "On the Disadvantages of a Democracy" pessimistically, but correctly, said a century ago at the outset of the American experiment, "The tendency of democracies is, in all things, to mediocrity, since the tastes, knowledge, and principles of the majority form the tribunal of appeal."

Although optimistic educational reformers want to think Cooper was wrong and believe that the U.S. Commissioner of Education, Ernest Boyer, is correct when he sees and applauds "a new commitment to excellence in education," I personally have no such faith in the American educational enterprise at the public school level.

Reformed Christians in America have for the past century realized the need in America for excellent schools where the demands of the covenant may be realized in all areas of instruction. Such excellence places great responsibility upon the Christian school teacher and upon the parents. This may mean that our teachers will have to work extra hard so that they will not be swept along with the proneness which is in their own nature and in the nature of their students to mediocrity. We are in a certain sense products of our age.

In a day when the schools of America are hearing a call from the conservatives to "return to the basics" and progressive forces refuse to "mandate students to march through an educational maze," Reformed Christians, who maintain distinctively Christian schools, must resist the inevitable tide of mediocrity.

The vigilance we need as Christians in being perfect is epitomized for us in the Word of God. Jehovah God calls His believing children to perfection so that they will be thoroughly fitted unto every good work. There is a sense in which each of us must go "on unto perfection or completeness" in our day to day tasks as well as in our spiritual life of sanctification. In this way, we can be thoroughly perfect in every good work.

God does not call us to mediocrity! (cf. Matt. 5:48)

God calls us to resist the inroads of mediocrity!

There is an ultimate standard that urges us to excellency!

C. S. LEWIS ON THE "DEMOCRATIC" DESTRUCTION OF EDUCATION

C. S. Lewis once analyzed this "decline of excellence" in the schools which Miss Lubbers so aptly describes. In his own inimitable way he explained it as a high priority aim of the Devil:

The basic principle of the new education is to be that dunces and idlers must not be made to feel inferior to intelligent and industrious students. That would be "undemocratic." These differences between the pupils — for they are obviously and nakedly *individual* differences — must be disguised. This can be done on various levels. At universities, examinations must be framed so that nearly all the students get good marks. Entrance examinations must be framed so that all, or nearly all, citizens can go to universities, whether they have any power (or wish) to profit by higher education or not. At schools the children who are too stupid or lazy to learn languages and mathematics and elementary science can be set to doing the things that children used to do in their spare time. Let them, for example, make mud-pies and call it modelling. But all the time there must be no faintest hint that they are inferior to the children who are at work. Whatever nonsense they are engaged in must have — I believe the English already use the phrase — "parity of esteem." An even more drastic scheme is not impossible. Children who are fit to proceed to a higher class may be artificially kept back, because the others would get a *trauma* . . . by being left behind. The bright pupil thus remains democratically fettered to his own age group throughout his school career, and the boy who would be capable of tackling Aeschylus or Dante sits listening to his coeval's attempts to spell out A CAT SAT ON THE MAT.

In a word, we may reasonably hope for the virtual abolition of education when *I'm as good as you* has fully had its way. All incentives to learn and all penalties for not learning will vanish. The few who might want to learn will be prevented; who are they to overtop their fellows? And anyway the teachers — or should I say, nurses? — will be far too busy reassuring the dunces and patting them on the back to waste any time on real teaching. We [Lewis was expressing the argument of the Devil shall no longer have to plan and toil to spread imperturbable conceit and incurable ignorance among men. The little vermin will do it for us.

Of course this would not follow unless all education became state education. But it will. That is part of the same movement. Penal taxes, designed for that purpose are liquidating the Middle Class, the class who were prepared to save and spend and make sacrifices in order to have their children privately educated. The re-

moval of this class, besides linking up with the abolition of education, is, fortunately, an inevitable effect of the spirit that says "I'm as good as you."

* * * *

As an English politician remarked not long ago, "A democracy does not want great men."

* * * *

For "democracy" or the "democratic spirit" (diabolical sense) leads to a nation without great men, a nation mainly of subliterates, morally flaccid from lack of discipline in youth, full of the cocksureness which flattery breeds on ignorance, and soft from lifelong pampering. And that is what Hell wishes every democratic people to be. For when such a nation meets in conflict a nation where children have been made to work at school, where talent is placed in high posts, and where the ignorant mass are allowed no say at all in public affairs, only one result is possible.

One democracy was surprised lately when it found that Russia had got ahead of it in science. What a delicious specimen of human blindness! If the whole tendency of their society is opposed to every sort of excellence, why did they expect their scientists to excel?

From Screwtape Proposes a Toast and Other Pieces, pp. 22-25.

PETER DE JONG

The Ministers of Petty Falls

WATSON GROEN

Although the relationship between neighboring churches becomes more complicated than it used to be because of increasing differences of faith and practice between them, Rev. Watson Groen's sharp observations about the situation in our churches' center forty-seven years ago may interest our readers and many of his suggestions for correction are still valid.

The city of Petty Falls sits astride the Petty River at a point nearly forty miles from the outlet of that river into the Inland Sea. The founders of the city were evidently not given to exaggeration, or they would have called their river the Great River and their city Great Falls. Instead, they were very humble and named their river the Petty River and their city Petty Falls. Nevertheless, the river carries a splendid burden of water throughout the year and the city has

grown to be so large and prosperous that its newspapers can speak of a metropolitan area.

I visited this city last June, of all months the most delightful to spend there. The luxuriant foliage and flowers, the blue skies, and the pleasant sunshine atone during June for other less pleasant features, namely, that the buildings are begrimed by the smoke of many winters, that the streets are narrow, and that traffic regulations are evidently devised by some fussy old lady.

Petty Falls is a city of churches. My own denomination is represented there; more strongly, in fact, than any other Protestant denomination. On Sundays I was glad to worship with my own people, to behold their fine churches and equipment, to be seated among the attentive worshipers who thronged the churches, and to hear ministers who according to their own talent and personality rightly divided the Word of God. From all appearances I had reason to suppose that no happier or more contented groups of Christians could be found than these same churches.

What Do You Think of Our Minister?

However, invariably after I had attended the services, one of the members would ask me: "What do you think of our minister?"

It did not take me long to realize that folks in Petty Falls think and speak of their ministers very freely, but rarely charitably. I noticed that the ministers were classified into three groups: those that draw the crowds, those that hold their own, and those that are no good. Therefore, when anyone would ask me: "What do you think of our minister?", I could tell by the expression on the face of the inquirer and by the tone of voice in which the question was uttered, what he himself thought of his minister. I discovered that very few ministers are drawing the crowds, that most of the ministers in Petty Falls are merely holding their own, and that a rather sizable minority are "no good." Never had I seen a more woe-begone expression than that on the face of the person whose minister happened to be "no good." Shame, disgust, and anger were evidently vying with each other for control over the soul.

Undoubtedly my reader will at this point ask me: "But did you not a moment ago write that the churches were filled by attentive audiences? How, then, can there be ministers who are not drawing the crowds?"

Be patient, gentle reader. The criterion by which ministers are judged is their success at drawing crowds to their evening services. Nearly all the churches of my denomination in Petty Falls have at the morning worship congregations that tax the seating capacities of the buildings; but only a small number have capacity crowds in the evening. The less popular ministers are deserted by their own people who help fill the churches of those who are drawing the crowds.

No wonder that I earnestly sought to discover what made one minister to be an attraction, while his colleague in a neighboring church was abandoned

even by his own people. Therefore, when some one inquired: "What do you think of our minister?" I usually responded with this other question: "What do you think of him?"

The Anvil Chorus

The answers that I received were very frankly given. I stood amazed at the free and easy way in which the people of Petty Falls spoke of their ministers. As I pondered over the answers, I noted a very peculiar fact. The people whose ministers were drawing the crowds were very loud in proclaiming the praises of their ministers, but were unable to tell me definitely why they should be popular. On the other hand, the folk whose ministers belonged to the two other classes, were able very definitely to place their fingers on the faults of their ministers. How strange! When a minister is riding the wave of popularity, people do not take time to appreciate his talent; but when the wave recedes people can at once point out the reason for disfavor.

Let me tell you the faults that people in Petty Falls found with their own ministers. Here they are:

Our minister has very evidently never experienced the things whereof he is preaching.

Our minister is unable to put his theology into the language that the twentieth century can understand.

Our minister cannot get along with the young people.

Our minister has been with us too long. We are tired of seeing the same old face and figure on the pulpit each Sunday. We want a young man.

Our minister is great for going fishing and for telling a story; but on the pulpit he dispenses milk and water. We must go elsewhere for a square meal. Too bad, for he is a nice fellow.

Our minister cannot take advice. Poor man! If he'd but listen to what people are telling him, he'd succeed.

Our minister is as awkward as an ox. His appearance and posture on the pulpit are terribly offensive.

Our minister is a bookworm. His sermons are too deep and too obscure. We never know what he is talking about.

Our minister lacks ability to lead.

Our minister is not nearly as good as our old one.

If our minister would get out more and mix with the people everything would be fine.

Such things our folks in Petty Falls were saying last June of their ministers. Undoubtedly you, my reader, are saying: "What a poor set of preachers must be holding forth there!" Again I say: "Be patient." I know these ministers to be as fine as any. Not one of them claims perfection, and very likely some of the criticisms mentioned above are to the point. I firmly believe that several of the ministers are conscious of their faults and are doing their best to overcome them.

However, some of the above criticisms are positively malicious and could have been uttered only by those whose spiritual vision is biased.

Why Do People Criticize Ministers Harshly?

