

The Outlook

**ARABIC RADIO
SHOULD I MOURN?
WHAT'S COMING UP AT SYNOD?**



JUNE - 1978

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

ANOTHER MAGAZINE

WHY?

This is a reprint of the first article in the first issue of our magazine which came out as *Torch and Trumpet*, April-May 1951. Board members who read it recently observed how well it described the situation that prompted our organization and printing venture and the objectives that they sought to achieve. After the lapse of 27 years the need for the promotion and defence of the Biblical Reformed faith appears greater than ever and our prayerful efforts, with God's help, have the same goal as did the efforts of those who began this venture. We still invite the cooperation and support of all who share our concern and cause.

EDITOR

Why another magazine? That question is being asked by many. We wish to give a definite answer to that perfectly natural question.

A second question is being asked. Why are two magazines coming out at the same time? People are wondering if the birth of these two periodicals at the same time is evidence of a deep difference of opinion suddenly breaking into the open.

We can dispose of the second question first. The simultaneous announcement of *Torch and Trumpet* and *The Reformed Journal* was not planned that way. We, the sponsors of *Torch and Trumpet*, were completely surprised when we heard of the impending birth of *The Reformed Journal*. *Torch and Trumpet* is not being issued as the expression of one side in a debate, with the editors of *The Reformed Journal* on the other side.

The persistent questioner may then say, Why not merge the two efforts, since both are intended to further the interests of the Reformed faith? Why two magazines? It seems very clear to us, the sponsors of *Torch and Trumpet*, that the method to be followed in seeking to further the interests of the Reformed faith will be quite different in the two journals. We are certain that this difference will become increasingly apparent as the issues appear.

Why, then, *Torch and Trumpet*? We are frank to say that we are moved by a serious concern for the

welfare of Zion. Alarming and increasingly persistent are reports that there are so many in the Reformed churches who seem to be insensitive to the real meaning of a Reformed confession and life. Men and women with sharp Reformed "feelers" (Gereformeerde voel-horens) are becoming almost a curiosity.

Only the ignorant or the blind can dare hold to the comfortable opinion that the flood-tide of anti-doctrinal, man-centered modernism has graciously bypassed the Reformed churches. And in more recent days we have Barthianism, called "neo-orthodoxy" by many. We are persuaded that this new brand of theology is better called a "new modernism," and that it jeopardizes the foundations of the faith with even greater subtlety than the older liberalism. Furthermore, we may not fail to take note of the influence upon the Reformed churches of that strange mixture of truth and error commonly called Fundamentalism in our day.

It is our purpose to arouse those of like mind with us to a more serious study of the Word and the Reformed heritage, that we may all put on the whole armor of God and be the better equipped to fight the good fight of faith. We believe the disease of religious and doctrinal indifference is making insidious progress among us, and we would indoctrinate our people with the truth of God. Then too, we who think and live under the mandate to subdue all things for God's glory must speak with greater clarity to a generation whose culture is decadent because the people stagger in drunkenness with man-centered ways of life and thought. If in God's good providence we can do only a little to help many give clearer expression to that voice in our time, we shall feel that our purpose is being realized.

Our method is simple. We shall try to speak in clear, forthright language to the average man in the church. We shall seek to inspire, instruct and edify the serious-minded man and woman in the pew. But every issue will also carry several worthwhile articles for the pastor, upon whom, more than any other leader, depends the spiritual welfare of the church. Most of the articles will appear serially and our magazine will be presented in such form that it can easily be filed into separate volumes, each year representing one volume. Because most of the material will appear serially, we trust that many societies will find the magazine useful for study purposes.

Most of the articles will be expository. But when necessity presents itself, we shall not hesitate to engage in controversy. The truth is intolerant though we would be gracious and speak the truth in love. We go forth in the spirit of those faithful servants of the Lord who "held the torches in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands" (Judges 7:20). Our earnest prayer is that God may graciously bless our *Torch and Trumpet*, just as He blessed the lamps and the trumpets of Gideon's day.

We invite you to join us in this crusade.

REFORMED FELLOWSHIP, INC.



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

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Should I Mourn?

an old and proper question

CECIL W. TUINGA

This unusual question was asked by some young men. They were sent from Bethel to ask the priests and prophets at Jerusalem concerning a liturgical custom (Zech. 7). This question arose because of conditions in the land. This was a time of joy. The temple had been rebuilt. The city walls were restored. Israel as a people had been reunited. Bethel came again to Jerusalem.