What lies at the root of this uncharitable criticism? My impression last June was that the churches of my fellowship were running a most unholy competition with each other; and that ministers and church members were adapting themselves to this fact. One of the preachers told me that on Sunday evenings he was preaching a type of sermons that he himself did not desire, simply because he had to meet competition. Years ago, when I happened to be in Petty Falls, an older generation of preachers used to speak of competition between churches as a wicked thing, a menace to be fought against. Today, that which was once considered a menace has been accepted as the normal condition of the church. The larger purposes of the church have been forgotten; and the poor minister instead of working to save souls, is working hard to save his hide. To put it less crudely, he is putting forth every effort to bid for the favor of the people against another minister who is putting forth a similar effort in a church of the same denomination only a few city blocks away. This competition has been so completely accepted as the normal state that when lately churches in Petty Falls have called ministers, they sought to fortify their call-letters by the post-script: "Competition is keen." This condition of rivalry is, in my opinion, the root of all the severe criticisms to which the ministers in Petty Falls are subjected.

Ministers in Unenviable Positions

No wonder that churches in that city at times experience difficulty in obtaining ministers. What preacher will care to serve where his energies will be consumed chiefly by competitive efforts? Even the very best minister has too little mental or physical strength to waste the same in unholy rivalry. Moreover, he needs the good will of the members of his church in order to do his best work. How can he expect this good will in a church obsessed with the competitive idea and consisting of members who have so little loyalty that they will desert their minister to follow the popular idol? Again, the minister knows that if on Sunday evenings the pews are not occupied, the fault will be placed at his door. As a result, he loses his poise and optimism. He becomes sullen and vindictive toward his congregation. His sermons become harsh, and on the pulpit he assumes the bearing of one who champions a lost cause. Certainly the buoyancy, hopefulness, cheerfulness, and kindness that should characterize Christian preaching, cannot exist with anyone who knows that he is losing out.

On the other hand, there can be nothing desirable about the life of one who draws the crowds. In fact, I consider him to be an exceptionally pitiable object. Very often those riding the high tide of popularity are in that position through no effort of their own.

Possessing no outstanding talent, they at the beginning of their pastorates by their newness or differentness happen to catch the popular fancy.

This popularity is exceedingly sweet; and a man must possess more than ordinary self-control to conquer the craving for more popularity. Against his own better judgment he will put forth every effort to retain the favor of the people. Usually, however, by the end of the second year the popular minister has exhausted his resources, and the people have relegated him to the realm of flat tires. Members of his church criticize him severely, and his ministry becomes an agony. Occasionally popularity remains longer than two years. There are the very exceptional cases of men who possess such brilliancy that they remain popular perennially, though they never seek popular favor. Others possess greater resourcefulness than conscience.

Theatrical pulpit habits and wierd mannerisms are affected. Lurid advertisement in newspapers is purchased. Some ministers go to the extent of creating discord on some point of doctrine and of disrupting denominational peace. Others have drawn the spotlight to themselves by some spectacular incident such as being kidnapped or being put in jail. I know that Petty Falls has become very unpleasantly familiar with these tactics in one form or another. However, the tactics employed by ministers to manufacture popularity sooner or later become the weapons whereby they destroy their own usefulness as ministers of Jesus Christ. Therefore, I repeat that I pity the popular minister more than the one who has never tasted the stultifying sweetness of popular favor.

Thus most disagreeable situations are created by submission to church rivalry. Due to competition false standards are raised for excellency in the ministry. No minister can be more certain of bitter grief than he who finds himself judged according to these standards. Therefore the lot for a minister in Petty Falls is far from enviable.

The Remedy

What remedy should I suggest?

Nothing less than the complete extermination of the competitive idea out of the life of the church. There is no more need of competition between the churches of Petty Falls than there is of competition between the Christian schools of that city. Each church and each minister ought to fulfil certain definite needs which not another church or minister in the city can fulfil. Unless they are absolutely positive that they are supplying a definite need in that city, they have no business there. One of the chief reasons for keen competition between churches is the fact that certain communities are over-churched. Another cause is that poor judgment has been exercised in fixing the location of churches. As a result two or more churches are trying to do what one church could accomplish by itself.

I firmly believe that one large congregation will be productive of more spiritual good than two or more little churches that fritter away their energies

in loveless rivalry. I am bitterly opposed to allowing ministers to risk their reputations and their peace of heart and mind in that silly game! In localities where the success of one church means the decline of the other, there is one church too many. The two should unite and form a single strong church. Especially is this the case in localities where years ago, due to the language problem, a group of the more Americanized established a church within the shadow of the mother church. Today the mother may be as fully Americanized as the daughter. Why shall the two now continue to exist side by side in unholy rivalry? In some cases the mother church has a large building with room to spare at all of the services, while the daughter has a small building, far too small for its membership. The union of such churches would remove much of the rivalry and also much of the criticism of the ministers. There would, at any rate, be fewer ministers to criticize. Moreover, each minister and each church would have the satisfaction of fulfilling a definite need.

There are, however, in Petty Falls communities so populous of folk of my own faith that two or more churches, in close proximity to each other, are needed to supply properly the spiritual needs. Sad to say, even there is rivalry! With plenty of elbow room for all the churches and ministers to put forth all energies into constructive operations, the jealous fear is expressed that the neighboring church may have a better minister and that the neighboring minister may enjoy larger congregations on Sunday evenings. What bosh!

A Word to the Ministers

This I suggest to the ministers of Petty Falls. When you are preparing your sermons forget for the moment that there are any other ministers in your vicinity. Preach to your own people as you know their needs. Banish all sensationalism; and substitute for this a charm and kindness of character that will make you the beloved of your people. Seek the love of the young people and be to them a guide, a friend, and a father. Make the most of the talent God has entrusted to you. If you have money wherewith to advertise your church in newspapers, do so that the emphasis will rest not on you but on Christ whose ambassador you are. Whenever criticism of your work is brought to your attention, do not act like a martyr. No matter how unfair the criticism may be, it may contain a germ of truth. Take this truth to heart, and silence the critic by your sincere efforts to improve yourselves. Doing these things and others like them, you will experience that from your hearts and from your faces will be driven the sourness and melancholy that unholy competition has impressed on you. Your ministry will prove delightful. You will discover that your churches are growing and that a pleasant spirit of harmony prevails among the people. At the same time each one of you will be pleased to learn that his colleague in the neighboring church is preaching to large congregations. All of you will rejoice that prosperity is everywhere abroad among the churches and that the cause of Christ is advancing.

A Word to the Members

I have certain suggestions to our people in Petty Falls. Your minister wishes to find you in a receptive mood and not with prejudice against him. He may justly entertain this wish, because when you called him, you wrote: "Come over and help us." Your minister responded to your appeal; and now you must give him every chance to help you. You should be eager to derive every spiritual benefit that your pastor's ministry can provide for you. This receptive attitude is impossible with an eye to the fact that competition is keen.

In that case you will experience the bitterness of rivalry between churches. Even should you succeed in obtaining as your minister one who is a popular idol, you will become spiritually cold and sterile amidst all the seeming prosperity. You and your minister will never learn to love one another, unless your minister forgets about his popularity and you forget about that keen competition. He is there to be of help to you. Avail yourselves of his services as often as health and circumstances permit. Cooperate with him in whatever he undertakes to be of service to you. Let prayers and words of encouragement take the place of loveless criticism. Such an attitude of receptivity and helpfulness will prove a blessing.

Bear also this in mind! No man has all the characteristics of a perfect minister. Every member knows this to be a fact, but ignores it consistently. He demands and expects perfection. He becomes disappointed and even angry when after some familiarity the minister's faults and shortcomings are apparent. The member punishes the minister by attending services elsewhere. How foolish! Suppose that a man happens to marry a woman who cannot cook or bake well. She may have an attractive personality and appearance, and she may be ever so loving a mother and faithful a housewife; but she fails to qualify at the kitchen range. Will the husband therefore be justified in going to his brother's house for dinner each day because his brother's wife happens to be a better cook? This would be most distasteful to the sister-in-law and most painful to the wife.

So also it should be absurd for a man to worship in his brother's church, simply because the brother's minister happens to be more talented in certain ways. No true minister is pleased when his church is thronged with people who should be worshipping in their own churches; and most ministers feel painfully hurt when their people desert them.

What should a man do if his minister displays certain glaring faults and shortcomings? He should learn a thing or two of the faithful husband whose wife is a poor cook. This man bravely and kindly wades through the tough steaks, the burned biscuits, and the leathery pie-crust to the very detriment of his digestive organs, and speaks words of encouragement and appreciation after every meal. He knows that such treatment will inspire his wife to improvement. Moreover, love can make even weak coffee tasty. So love of a man to his minister will render

insipid preaching tasty. It is within the power of every congregation to inspire a minister to constant improvement. Loving loyalty on the part of the minister and of the church can make any ministry successful.

When I Visit Petty Falls Again

I hope that I shall be permitted to visit the city of Petty Falls again. Whether this visit be in June or in January, only one thing will interest me above anything else. I shall be eager to worship with my own people in their beautiful churches. I know I shall enjoy the prayers, the songs and the preaching. However, I shall be greatly disappointed if none of my old friends approach me saying: "What do you think of our minister?" I cannot tell you how pleased I will be, if on the face and in the voice of each inquirer I read sincere joy at the possession of a man of God who ministers daily to the needs of his flock. At every hand I hope to hear sentiments of loyalty and love toward the minister whom Christ has sent. Then I shall know that competition is a thing of the past, that ministers are no longer worried about empty pews on Sunday evenings or about each other's popularity. They are standing fully prepared to preach the gospel without respect of persons, and to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. ●

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imprecatory prayers

STEPHEN R. SPENCER

That the imprecations of the wicked by the godly in Scripture present a problem to the Christian has been a common observation, most recently made by Rev. Neal Plantinga in *Today*, January 25 and 26. First impressions are often deceiving, however, and we do well to take another, more careful look at that which at first glance surprises us.

We must remind ourselves of some basic principles before proceeding further. First, Scripture is the inerrant Word of God to man. It comes to man with all the authority of the Holy One of Israel, Sovereign

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over all the universe. Many may not appeal to anything else. Scripture is our final authority.

Second, standards for morality and ethical behavior come from God, who creates them. There is no standard of right and wrong outside of and above God to which He Himself is responsible or according to which He acts. The good is good because God does it, rather than God doing the good because it is good.

Taken together, these two principles cannot allow man to stand in moral judgment over that which Scripture commends or commands.

Perhaps it is granted that the above principles are true, but it is argued that the imprecations in Scripture are not commanded or commended. Rather they are in Scripture as warnings to us of that which we should avoid. After all, are they not at odds with the frequent exhortation to love our enemies? Are they not at odds with the character of God and the conduct of Christ? These are legitimate questions and demand careful answers.

It must first be noted that these imprecations have their basis in the jealousy of the godly for the honor of Jehovah and His cause. In Nehemiah 4, the Samaritans were attempting to impede the work of the Jews as they rebuilt the wall in response to God's command. They thus were opposing God. Nehemiah desires that God's will be done and the city restored. He utters his prayer not because the Samaritans annoyed him or even merely because they opposed him, but rather they had set themselves against the program of God.

David utters Psalm 109 for the same basic reason. The enemies were opposing God's anointed King and thus had set themselves against God. Moreover, as verses 16-18 indicate, the enemies were men of wickedness and unrighteousness, persecuting the afflicted and the needy and delighting in cursing rather than blessing.

The expressed concern of the godly for God's honor and program points out again that God is holy and righteous and just as well as loving, gracious, and merciful. The grace of God in bearing long-sufferingly with the wicked does not remove His right to punish their sin thoroughly at any time. God owes mercy to no one.

The same God who desires that the wicked turn from his way and live also hates all who do iniquity (Psalm 5:6), hates the one who does violence (Psalm 11:5), and hates the false witness and the one who spreads strife (Proverbs 6:16). He will repay those who hate Him (Deuteronomy 7:10), will inflict curses on those who hate His people (Deuteronomy 30:7), and brings wrath upon those who help the wicked and who love those who hate the Lord (II Chronicles 19:2). Yet Christ gave God as the example of One who is kind and good to evil men (Matthew 6:43-45 and Luke 6:26-37). Obviously, Christ did not find these two courses of action to be contradictory or incompatible.

It is said that Ezekiel 18:23 is a Christ-like prayer, which we readily grant. Yet Christ also condemned Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum (Luke 10:12-15) and the Scribes and Pharisees (Luke 11:27-52). He Who sent the seventy out as lambs, without swords (Luke 10:3, 4), later sent out the twelve with the exhortation to take a sword even if it required selling ones cloak to obtain it. Obviously, He knew no incompatibility in these actions. We would do well to see no incompatibility in them either. Love for God and His righteousness must give definition to love for one's enemies. ●

twisting scripture
to put
WOMEN IN OFFICE



REV. JELLE TUINGA

It happens time and again. In their zeal to promote the cause of women in ecclesiastical office, the proponents of this view often fall for argumentation that is weak and sensational, with little apparent regard for sound scriptural interpretation and exegesis. Such arguments may appear plausible to those who are not given to thinking, but serious students will soon detect their shallowness.

An example appeared recently in the *Reformed Journal*. Marcienne Rienstra in the course of an article wrote:

Why are the two injunctions of Paul telling women to keep silence and learn in submission turned into *key* texts for the interpretation of *all* scriptural teaching and seen as timeless commands rooted in creation order; while at the same time, other commands of our Lord — the

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command to wash each other's feet, or to go on missionary journeys with only a staff, or to fast secretly — are relegated to another age and taken as strictly optional?

Apart from some misrepresentation and an obvious over-statement of the case, I submit that this type of argumentation is really not even worthy of serious refutation. No attempt whatsoever is made to read (let alone understand) the actual words of these various injunctions *in their specific contexts*. They are simply lumped together in one category.

But anyone who takes the time to read passages in their historical setting must observe an obvious difference between them. Although we no longer walk along dusty Palestinian roads in sandals and our mission work is not limited to Palestine and the lost house of Israel, foot-washing and the holy kiss are not therefore "relegated to another age and taken as strictly optional." They remain in force today, but in a different form. The form changes, the norm abides. To confuse the two is inexcusable.

Paul's admonitions regarding the behavior of women in the churches deal not with changing applications but with fundamental principles. In them Paul does not just talk about "what is proper" (as he does with regard to the veil, I Cor. 11:13) or about local customs which change from place to place and from age to age, but he goes back to the very beginning of creation and the fall into sin! That's not subject to historical change. And that is the point which we must see. Let me quote from the Postscript by the Rev. P. M. Jonker found in the 1973 *Acts of Synod*:

It is beyond doubt that many of the instructions or commands given regarding the behavior of men and women have to be understood in the light of the historical-cultural situation in which the New Testament church had its place, and which for that reason are not *in the same way* (Ital., J.T.) binding for the church of all ages.

A difficulty arises, however, when the apostle Paul makes reference to the order of creation (I Tim. 2:13), to what the law says (I Cor. 14:34), and to the fact that woman was the first who fell in Transgression (I Tim. 2:14). Paul concludes from these references that the woman ought to accept a place of submissiveness within the church.

I fail to see that this reference to God's revelation in the Old Testament can be considered as time-conditioned, i.e., as being related to the social structure of the time in which Paul lived and in which the early church had to find its place (p. 589).

More need not be said. The fact that this crucial point is often ignored altogether by proponents of women office-bearers, and that not one has yet appeared to answer this objection to putting women in office, tells me that it is indeed the big hurdle in the way of female elders in the church. ●

OUR QUESTION



REV. HARLAN G. VANDEN EINDE

Rev. Harlan G. Vanden Einde is pastor of the Oakdale Park Christian Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan. All questions for this department are to be sent directly to his address:

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This department is *for everyone*. No signatures are required and no names will be published. Your questions will be gladly received and answered as promptly as possible.

From a Michigan reader comes a rather lengthy question that has to do with our attitude toward "parachurch groups." I quote some parts of the letter from which the question is taken: "I am wondering, what does the Bible say in regards to parachurch organizations? How would they relate to the nature of the local church, and its operation? . . . What kind of biblical evidence is there to support parachurch groups?"

I will not attempt, in the space allotted me here, to say all that could be said in evaluation of parachurch groups. The term "parachurch" is relatively new among us, though the problem has a long history. Almost a year ago, beginning with the June 10, 1977 issue of *The Banner*, Dr. James A. De Jong, of the theological department of Dordt College, authored a series of four two-page articles on this subject. You will find it very helpful, if you still have those copies, to read these four articles which give a well-defined and well-balanced view of this subject. My comments have been influenced by what Dr. De Jong wrote.

First of all, it is important to define the term. "Para" is a Greek word, which, when used as a prefix, means "beside, near, with, by the side of." When used as a prefix with the word "church," therefore, it refers to groups or organizations that exist along side of the church, presumably to compliment the church's task, but sometimes viewed as competitors of the church.

To ask: "What does the Bible say in regards to parachurch organizations?" is to ask a question that the Bible does not answer, at least not in those terms. We need to hear what the Bible says about the

church, and then make a judgment about these organizations now designated as "parachurch."

The church is not just a loose-knit gathering of people who happen to like one another and therefore come together periodically for worship and/or service. Whatever else ought to be said about the church, the Bible speaks clearly of the church as the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:27), and the word used most frequently in the New Testament for "church" comes from a verb meaning "to call out." Christ has "called out" from fallen humanity a people who make up His body, including those who confess Him as their Savior and Lord, and who acknowledge Him as their "Head."

A valuable distinction that has been made between the church as institute and the church as organism, ought to be helpful to us as we discuss this matter. By the church as institute, we mean that visible church as it comes to expression in the offices, in the administration of the Word and sacraments, and in a certain form of church government. By the church as organism, we mean that visible church as it comes to expression in the communion of believers, in their communal life and profession, and in their common opposition to the world. This is the framework from which Dr. De Jong evaluates parachurch groups in his articles too. And it appears to me to be very helpful.

If a parachurch group seeks to replace or by-pass the church, then it ceases to be "parachurch," and becomes "antichurch." Such a group must be opposed, for Christ is Head of His church in a unique way and has chosen to exercise the keys of the Kingdom through the government of the church. If the parachurch group is truly "parachurch," that is, consisting of Christians who are functioning in common cause as part of the organism of the church, then the problem is greatly lessened.

The greatest difficulty that I have with these groups that fit into the definition of "parachurch" is in their failure to properly recognize authority and responsibility. Whether the church be viewed from either the perspective of institute or organism, there is One from Whom all authority is derived, and to whom all are accountable or responsible, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ. He exercises that authority through and delegates that responsibility to the officers of the church. Regarding those organizations that exist "along side of" the church, the parachurch groups, from whence do they derive their authority, and to whom are they responsible? Though I realize that Scripture says, "He that is not against us is for us" (Mark 9:40), peoples' accountability to those to whom Christ entrusted the keys of the Kingdom is still important.