One might be a little suspicious of this delegation. These men were from Bethel, formerly idolatrous. And were they not of Syrian lineage? From such a source one might expect a question concerning a change in liturgy. Their question went something like, "Isn't it time to change the time-worn liturgy of the church?" (Zech. 7:3). Maybe we feel a little uneasy with such a question from such a delegation. Mixed marriages generally bring problems into the church.

On closer scrutiny, however, we find something commendable in these men. They were not in any way rebels or revolutionaries in the church. They were polite and followed the proper ecclesiastical channels. They went to the right place and the right authorities. They did not by-pass the priests and prophets at Jerusalem. They asked seriously whether it was still proper to mourn at a time for joy. Why practice what seemed irrelevant?

How would the leaders answer that question? Would the answer be: That depends on which age-group you belong to? If you are of the older age-group you will keep the traditions handed down. If you are of the younger generation you will welcome a change. Some would aver that this question properly depends on the generation gap.

But this question was not one concerning parents versus children, or older people versus youth. It concerned the rite of fasting and mourning, which was

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observed by everyone. The answer came from an unexpected quarter. It came directly from the Lord. And it went right to the heart of the matter. By rhetorical questions the Lord pin-pointed the real reason for this question. All parts of a church's liturgy were meaningless unless the worshippers used them in faith. And since Israel did not really practice the ritual of mourning and fasting from the heart it was an empty form. Why keep an empty form? We can understand and appreciate this question from Bethel. Let's throw out old meaningless traditions and introduce some new and more meaningful ceremonies.

The Question Today

Don't we today face similar questions? Agitation for new forms and new liturgies comes with the same kind of questions as the Bethel delegation did. And we must be ready to answer such questions. Before we make changes we must ask why the old forms failed and whether new forms will serve better. Such questions drive us to the heart of the issue. Assuming old forms have failed, we must ask why. If it is because we have not understood them rightly, and have not practiced them by faith according to their proper meaning, then we must examine carefully how we did use them, and whether we do right by removing them or introducing new ones.

The old question of the Bethel delegation persists today. Surely, it comes in different forms, but we do hear in our modern questions the Bethel question, "Should I mourn?" What so many are asking is, in the light of the Gospel's assurance that in Christ Jesus all our sins are washed away, what is there left to mourn about? Can we still then say with our old forms that we "Abhor and humble ourselves before God" because of our sins? (Old forms for Confession of Faith and the Lord's Supper), or pray to God to forgive us "miserable sinners" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 51)? Some have actually gone so far as to count it an insult to God to ask for forgiveness, seeing our sins past, present and future, have all been nailed to the cross, and are no longer remembered by God. Others feel that to mourn for sins can only bring one uncertainty of salvation. One leader tried to comfort a member by asking, "Do you believe your sins are all forgiven? You do? Why are you then any further concerned about sin?"

On first thought that might sound good. We are called to be a rejoicing people, rejoicing in the God of our salvation. Aren't we, by being disturbed by sin, casting a shadow over God's eternal sovereign grace? Should we not discard the bad tradition of looking so much at sin? That, we are told, has produced much joylessness among Reformed believers. We must live more in the awareness of sins forgiven.

The Test

These arguments may sound plausible, but we must test them by asking whether they conform to Scripture and experience. According to that test, should I

mourn or abhor myself because of my sin? And if I should can I still live a joyful life, thankful to God for His great forgiveness?

Should I mourn for my sin? Yes, I should. Because as a child of God, whom the Lord has given freely so great a deliverance, I come far short of serving Him as I should. In the measure that I see how great a price my Saviour paid for my ransom, in that measure I will praise God and rejoice in His sovereign electing love that has set me free. But in that measure I will also be sorry for sinning against the God and Father Whom I have learned to love dearly. Every truly born-again believer understands the apostle's deep sorrow for sin as he expressed that in Romans 7. We must listen to the heart-rending weeping of David or Peter when they realized how they had sinned against a loving God and Saviour, to better understand real sorrow for sin. And the more I try to serve my God and Father thankfully the more I will be troubled by my sins and learn to abhor myself because of them.

Living a joyful Christian life isn't simple. Only those who realize that sin provokes a loving Father, can deeply experience the Father's forgiveness and rejoice in it. Sin deeply troubles God's children. The closer they walk with Him the deeper will be their sorrow for sin. In the measure that I love my wife I will be sorry for hurting her. And in the measure that I love my parents I will be sorry for doing that which offends them. The same principle applies to our walk with our merciful God and Father.

A Deficiency in Our New Liturgies and in Our Lives

Seeing this suggests other questions. Why do our newest forms omit calling members to a confession of self-abhorrence because of indwelling sin? Is it because we no longer live that closely to God, or that sin is not that real because God does not seem that real? And then there are other related questions, such as: Is it because sin doesn't trouble us any more that we can sin with such impunity? Is the Church today facing one crisis after another because the members no longer live a repentant life before God? We need but take notice of what we allow today and still while thinking that we can be good Christians. Our modern problems run the whole gamut of the world's life-style. We must contend with drinking, moral looseness, lack of interest in Bible study, careless church attendance, sport madness, dancing, etc. etc. And in the face of it the church softens in its demands for confession concerning knowledge of sin. It seems to me that this must be the the cause of many of our problems. We must return to a firm stand against sin and call men to a genuine repentance for their sin. We must again become a church that takes sin seriously because we love our God for His eternal love to us.

Our many problems have come upon us subtly. As I see it, the modern world spirit, encouraged by a time of affluence, has pervaded the life of the

church. Able to enter into many areas of art, music, learning, entertainment, etc. (that affluence made possible), many church members largely rejected the sober, stern, puritan real and somewhat legal life-style that was still a part of the Christian life. In a time of poverty and harsh living conditions such a self-disciplined Christian life might fit, but now there were new things that could be enjoyed. Slowly we yielded ground, rationalizing our yieldings, and excusing them on the basis of the supposedly too severe and cold and loveless life-style of our forefathers. Granting that perhaps there was too much fear of the world on the part of our forefathers (which has never yet been proved), we have swung over to the opposite extreme of adopting a life-style that is almost entirely that of the world. Almost everything is tolerated among us as a legitimate area of Christian behavior. So today we mingle with the world, enjoying its life and all it has to offer, while at the same time trying to be joyful Christians. Since that cannot be done, we (wanting nothing of a teaching or life that emphatically opposes sin) experience unrest and joylessness.

The Remedy

As I see it, that is our deepest problem today. We must begin again to take sin seriously because it offends our only God and Saviour. We must begin again to teach children very early in life the death-bringing power of sin, the subtle allurements of a world involved in the tragedy of sin. We must show them what the world is as it laughs its way into hell. And we have to lead them, also with our own example of devoted living, to see that we hate sin and fear it because we love the Lord and seek to serve Him. We must get rid of our common tolerance of sin and learn wholeheartedly to "Abstain from every form of evil" (I Thess. 5:22). If we do not do so we and our children will continue to live joyless lives. We will do, as so many are doing today, as the Israelites of old did, "So they feared the Lord but also served their own gods, after the manner of the nations . . ." (II Kings 17:33). We must learn again wholeheartedly to pray the prayer with our forefathers "we confess to our humiliation and to the praise of Thy mercy that our transgressions are innumerable, and that our debt is so great that we cannot ever begin to repay. We are not worthy to be called Thy children, nor to lift up our eyes heavenward to Thee in prayer" (Christian Prayers, New Psalter Hymnal, p. 181).

May our God grant us the grace to return to a genuine fear and hatred of sin and a heartfelt abhorrence of ourselves before a holy God, as we seek to serve Him, the God of our salvation, with our whole lives. Only in that way can we experience again the favor of the Lord and the true joy of His service. Only in that way can we rescue our denomination from the certain ruin our present worldly living will bring. This is the way in which we must earnestly pray and work for the peace of Zion. •

Daily Preaching the Word

SHIRLEY W. MADANY

As the world's attention is being drawn to the Arab world because of its oil wealth and influence we appreciate this report from the wife of our Arabic Radio minister as she calls attention to our growing opportunity to bring the gospel there.

Radio's New Opportunity

Radio has given us the means to emulate an apostolic style of missions. Just as Paul was compelled to hold forth daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus, there in Ephesus (Acts 19:9), so we are holding a daily meeting in the Arabic-speaking world.