Perhaps the real question we ought to ask ourselves is this: why have these parachurch groups arisen in the first place? Especially those so vigorously engaged in the work of evangelism? It is because the church has not been diligent and faithful to its calling? If so, then we ought to take an evaluative look at what the church is doing and is not

doing. Where the church is doing its work and answering its calling faithfully, the need for the parachurch group will diminish. At the very least, the parachurch groups ought to be working in very close harmony with and as a compliment to the church. For any part of the body of Christ to do otherwise is to fracture the body, if not to be competitive with it. Notwithstanding these problems, let us pray that such groups may enhance our Christian life, and serve the purpose of assisting the church in its ministry. They may never serve as substitutes for the church.

Meditation

THE RISEN SAVIOR AND THE MARY MAGDALENES



REV. JOHN BLANKESPOOR

Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God.
John 20:17

Who in the church does not know Mary Magdalene? Who is not acquainted with her history as she stood near the empty tomb and as the Lord revealed Himself to her in His own peculiar manner? And who cannot understand her when she wanted to embrace the Lord's feet?

We all know her. Why? Because we know this history? Yes, but above all because we are so much like Mary.

The Scriptures tell us that Jesus revealed Himself at least ten times after the resurrection. Each one of these manifestations was unique, each one revealing something special and different of the risen and victorious Lord of the church. In each case the setting was different, usually the people were different, and surely the purpose was to some extent different. To the Emmaus travelers He revealed that He had to suf-

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fer and die as Savior to fulfill the Scriptures. To the fisherman He showed that He was their risen Savior, who controlled all things, even the fish in the sea. There was also a definite purpose in this appearance to Mary Magdalene.

Mary was a woman. She appears to have been sentimental and affectionate. Add to this the fact that at one time she had been marvelously delivered from seven devils. Could she possibly forget this gracious work of Jesus? Never! Ever since, her life has been devoted to the Lord. She, with others, followed Him most of the time and cared for His earthly needs. That was her joy. It was her life to be with Jesus, to serve Him in love. If only she could see Him and hear His gracious voice! Possibly she didn't understand too much of His teachings, surely not of the more profound "sermons." But that didn't matter too much, if only she could be with Him. Without this service and physical nearness she was lost.

This Mary now appeared at the empty tomb. A sad scene it was. She cried, literally, with unrestrained sobbing; she cried her heart out. The very sight of angels didn't affect her. Her eyes even failed to recognize Jesus as He stood behind her. She continued crying. Although in heaven there was great joy, with millions of angels singing, here in the garden was great sadness! What a contrast!

Then came the moment when Jesus called her by name. There was only one word in response, "Rabboni." Turning around and recognizing Him she wanted literally to hug His feet. But that she was strictly forbidden to do.

Why? What was Mary's one big mistake? Her error was that she wanted a Jesus merely for this life. At another time women were allowed to touch Him. That He is Savior for body and *soul*, for this life and for eternity she failed to see. Surely she was one of His own. But she didn't discern the spiritual things here. She saw only natural things. The meaning of the resurrection she did not yet see. She wanted a Savior whom she could touch and *see*. Didn't the two sisters of Bethany have the same conception of the Messiah? With them a Savior far away in Perea meant little when their brother was dying. He must be near them physically.

Often we are no different, are we? Don't such thoughts appeal to us, a Savior literally near us and with us? Wouldn't it be wonderful if He would preach for us occasionally, speak over the radio and T.V. net-works? A Savior for this life, to help us in our physical needs, is the kind of Savior in which all men are interested. One who can help us when we are in the hospital, who can deliver our dear ones from the power of death, who can solve our problems, and even give us bread or pay checks without our working for them. Wonderful! But what about our souls, our sins and the time when we must die? The Mary Magdalenes don't seem to think that far. They are Christians, but their faith is still mixed with misunderstanding and unbelief. Mary really wanted a Savior who would perpetuate this earthly existence. How she wept because the dead body, the corpse of her Master

apparently was taken away! Unbelief never comes to the resurrection!!!

* * * *

In His answer to her Jesus spoke about ascending to the Father. He was progressing. He would receive the Spirit and come back, and then with respect to His Godhead, majesty, grace and Spirit He would at no time and in no circumstances of life be absent from His people. As such a Savior He would be near and in the hearts and lives of those in need in China as well as in Africa, in the funeral home as well as in the hospital, He would strengthen covenant young people and protect them as the devil tried to seize them, and be with all who called upon Him and waged the battle of faith. Only as such a Savior would He be able to say, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." As a risen, *heavenly* Savior, He has the keys of death and hell.

Mary wanted to pull Him back, keep Him in this life. But no, He must progress, He must ascend. The work of the kingdom must be established, not by a Savior who is physically near a few of His own, but by One who through the Spirit and Word works and lives in the hearts and lives of all His children.

That kind of Savior we need. One who is at *no time* absent from us. One who is with us today, but also tomorrow, with us and in us in times of joy, but also in times of sorrow, in trying times and when we one by one go through the valley of death. We may believe that in the Spirit, through the Word He is literally right next to us, with us, and in us. This is real! What a tremendous truth!

"Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father," Jesus said to her. This implied that when He has ascended she might embrace Him, yes, that then she should do so.

That risen Savior, who today is Lord of Lords and King of Kings we should embrace. Don't our confessions give this beautiful description of faith, that we with faith embrace Him, like we embrace a dear one? In doing so we know that He is always with us, with His grace and majesty. What a promise! And He will never leave us.

How did the Lord make all this known to Mary? How did He make this plain to her? Not by His appearance, but by His voice. Likely this means that we, too, can receive and know Him as the spiritual, heavenly Savior, not by sight, but by the *hearing of the Word*. To Mary and the disciples the resurrection Gospel was brought by the Word. Sight confirmed it, but hearing made it known to them. Today we have only the hearing, which is sufficient. To those that are obedient to the Word He gives the Spirit of the risen Christ in their hearts.

Such people never die. The risen Savior is and always will be in and with them. How much more He was than what Mary sought! How much more He is and will be, than what we can imagine Him to be!

Lutheran help in our problems concerning the Bible

PETER DE JONG

Information and advice of someone who has traversed an unfamiliar road can be extremely helpful to those who follow. At one point in our last summer's vacation we left the highway near the summit of Colorado's La Veta Pass and despite threatening weather drove many miles over a back road unmarked on many of the maps. We would never have ventured onto that back road to the Royal Gorge and we would have missed some exciting scenery if we had not met a traveler the night before who had driven that route and told us about it.

Reports of travelers who have been over the road ahead of us can give the same kind help in many other areas of our lives which are much more important than the routes we choose for our vacation trips. Today we, like many other traditionally Bible-believing churches, are being troubled and confused by questions concerning the Bible. We may find much important and needed help toward getting out of these troubles and removing the confusion if we will listen to and read what some of our Missouri Lutheran brethren are saying and writing as a result of their controversy about these matters.

Dr. Robert Preus' Lecture

Last October 20 a number of us had the opportunity to get such first-hand information and help when the Reformed Fellowship arranged for Dr. Robert Preus to speak at the Oakdale Park Church (Grand Rapids).

Robert Preus is the younger brother of the by-now well-known conservative president of the Missouri Synod denomination, Dr. J. O. A. Preus. Robert taught for a number of years at Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis, during the time when the Liberals (the self-styled "Moderates") were taking over that 800-student school. When 40 professors and most of the student body staged a mass walk-out to protest against the conservative effort to clean the Liberalism out of the school, Robert Preus was one of the few professors who remained, became its president and is now president of the denomination's other Concordia Theological Seminary at Ft. Wayne, Indiana. Kurt Marquart's recent book about that struggle, *Anatomy of an Explosion*, calls him "the major figure among Missouri's valiant defenders of

the faith . . . whose 1955 vindication of *The Inspiration of Scripture* had done much to rally the demoralized conservatives" (p. 111).

Out of his long familiarity with the variety and details of the Liberal-Conservative controversy Dr. Preus spoke clearly and simply about: "The Infallibility of Scripture." (He (1) directed attention to some biblical rules for properly reading the Bible, then (2) showed how modern historical criticism at every point violates these biblical rules of interpretation, and concluded with some observations on (3) how the Missouri Synod has struggled with this matter.

The Bible Teaches Us How to Read the Bible

Following the Reformation's principle of not only speaking about the Bible, but of grounding his own position upon it, Dr. Preus began by showing the rules for Bible study which the Bible lays down in its own most complete statement about itself, II Timothy 3:15-17. There the Apostle Paul urged Timothy and other pastors to remain with what he had taught them of Christ and salvation, claiming for his teaching the same Divine authority which he acknowledged in the Old Testament Scriptures. The gospel of the Old and New Testament is one and the same. This first principle (of the unity and analogy of Scripture) the modern interpreters deny as they speak of different, contrasting "theologies."

This inspired Bible is "able" (or "powerful"; the Greek word is also the root of our word "dynamite") "to make wise to salvation." It does this "through faith in Christ Jesus." The Bible is able to do this because it is "inspired" or "God-breathed." Recall Isaiah's expression, "The mouth of the Lord has spoken it." Coming from God's mouth it is "profitable for doctrine," for "reproof," for "correction" where there is error, and for instruction in righteousness," for teaching us everything that pertains to right living. (The common slogan "Not doctrine but life" is ridiculous because "doctrine" is teaching for life.) God's Word, the Bible, is the only authority for our teaching.

The Conflict about Interpretation and the Missouri Experience

The "Historical Critical Method"

Much of the present confusion and controversy in various churches has arisen regarding the interpreting of the Bible. Many who profess to believe in the Divine authority of the Bible are denying this in the way in which they interpret it. The "historical critical method" which they use rejects every biblical principle of interpretation, ignoring the Bible's unity, declaring its prophecies impossible, really denying it to be the Word of God. It began about 200 years ago in the days of the "Enlightenment" and spread throughout Europe before it came to this continent.