Through the providence of God the Christian Reformed Church began its foreign language radio work with the Arabic language. How that came about is a story in itself. Twenty years ago, the only available missionary radio station was looking for someone to prepare programs in Arabic. Rev. Bassam Madany, a Lebanese citizen and an ordained minister in the CRC was contacted by ELWA, the station in Monrovia, Liberia. The Back to God Hour was willing to stand behind this new venture. From small beginnings this Arabic ministry has grown to be international, with a daily broadcast and a total coverage of the Arab world. And the Back to God Hour has grown to include eight of the world's major languages.

There are 120 million Arabs living in the following countries which make up the Arab world: Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Yemeni Arab Republic, People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar. With the addition of super-power AM stations our coverage of these countries lost the restrictions which hinder short-wave reception, and our response showed a dramatic increase. The following figures will indicate just how much that increase has been:

1974	2,747
1975	4,547
1976	9,382
1977	12,876

Radio has proven to be the *only* means which can get around the insurmountable barriers placed in the way of conventional missions to the Arab world. Through this amazing medium it is possible to penetrate thousands of homes? However it should be stressed that it is only out of a Reformed heritage that one can make programs which fully meet the needs of these people. It is the content of the programs

which is attracting such response and eliciting such questioning and appreciation. Radio is only a *means*; it is the *message* which counts.

It Is the Message which Counts

The kinds of programs which have been prepared are expository sermons, systematic Bible studies, series on Bible doctrine, and a study in Church history up to the time of Augustine. These tapes are always prepared with a view to being reused many times. This allows for a planned staggering of programs from the various stations. A person may pick up two or perhaps three different programs during one day, if he happens to live in the right area.

Overcoming Difficulties

So here we have an unbelievably open door. It permits one person to enter a million homes a day. Given a totally open atmosphere we could never begin to supply the workers needed even numerically, for such a task. On the other hand, one cannot imagine a more difficult mission field. Besides the physical barriers which have existed for centuries, in which it is an act of treason for any Muslim to consider becoming a Christian, there have been centuries of anti-Christian teaching and known cases of extreme persecution.

What has a Muslim been taught? For one thing, he has been brought up with an intrinsic trust in his holy book, the Koran. He believes that it was brought to him through God's messenger, the prophet Mohammed. Muslims claim that Mohammed was illiterate! The Koran was revealed to him by God, in the Arabic language. Thus the Koran becomes the very word of God. So the Muslim learns from childhood that the Christian scriptures have been falsified; that Jesus was merely the son of Mary but could never have been the son of God; that He was never crucified and that our doctrine of the Trinity is completely impossible to even consider. The Muslim prides himself in his pure belief in a unitarian, unknowable, awesome God. For 1300 years the Muslim has been Christianity's extremely vocal foe.

Many of the early missionaries to Islam found themselves engaged in polemics. Perhaps that was inevitable in a face to face encounter with Muslims. In radio missions it is possible, however, to simply dwell on the proclamation of the Word of God and have the speaker remain incognito. We have often been told by our Muslim listeners that when they first heard the program they listened because they were struck with how wrong every word was. Later, when they wrote, they would describe how they had been "compelled" to continue listening until they finally had to admit that here indeed was a "heavenly" religion. They see in Christianity truly a "right guide." And we see, that with the blessing of the Holy Spirit, the pure Gospel is *reaching* the Arabs and bringing many of them to the foot of the Cross. [It is] "God's good pleasure, through the foolishness of the preaching, to save them that believe" (I Cor. 1:21).

The Mail Response

Naturally, when scanning great quantities of mail, we observe certain comments which are repeated often enough to make a refrain. One is the plea for longer programs. They feel that fifteen minutes a day is just not enough. (In the Middle East the first reply to such a letter brings the news that by switching stations they can get half an hour, as we are on at 10:15 over one station and 10:30 another.) Another comment is the claim that they are regular listeners. They would never miss a program if they can help it. (They make sure they are home in time to be settled by the radio. Some invite their friends.) But most important, there is the expression of thankfulness for a teaching ministry. They say that they are being taught so much that they could never possibly find out as they have no recourse to Christian literature or to Christians themselves. Arabic-speaking people, as a general rule, have a very deep feeling for God and for His guidance and they say that now they have found the Word of God and are making it their "guide" in life.