Its Inroads in the Missouri Synod

The Missouri Synod's history parallels that of our own (Christian Reformed) churches. Coming from immigrant origins, both denominations were organ-

ized in the same year. They long tried to keep their old language, and they established and maintained their own schools. Doctrinal deviation came to Missouri in the 40's. When 20 years ago conflict arose at St. Louis regarding the Bible's inerrancy the Synod rebuked those who erred, but this did not settle the matter. The incoming historical critical approach insists that the Bible must be read like any other book and especially in the Biblical Theology department of the seminary scholars accepted this principle and largely abandoned the doctrine of the Bible's inerrancy.

The Church Gets Back on Course

When enough people, especially laymen, throughout the denomination became aware of what was happening they took corrective action, compelled the synod to reverse its course and to begin investigation of the St. Louis seminary, especially regarding the views being held and taught on the authority of the Bible. When 40 out of 45 faculty members, resenting that investigation, walked out to begin their independent seminary, the "historical critical method" was the central issue which occasioned that break.

Effect of the Controversy

Although the (2.8 million member) denomination through the controversy has lost perhaps a hundred liberal pastors, it continues to show numerical growth. The St. Louis seminary whose enrollment had dropped to about 160 students has returned to over 400 and the Ft. Wayne Seminary now has 450 students. The real importance of the development has been that the denomination, in the grace and inscrutable Providence of God, has returned to renewed loyalty to the Bible as God's Word and to its Reformed confessions. In God's economy this is bound to be a blessing to those churches and perhaps to others, including ours, also.

Marquart's Book, "Anatomy of an Explosion"

A more detailed acquaintance with this large denomination's remarkable return to Biblical and confessional orthodoxy is now available to any interested reader in the 150-page paperback book by Kurt Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion, Missouri in Lutheran Perspective*. (It can be obtained from the Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, at the unbelievably low price of \$1.00!) Dr. Robert Preus in his Foreword observes that the writer, who held a long pastorate in Australia when the controversy was going on (although he now teaches at Ft. Wayne), could describe the events more objectively than some more intimately involved might be able to do. Professor Marquart's occasionally expressed traditional Lutheran hostility toward Calvinists need not hinder us from reading his book with keen interest and profit.

The Denomination's History

To understand the recent Missouri history one

needs to take some account of its historic stand against a government enforced church union in Germany and the common rationalistic attack on the Scriptures. Unsparingly the writer shows how the churches here developed a narrow legalistic provincialism which might even go to the length of forbidding a pastor to pray with missionaries of another denomination. It was in reaction to this kind of narrowness that the denomination moved into ecumenical alliances with other Lutheran churches, and it was by that ecumenical route that confessional indifference and biblical criticism moved in to take over its leadership.

Karl Barth's Influence

Very significant in this development was the influence of Karl Barth. While Barth reacted against the old liberalism he too accepted higher criticism of the Bible and so really rejected its authority. The author compares the Barthian position with "being half-way down an inclined plane on roller-skates." It is "one in which no one could stay permanently" (p. 104).

Error Promoted by Compromise

Some of Marquart's most illuminating observations deal with the way in which Liberalism moved into the Missouri Synod by way of promoting compromise regarding the Bible rather than frontal attack on it. In Missouri circles the suggestion was common "that historical criticism was more wild-eyed and 'extreme' in the last century than now, and that therefore early Missouri's condemnations of critical scholarship do not apply to today's 'milder' variety."

Some European would-be evangelicals "tried to compromise or 'mediate' between the old doctrine, and the prevailing historical-critical approach. Verbal inspiration was given up in the delusion that in this way one could gain the upper hand over the newer criticism." In this situation "the main targets of Missouri's opposition to historical criticism" came to be "not the outright liberals but those would-be conservatives with their divided, half-believing and half-critical attitude to Holy Scripture" (pp. 38, 39). (Isn't this "Moderate" compromise policy the one that we in Christian Reformed circles are being urged to follow!)

An Issue that Cannot be Compromised

The author shows the impossibility of holding such a compromise policy on this issue. The "historical critical method" does not involve only certain techniques of study but it takes a radically different approach to the Bible. It "differs from traditional biblical scholarship in that it insists on treating the Bible not as unquestioned authority, but as one ancient book among others. All biblical statements are therefore open to challenge before the court of sovereign human reason. Historical criticism understands itself simply as the general scientific method applied to past events, namely history. This means that the

critic and his reason are judge and jury, while the Bible like all other ancient documents, is on trial whether as defendant or as witness; for even as a witness its credibility depends entirely on the findings of the critical 'court.' This situation, of course, represents a complete reversal of the classic roles of reason and Scripture in Lutheran theology. Under the new, critical regime, reason is master and Scripture is servant, whereas formerly it was the other way around. For this reason . . . 'using the historical-critical method with Lutheran presuppositions' is as futile and absurd . . . as eating ham with Jewish presuppositions!" "It is important to see that the uncompromising supremacy of 'scientific' human reason is not an excess or an abuse which can somehow be tempered. On the contrary, it is of the essence of the method; indeed it is its basic point" (pp. 113, 114).

Whether one, with the more radical critics thinks "that miracles cannot and do not happen," or with the less radical, leaves the question open does not really make much difference. "Both types of critics take for granted that reason must sit in judgment over the claims of the biblical criticism" (p. 115). Even "Moderates" on occasion admit "one cannot honestly practice historical criticism" (whether of the more or less radical kinds) "and be 'under the Scriptures' . . ." (p. 116).

"Contrary to the tiresome caricature, orthodoxy insists not on the Bible but on Jesus as the crucial watershed for faith" (p. 128). However, "once a man confesses Jesus as Lord, he cannot in principle reject what Jesus Himself teaches about the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments" (p. 129).

An Example of Marquart's Help in Our Problem

This book can be extremely useful to help us understand and deal with the liberal fallacies which had long become commonplace among these Lutherans but which are newer at least in their tolerated public expression in many of our church circles. One thinks, for example, of the article printed in the February 24 *Banner* under the title "I Had a Struggle."

In the churches' official paper a writer without even having to divulge his name was permitted to caricature and hold up to ridicule the churches' historic faith in creation, to promote the whole evolutionary view as supposed by "much scientific evidence" and as just as honoring to God as "the 'flash' method of creation," and to interpret away the details of the Fall, while still claiming that with this "hermeneutic" he "honors the Bible as God's holy, infallible Word" with "new light and understanding" and still believes the Bible's doctrine of "sin and the promise of the Redeemer . . . Jesus Christ the same — yesterday, today and forever."

Using a similar Lutheran example Marquart calls attention to the obvious nonsense of this argument: "How does one 'hear and take seriously as God's Word' what one has just called a mistake?" (p. 132).

He highlights the groundlessness of this surrender

to Evolution and its destructive effects in the churches:

Perhaps the most scandalous instance of uncritical deference being paid to secular superstitions was the craven cringe to evolution. This rather unholy sacred cow, now totally bereft of respectable intellectual foundation, has been passionately embraced as a mark of intellectual respectability and good taste in many if not most Lutheran institutions of higher learning. The cost was rarely considered, but has been apallingly high. Loetscher's *The Broadening Church*, describing the Presbyterian experience, does not exaggerate the impact of evolution:

Of course, the most radical implications of evolution were not immediately drawn, nor were they everywhere accepted, but the disquieting and unsettling effects of the new doctrine were soon felt even in the most conservative circles. Evolution's challenge to the creation narrative of Genesis was direct and immediate. The stimulus it gave to naturalistic developmental views of the Bible was soon apparent. Its implications for the traditional doctrines of the fall and sin and redemption were unmistakable. Was the Person of Christ to be excepted from the naturalistic processes of development? . . . Most ultimate of all was the threat of evolution to reduce the concepts of reality and truth themselves to sheer relativity.

With evolution came the historical-critical destruction of biblical authority, which in turn promotes what Sasse has called "the decay of the doctrinal substance which can be observed in all denominations of Christendom."

Marquart further quotes H. Sasse as he observed that "The faith of the fathers is dying and is being replaced by philosophical speculations or sociopolitical ideologies." ". . . The New Hermeneutics which destroys the Word of God — 'We have lost the Word of God and cannot find it again,' as the leader of a Congregational College said — all this is indicative of a process of disintegration that is going on in all Christendom and leads not only to numberless personal tragedies, mental breakdowns and moral conflicts, but also to the dissolution of the churches."

Finally, still quoting Sasse, Marquart notes the strange deception by which men (like the anonymous *Banner* writer) are persuaded to accept and promote this destructive heresy under the illusion that it is exciting new light:

Like most of the great tragedies in the history of mankind, it is accompanied by a strange euphoria ("sense of well-being and buoyancy," Webster) which accompanies certain lethal diseases. What actually may be the ruin of the Church is regarded as a wonderful renewal, an unheard of resurgence of the Church and its mission to the entire world" (pp. 136, 137).

An Encouraging Victory

The book offers many more insights into the arguments between those who were promoting and those who were opposing compromise of this basic biblical doctrine of the Bible. The author observes that "the unsung heroes of those years of liberal take-over were the rank-and-file pastors and people who kept the faith despite the official vacillations and shenanigans," mentioning also some of the theologians and officials who provided them with leadership and encouragement (p. 111). "Without such men, and many others like them, who refused to be cowed by any self-proclaimed 'wave of the future,' the Synod as an institution would have been lost to the Lutheran Church. Humanly speaking, things already seemed hopeless when God in His mercy relieved and delivered His Zion on the Mississippi!" (p. 112).

May the way the Lord has led many of our Lutheran brethren to victories for the Word of God and its faith help us to see more clearly, and act more effectively in the same enterprise. ●

A TIME TO LAUGH — A TIME TO WEEP

CLARENCE G. WERKEMA

A good laugh can be a tonic. Jokes can be tension breakers. Sometimes people laugh when they don't know what else to do. Sometimes they laugh when they are embarrassed. Sometimes a laugh is a cover-up. Sometimes people laugh when they wish to belittle others.

Have Worldly Amusements Become a Joke?

Recently at a public meeting two denominational leaders made light with a laugh of some things that deserve serious attention. One speaker, as an introductory joke, said that although we are celebrating a number of anniversaries these days, some of them aren't of much consequence; he went on to name a few and then commented that one anniversary is very important. Then he proceeded to inform us that 1978 is the 50th anniversary of the "Report on Worldly Amusements." The crowd roared. But not all died. Serious faces showed that some considered this no joking matter. Another speaker at the same meeting observed that he was sure his audience didn't expect that he would ask them to push their banquet tables back and join in a Tango. The crowd laughed again; but not all did. This too was no joking matter and seemed to be in poor taste.

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An Important Matter

Our forebears in the Christian Reformed Church were serious men and women who tried to defend the faith once delivered to the saints. They constantly went to the Scriptures to learn how their God would have them live. Their fifty-year old Report on Worldly Amusements deserves renewed attention rather than a joking dismissal especially in our time. These earnest Christian people saw the dangers and urged Christians to walk circumspectly. They studied God's Word. They understood the ANTITHESIS. They knew the power of Satan, the Father of lies.

We can profit by listening to what they said. Here is a pertinent quotation from the Report on Worldly Amusements. "All these principles can be subsumed under the following general concepts: the Honor of God, the Welfare of Man, Christian Separation from the World, and Christian Liberty. These touch on a fourfold relationship of the Christian: to God, to Himself, to the World and to the Law."

A Needed Warning

The teachings of the Word of God called loudly and clearly to the believer warning against falling into the ways of the world. Moses warned ancient Israel against the ways of their heathen neighbors. Paul was as emphatic in the New Testament as was Moses in the Old in his warning against worldly entanglements. The constant call was for the life of separation from the world, meaningful separation. The call for a separated, set-apart life style needs sounding in the church today. It needs sounding now more than ever before. Would to God that our leaders were sounding that call instead of succumbing to the persuasion of those who mute the warning of the Word. Let the warning, "THUS SAITH THE LORD," "BE YE SEPARATE," "COME YE APART," "BE NOT UNEQUALLY YOKED" be heard again.

What Shall We Do About It?

Dear reader, if you haven't heard the call to separation from the world from the pulpit of your church, demand it. I say demand it loudly and clearly. Demand that this call, so loudly voiced by our forebears, be sounded loudly and clearly once more. Demand that the warnings against dancing reappear, even in the pages of *The Banner*. Demand that the representative of your classis give an explanation of the actions of the Board of Trustees of Calvin College and Seminary. Some say, "we will dance no matter what you say." These people must be firmly dealt with.

Do you know that the Board of Trustees has chosen to ignore the voices of the people of the denomination as they have been speaking. The Board received some 300 communications on the dancing issue, 10% of which favored dancing at Calvin. That means 90% were not in favor. The Board would not listen to these voices. Not even the voices coming from 8 of the Classis of the Denomination are getting a hearing. We need still louder and more voices.

We must speak for the good of the Church, for the good of our homes, for the good of our schools, yes, for our very lives. The antithesis must be preserved.

In the old Report on *Worldly Amusements* one quotation about dancing deserves repeating. It is taken from *The Presbyterian*: "(dancing) it dissipates the mind, sears the conscience, deadens the sensibilities, often destroys health, certainly tends toward the lowering of morals, is utterly incompatible with true holiness and separation from the world, burns up any right religious convictions, incites the lowest animal passions, and sends its giddy, godless devotees whirling down the broad avenue of lust, lewdness, divorce, broken hearts, and wrecked homes."

If ever there was a time for godly men and women to rise up within the Christian Reformed Church it is now. Speak loudly and clearly. Speak to the members of the Board of Trustees, to the Delegates to Synod. Demand that the things done be reversed.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT -

Man's Brutality or God's Commandment?

PETER DE JONG

During the last year or two, especially since the execution of Gary Gilmore, the first murderer to be executed in the United States in a decade, one state after another has given renewed attention to the subject of capital punishment. After the Supreme Court saw fit to outlaw most of the laws prescribing a death penalty for murder a number of years ago, such crimes have continued to increase. Now many states have passed laws seeking to restore that penalty.

A number of religious leaders and civil rights promoters across the country have deplored the return to the death penalty as a return to barbarism. To go back to such "cruel and unusual punishment" has been called a long step backward from the enlightened humanitarianism that was supposed to characterize our "progressive" times. It has been argued that such punishment is futile because it does not deter others from the same crime and that it is unfair because it is enforced only upon a few of the poor who cannot afford the expensive lawyers which the rich can hire to get them off. Perhaps most plausible has been the argument of many religious people that to kill a

man by law cannot possibly be harmonized with Christ's commands: "Love your enemies," and "Resist not evil . . . whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also . . ." (Matt. 5:44, 39).

When there is so much confusion about this matter in the churches as well as in the world outside of the churches it is well to question what the Bible really teaches us about it.

Its Origin in God's Command

We find an early and clear teaching about this subject in certain orders which God gave in the world that survived the great flood. The old world had been destroyed by that judgment of God after men who had fallen into sin filled it with violence (Gen. 6:11-13). One of the important provisions God made for the family of men that He had saved through that flood was the rule: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made he man" (Gen. 9:6). This Bible text clears up a number of points that are completely misunderstood and misrepresented, even by supposedly Christian people in much of present day discussion.

The death penalty for murder did not begin as a human expedient but as a command of God. It was not the expression of man's "primitive" and "inhuman" brutality against his fellow men, but something exactly opposite, a commandment which God gave to punish and restrain such violence. It was not a demonstration of contempt for human life, as its present-day critics claim, but a recognition of its sacredness. In this connection we may also observe that getting rid of the death penalty for murder has, as a matter of fact, not been the result of the "Christianizing" of our society, but it has come in with the general rejection of Christianity and of God's laws in particular. And right along with the disappearance of that death penalty there has come the spectacular increase in the violence which the Lord originally gave it to prevent.

Is the Principle Still Valid?

But is this commandment, given so early in Bible history, still to be regarded as a law for us? Perusing that history we observe that that command of God does not stand alone. It was restated in the laws which God gave to Moses (Ex. 21:12, 14; Lev. 24:17): "He that killeth any man shall surely be put to death." In this latter passage it is significant that the penalty for killing a man (who was made in the image of God) is exactly the same as that for showing ones contempt for God more directly by blasphemy.

But doesn't the coming of Christ change and cancel all of this Old Testament structure of law and harsh penalties? No, it does not! He corrected the mistake of those who might get that impression, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matt. 5:17, 18). Christ's whole work

of saving us was not done by the way of destroying the law (as many right down to the present would like to portray it) but by the way of fulfilling it! Therefore He, far from condemning the laws and their enforcement even by imperfect human governments, acknowledged the divine authority of those governments and even willingly submitted Himself to the death penalty in order to become our Savior. He told Pilate, the governor, "Thou couldest have no power at all against me except it were given thee from above . . ." (John 19:11). Behind the earthly governors and governments there was the decree of God, "The wages of sin is death!" (Rom. 6:23; Gen. 2:17). Christ, by dying as our Substitute under the condemnation of the law, "redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3:13; Deut. 21:23). We ought to observe that the current trend, promoted especially by religious leaders, to get rid of the whole idea of law with stern penalties, including the death penalty, as old superstitions and relics of barbarism, really shows a complete lack of appreciation for what Christ came to be and do as our Savior. That the liberals who have always hated the idea of sin and atonement endorse this movement is not surprising. Can an orthodox Christian who sees what is really happening support this kind of "humanitarianism?"

Must We Not Love Our Enemies?

But does Christ's recognition of the government's God-given authority and even submitting Himself to the death penalty mean that His followers must continue to recognize the legitimacy of both in today's world? Do not the Lord's commands to us to love our enemies and not to resist evil contradict this recognizing of a government's right and even duty to punish some crimes with death? Although it might seem so, they do not! To see our way through the confusion that exists regarding this question we need to listen more closely to what the Lord teaches us in the New Testament. He teaches us to distinguish between what He has told us to do as individual Christians and what He has commanded governments and their officials to do. We see the difference between these two most clearly when we compare Romans 12:17-21, which outlines our personal responsibilities, with the verses which follow, 13:1-4, which describe the duties of government. Personally we are told to "Recompense no man evil for evil. . . . Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves . . . for it is written, Vengeance is mine: I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink. . . . Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." This is not the Lord's command to governments, however, not even to the Christian judge. Does the Lord command him as judge, for example, to "recompense no man for evil"? Of course not. If He did the judge would have to turn every criminal loose! The Lord's command to the government and to the judge is stated in the

verses that follow: "the powers that be are ordained of God . . . he is a minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." In other words, the same Gospel which teaches us to love our enemies and forbids private vengeance, commands governments to enforce laws including penalties which may go as far as death. The Lord teaches us the same thing in the first letter of the Apostle Peter (2:13, 14), "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well." Thus we find that the New Testament, far from abolishing these duties of governments to enforce laws by means of appropriate punishments, commands Christians to acknowledge and support them.

Our Christian Duty

The Bible from beginning to end teaches us that the Lord ordained human governments to control and suppress violence and evil. When a government fails to do that He holds that government and people accountable as accomplices in the crimes they have failed to suppress and punish. We see that principle plainly stated in the judgment of captivity which God pronounced upon the nation of Judah for the "innocent blood" shed in Manasseh's reign (II Kings 24:3, 4) and in the way in which Solomon had to inflict due punishment upon the atrocities of a famous general in order to save his realm from bearing further responsibility for them (I Kings 2:5, 6, 31-33). Our massive and rising crime rate, accompanied by the virtual disappearance of the idea of punishment from the procedures of many courts and from the thinking of many judges, are asking for and getting God's judgments upon our country in the form of ever-increasing violence. To what extent are Christian people, by encouraging this leniency of the law because some mistakenly call it "Christian charity," making matters worse instead of better?

Didn't Christ come to save sinners instead of punishing them? Indeed He did. But He did not do that by abolishing laws and their enforcement. The notion that He did is not His gospel but the devil's perversion of it. As the Apostle said, "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law" (Rom. 3:31). We are saved by faith in Christ, our Substitute, "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us" (Rom. 8:4). We must in love call all men to this way of salvation. With respect to our relationship to human governments this gospel instructs us to acknowledge and support them as "servants of God" ordered by God to curb violence and evil. That vision of the government's God-given purpose, we need to regain and promote. The return of capital punishment, seen and enforced in this way, is not a surrender to violence but a return to God's commandment. ●



GRACE UNLIMITED. Edited by Clark H. Pinnock. Bethany Fellowship, Inc., Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1975, 264 pp., \$4.95, paper. Reviewed by Rev. Johan D. Tangelder.

This symposium was written explicitly against Calvinism. Each essay supports one variety or another of the Wesley-*Arminian* tradition. The contributors are Clark Pinnock who wrote the Introduction and "Responsible Freedom and the Flow of Biblical History"; Vernon C. Grounds, "God's Universal Salvific Grace"; Donald M. Lake, "He Died for All: The Universal Dimensions of the Atonement" and "Jacob Arminius' Contribution to a Theology of Grace"; Jack W. Cottrell, "Conditional Election"; William G. MacDonald, "The Spirit of Grace"; David J. A. Clines, "Predestination in the Old Testament"; I. Howard Marshall, "Predestination in the New Testament"; Grant R. Osborne, "Soteriology in the Epistle to the Hebrews" and "Exegetical Notes on Calvinist Texts"; James D. Strauss, "God's Promise and Universal History" and "A Puritan in a Post-Puritan World—Jonathan Edwards"; A. Skevington Wood, "The Contribution of John Wesley to the Theology of Grace." Since the book is written by prominent evangelicals for evangelicals, it will be widely read.

The basic presupposition of the authors is that "God is good in an unqualified manner, and that he desires the salvation of all sinners" (p. 11). The authors claim that the purpose of the work "is not to be polemical," and that they don't desire "to revive the old and tragic controversies of Calvinism and Arminianism" (p. 45). But this claim is false! The essays are slanted and polemical. For example, Clark Pinnock says about Calvinism: "This theology which, in its dreadful doctrine of double predestination, calls into question God's desire to save all sinners and which as a logical consequence denies Christ died to save the world at large, is simply unacceptable exegetically, theologically, and morally, and to it we must say an emphatic "No" (p. 12). The authors are far from objective in setting forth the Calvinist position. They often paint caricatures. They leave the impression

that their main concern is the scoring of points in their debate with Calvinists.

I was surprised to read that Karl Barth's view of election was suggested as "yet another option for the evangelical theologian" (p. 14). Karl Barth's position on election is not defensible. Barth taught that Christ is the foundation of election. Predestination is truth in Jesus Christ. Christ is the light of predestination. All men are chosen in Jesus Christ. Christ is both the reprobate and the elect for us all, so that all might be redeemed in Him. This teaching brought Barth to the brink of universalism, though he refused to identify himself with that position. I just cannot understand how an evangelical author can argue that Barth's view is an alternative for the evangelical.

Ephesians 1:4, 5, appealed to by Barth, refers to believers and not to all men. Paul tells us that God was motivated by sovereign love in choosing unto eternal life certain persons out of the fallen human race.

The authors refuse to accept the paradox of God's sovereignty and human responsibility. They argue for the either-or position. Calvinism argues for the both-and position. The eternal destiny of every human being was determined by God's decree but man is still responsible. God cannot be blamed for the lostness of the lost. Calvinism shows that divine sovereignty and human responsibility are both taught in Scripture.

Arminians claim that grace is not weakened by their position. But how can one believe in the majesty of God's sovereign grace and at the same time accept man's self-determination in salvation? Donald M. Lake says: "Christ's work on the cross was sufficient to redeem all mankind, but its application depends upon man's response of faith, by which he lays hold of Christ and shares in the fulness of Christ's atoning work" (pp. 41f.). Clark Pinnock states: "One of the deepest of all human intuitions, even in those persons with philosophical, theological, or psychological misgivings, is the sense of freedom to determine what they shall do and what they shall be" (p. 95).

I suggest that pastors buy this book. It will keep them abreast in the current Arminian-Calvinist debate. I hope that soon a Calvinist symposium will be forth-coming that will refute the old Arminian errors dressed in modern garb.

WHICH BIBLE? Edited by David Otis Fuller, D.D. Reviewed by Dr. William Hendriksen.

This book is a vigorous defense of the King James Version of the Bible. I heartily agree with the authors, Dr. Fuller, Z. C. Hodges, H. W. Coray in their defense of the Bible's inerrancy against attacks being made upon it.

I regret that I cannot agree, however, with their all-out defense of the Greek text—that is, the Textus Receptus (Received text)—upon which the King

James Version is based. I cannot endorse many such statements as "The King James Version has . . . the strongest possible claim to be regarded as an authentic representation of the original text."

This evaluation conflicts with the convictions of men who have made textual criticism one of their fields of special interest. Thus Dr. B. B. Warfield brands the elevation of the Textus Receptus to the level of the only true text a manifestation of "reverence for the Word perversely exercised" (*Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, p. 216). Dr. A. T. Robertson states, "There are still defenders of the Textus Receptus . . . but the tide has turned definitely against the traditional text" (*Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, p. 22). And Dr. B. M. Metzger describes the Greek text on which the King James Version is based as being "essentially a handful of late and haphazardly collected miniscule manuscripts." He adds, "In a dozen passages its reading is supported by no known Greek witness" (*Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, p. 106).

Besides, even if one should agree with Dr. Fuller's high regard for the Greek text on which the King James Version is based, it would still remain a question whether it is wise to force that translation of the year 1611 upon our sons and daughters, who speak a different language. What, for example, can today's younger generation make of such King James Version passages as the following: "With him I will speak mouth to mouth, even apparently" (Numbers 12:8); and "I will that thou give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist" (Mark 6:25)?

We are thankful to God for the many blessings that have resulted from the publication of the King James Version, but let us move onward and read the precious Word of God in the language of today. When Jesus and the apostles addressed the people, they did this in the language of their own day. Let us therefore also allow Scripture to speak to our present generation in a language they can understand; that is in today's English.

SOLI DEO GLORIA: ESSAYS IN REFORMED THEOLOGY — Festschrift for John H. Gerstner. Edited by R. C. Sproul. Nutley, N. J., Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976. 210 pp. \$6.95. Review by Rev. Jerome Julien, pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa.

Taking its place on the ever growing shelf of festschriften (volumes commemorating the work of some theologian) is this one commemorating the work of John H. Gerstner, professor at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

Besides a bibliography of Gerstner's writings, this volume includes papers by many of the outstanding orthodox theologians of our day. John Warwick

Montgomery ("Chemnitz on the Council of Trent"), Cornelius Van Til ("Calvin the Controversialist"), James I. Packer ("Sola Fide: The Reformed Doctrine of Justification"), Philip Edgcumbe Hughes ("The Sovereignty of God - Has God Lost Control?"), Roger Nicole ("Induction and Deduction with Reference to Inspiration"). There are fourteen papers in all. Others are about the Sabbath, Jonathan Edwards, Double Predestination, Total Depravity, the Pastor, Psalm 12 and Princeton piety as seen notably in Charles Hodge. Especially interesting is the contribution of Dr. John Murray on "Irresistible Grace" written shortly before his death.

These essays are good additions to theological literature. Anyone who reads them will certainly benefit.

CHRIST AND CULTURE, by Dr. K. Schilder (translated from the Dutch by G. Van Rongen and W. Helder). Premier Printing, Ltd., 1249 Plessis Road, Winnipeg, Man., R2C 3L9. 1977. 89 pages, \$5.90 (hard cover), \$4.60 (soft cover). Reviewed by Rev. Henry Petersen, Pella, Iowa.

The original version of this book appeared in the Dutch language in 1932. The translators have performed a good service in making it available to a wider circle of readers. Their translation, for the most part, is smooth and lucid.

This small volume is packed full with stimulating thought and challenging ideas as are all of the late Dr. Schilder's writings. The distinguished author emphasizes Christ's office, continued in Christians. Christ is the foundation, redeemer, and renewer of culture. The Christian is laborer, co-worker with God. Schilder is so full of his subject that he takes half a page to define culture. He summarizes the cultural task in this statement: "To serve God, in concrete life, to obey God in any function, to fulfil God's expressed will with all that is in us and to do so in the midst of and in organic relation and communion with all that is around us." He refers to the definition of a Christian in Lord's Day 12 of the Heidelberg Catechism as another good summary of our cultural task.

Read this book to be stimulated in performing your "endless task" in whatever occupation God has placed you.

NONE LIKE THEE, by Cl. Stam. Premier Printing, Ltd., 149 Plessis Rd., Winnipeg, Man., R2C 3L9. 1977, 85 pp. (PB), \$3.40. Reviewed by Rev. Henry Petersen, Pella, Iowa.

This is a book of seven sermons on Micah preached by Rev. Cl. Stam at Rehoboth Canadian Reformed Church of Burlington, Ontario. The book's title is also the title of the last sermon on Micah 7:8-10.

The author stresses what he considers the basic line of prophecy: God's redemptive work in Christ. Along with

this he emphasizes the call to reformation that is prominent in Micah's prophecy. In his applications he brings out what is "Reformed" and what characterizes the true church today. He makes frequent references to covenant theology.

The book should be "useful for public worship and for individual study."

FEAR NOT: A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF DEATH, by Manford G. Gutzke. Baker, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1974. 96 pp., paper, \$1.25. Reviewed by Paul E. Bakker of Rock Valley, Iowa.

The author states as his intent "to find out the Biblical view of death." He succeeds very well in fulfilling that purpose. Recognizing the reality of death he deals with some of the unpleasant and painful aspects of death, that last enemy whom we all must face as the consequence of sin. He points out, however, that death is basically different for the Christian believer and the unbeliever. Because Christ defeated death through His death and resurrection, the Christian need no longer fear death but can live and die in the hope of eternal life and glory. The book closes with a section of "Aids for Consolation" which includes selections from Scripture, poetry, and hymn which should be of great comfort to the Christian bereaved. A good little booklet concerning a reality that is unavoidable.

MALE AND FEMALE CREATED HE THEM, by Ernest L. Green. Kregel, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1977. 86 pp., paper. Reviewed by Paul E. Bakker of Rock Valley, Iowa.

Green has written this book because of the widespread unhappiness and disension in marriage today. He believes that it is possible for a husband and wife to experience real love, real joy, and real harmony. It is possible if both husband and wife will believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and if they will obey God's Word regarding male and female, husband and wife in marriage.

In this small book the author, in a clear and practical way, presents the Biblical teaching on male and female, husband and wife relationships. God Himself created man male and female and in His Word He also prescribes the proper relationship between them. The major part of the book deals with God's rules regarding marriage, sex, roles, perversion, and contentment. The last section entitled "Potpourri" treats such matters as homosexuality, mixed-up roles, the sexual drive, and the ideal wife and mother and the ideal husband and father.

Green seeks his answers and advice from the Scriptures. At times his answers and suggestions seem a bit simplistic. Nevertheless, this little book brings to our attention much that the Bible teaches on the male-female, husband-wife relationships, and rightly points out that if God's directives would

be heeded there would be many more happy, harmonious marriages.

BIBLE PUZZLES FOR ADULTS, by Grace Vander Klay. Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan. 64 pages, paper back, \$1.95. Reviewed by Simon C. Walburg, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

In the preface the author states, "These Bible puzzles will provide many hours of entertainment, and at the same time test and increase knowledge of Holy Scriptures."

At first glance I thought, Bible Puzzles for Adults? Seems to me that's kid stuff. But I have to admit on checking these puzzles the author must have a computer-brain to formulate such enigmas. Just to give you a few samples of the contents of this volume, here are some chapter titles: 1. Vowel-less Puzzles. 2. Psalmword Puzzles. 3. Short Bible Names. 4. Long Bible Names. 5. Hidden Words. 6. Ladders. 7. Heart-love, and more, for a total of 15 chapters.

Intriguing to say the least, and certainly requiring an adult mind to comprehend. Very useful as a wholesome past-time, better than playing cards, by far. We would suggest these puzzles as ideal for family gatherings, showers, or informal programs. They could be used to arouse enthusiasm in Scripture facts and facets in an interesting manner.

The best part of the book—to me—is the fact that on page 57 you will find the right answers to all of these brain-teasers. To use the words of the author, "Happy Puzzling."

THE FARMER FROM TEKOA, ON THE BOOK OF AMOS, by Herman Veldkamp. Translated by Theodore Plantinga. Paideia Press, (P.O. Box 1450), St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada, L2R 7J8. 1977. 236 pp., \$6.95. Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien, pastor of First Christian Reformed Church, Pella, Iowa.

If I have read the publisher's note on the dust jacket correctly, there will be more of these volumes of Rev. Veldkamp translated for English readers. May the day of their appearance be very soon!

Anyone who thinks that the Old Testament prophecy of Amos is dry and without application today has a shock in store when he reads this volume. Out of the dust rises a prophetic voice that will leave nothing which men call sacred untouched. Outward form, social custom, personal ideas and ideals are subjected to the light of God's truth. All the cracks, smudges, scuffs and rough places are seen. As Rev. Veldkamp shows us what Amos says we are made to think in a serious and constructive way about our spiritual lives.

The author writes simply and clearly. No one need be afraid to read this book. There will be no dull moment in the reading of it. God still speaks through Amos today!

(This book may be obtained from the Paideia Press, P.O. Box 1450, St. Catharines, Ont., Canada L2R 7J8.)

ROMANS: A DIGEST OF REFORMED COMMENT, by Geoffrey B. Wilson. Edinburgh, Banner of Truth. 1977. 254 pp., paper, \$2.95. Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien, pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa.

The pastor of the Birkby Baptist Church of Huddersfield, England has returned to the first New Testament book on which he prepared a commentary. According to the publisher here is a complete new commentary.

The commentary is more a collection of quotes from noted Reformed writers than a work of the author, though he writes comments, too. Warfield, Murray, Denney, Vos, Shedd, Haldane and more are referred to.

What position does he take concerning the meaning of Romans 7? Paul, according to Wilson, is speaking about the regenerate man.

The "all Israel" of Romans 11:26 is explained as meaning the elect from among Israel as a nation. It is not spiritualized to mean the Church from every tongue and tribe and nation.

All in all, this is an inexpensive, helpful, short but thorough commentary on a very important New Testament book. This is a good book for Bible study groups, personal use or even quick reference for sermon preparation.

May God give strength to the author so that more books may be added to this helpful series.

MARRIAGE IN HONOR, W. G. De Vries. Premier Printing, Ltd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, 1976, 186 pp. No price given. Reviewed by Rev. Elco H. Oostendorp, Hudsonville, Michigan.

This is the English translation of the fifth edition of *Het Huwelijk in Ere*, which first appeared in 1967. The author is a minister in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. Since the book is published under the auspices of the Canadian Reformed churches, I take this to mean the "Liberated" churches.

The publisher has done us a service in translating this fine book and making it available in our circles. It deserves wide sale and extensive use. In a day when there is a flood of books on marriage and family problems, many of which leave much to be desired from our Reformed standpoint, this work presents a balanced discussion of Biblical guidelines for family living.

There are five chapters, varying considerably in length. After giving some scriptural data on marriage the author devotes 62 pages to "Preparation for Marriage." This is followed by 70 pages about "Married Life." A short chapter on "Life Without Marriage," and another on "Marriage and the Family" round out the discussion.

Especially three characteristics of the book commend it to those interested in learning about marriage according to the ideals God gives us in His Word. 1. It is Scriptural. There is much exposition of relevant passages, including the Song of Solomon and Ephesians 5. The book lets the light of Scripture shine on our path as husbands and wives, parents and children.

2. It is frank and realistic without being offensive. There is no polyanna romanticizing of life. The problems of our day are discussed in an up-to-date manner. Topics such as masturbation, the Kinsey Report, sexual education, homosexuality, abortion, the pill, family planning, the population explosion, methods of birth control are listed under chapters two and three.

3. It is balanced, by which I mean that the author avoids stressing just one aspect of the many problems of marriage. He is sympathetic to physical needs, but also points out important spiritual and social principles. The fact that the book is written from the perspective of conditions in the Netherlands shouldn't limit its usefulness in our circles. This Dutch perspective may be reflected in the comparatively small attention given to divorce. There is a bibliography, but it contains only three English titles, and most of the Dutch books will not be readily available here.

All in all, the translation is excellent, with only occasional Dutchisms.

The book should be in many of our homes and will be excellent for use in discussion groups. Highly recommended.

JONATHAN EDWARDS THE YOUNGER: 1745-1801 - A COLONIAL PASTOR, by Robert L. Ferm. Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1976. 214 pp., \$7.95. Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien, pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church, Pella, Iowa.

Most of us have heard of the famous Jonathan Edwards of New England, but few of us know much about his son of the same name. And we do not have much help in getting to know him, either. To my knowledge this volume on the younger Edwards is the only one available - and I have tried to check bibliographies. To be sure, there are sort entries in the *Encyclopedia Americana* and the *Columbia Encyclopedia* (3rd ed.) and a bit longer entry in the *Dictionary of American Biography* but the only other biography is one, now out of print, by his grandson Tryon Edwards and published with his works. Ferm should be congratulated for his work and Eerdmans for their willingness to print such a helpful volume.

This book is more than a biography. It is a survey of the theological and ecclesiastical scene of that period. It shows how orthodoxy declined in spite of the fact that such a man as Edwards believed that he was being true to the orthodoxy of his father.

Any number of interesting points could be cited from this book. One is of special interest in these days of individualism in the church. Edwards wrote an impressive short statement of his faith when he purposed to come to the Lord's Table for the first time.

Although one might question some of the value judgments of Dr. Ferm, such as the observation that the Synod of Dordt made its decisions "in favor of a stringent Calvinism," this volume is a valuable aid to the understanding of the American church scene.