A New Frontier

The Arabian peninsula, which is the cradle of Islam, has become the new frontier of the world. Oil has made most of the countries of Arabia super-rich. As a result there is an interest in the Arab world which is global. Among Christians there is a great deal of discussion about possible new methods for reaching the Muslims. We are convinced, both on the basis of Scripture and of these 20 years' experience in radio missions to the Arabs, that the proclamation of the whole counsel of God is **the** way to bring Muslims to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Of course, this proclamation has to be done with the full awareness of our historic Christian heritage and the present religious and cultural situation among the Arabs. The Bible must be proclaimed in the Arabic of today, to the Arabs of today.

The reading of 65,000 letters convinces us of a gigantic longing for the Word of God and its exposition. There is a very real desire for information about the Messiah. There is a tremendous need for counseling and help with personal problems. There is also an acute awareness of sin and a desire for repentance.

Christian Literature

Accompanying our radio ministry there has been a systematic follow-up through literature. Saatu'l Islah (the Hour of Reformation) has published 15 books on a variety of subjects. Through a large mailing list, we have the means to distribute these books to people who are eagerly waiting to receive them. Thousands of Christian publications in Arabic are now on the shelves of homes throughout the Middle East and North Africa. At least 250,000 have been mailed.

To give you some idea of their contents we describe a few of them:

The Teachings of the Holy Bible (368 pp.) is a

Reformation catechism in Arabic. The first of its kind. It is an adaptation of the Heidelberg and Genevan catechisms and marks our 15th publication — 15,000 copies.

The Mission and Message of the Prophets, is a book based on a series of messages on the Minor Prophets, with special emphasis on the Messianic element and the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Muslim is naturally attracted to the words of the prophets and it is news to him that Jesus was the fulfillment of so much prophecy.

Family Worship, now in its third printing, is a daily devotional guide for an entire year. It is like a compendium of the Christian religion and covers various Biblical and doctrinal subjects. It has been much appreciated.

Reflections in Contemporary Life, is a four volume series which is specially appreciated by university students. It deals with modern secular life and the Biblical answer.

Certainly God has given us a wide open door. We should not end this article without mentioning that it has never ceased to amaze us how He has answered our prayers almost before they could be uttered. More radio stations, the ability to publish Arabic literature right here in America, electric Arabic typewriters, etc. — the ministry has grown by leaps and bounds. We praise God for touching the hearts of His people in North America and moving them to support radio missions.

To God be the glory!

FROM A MAN'S POINT OF VIEW

A. MEYER

Women have come a long way, considering that according to the comics the cavemen used to drag their women along by the hair.

Now in our Western world they have the right to vote, the right to work, the right to drink and smoke. Simple people like myself cannot help wondering where all this equality business will eventually lead to.

If the ultimate goal is righteousness in man-woman relations, all of us should endorse, promote and applaud such a laudable idea. However, so far women's rights, women's liberation and even a whole year set aside for the purpose of freeing women from their alleged inferior position, have not been too successful. Inequality is often taken to mean inferiority and

Mr. Albert Meyer of Brantford, Ontario, submits his article which appeared earlier in the local Christian Reformed Church's ONWARD magazine.

of course, this throws the whole equality business out of kilter. The old fashioned idea that the man is the head of the family is hotly disputed as being discriminatory against women. After all if men and women are equal, why should not the woman be the head of the household?

Mrs. John Doe resents it when she is addressed as such. She wants to be called Ms. Judy Doe. After all, she is not John's property, but an independent person. And so we read and hear about a movement that promotes the idea of doing away with Mrs. and Miss. Are not single and married men alike addressed as Mr.? The title Mrs. reveals a woman's marital status some say, and after all this is nobody's business. It reminds them perhaps not of the cave woman's lack of freedom, but to some it still is a distant echo of the time of the infamous chastity belt.

Many of us are perhaps hardly aware of all this, but those who do a bit of reading in all kinds of magazines know of the strange and godless desires and philosophies which are widely accepted.

If we may believe the statistics of the social agencies, there never have been so many unhappy and lonely girls and women as there are today. Especially among the younger generation there is a tendency to hate housework. The women envy their husbands who leave the house in the morning and are not pestered by naughty children and everything that goes with it, such as washing, cleaning, cooking, nursing, etc. Grass is green on the other side of the fence. Once the idea of your own difficult life has itself anchored in your head, you are on a very sad and tricky road.

The husband may have the same problem in his life and before long, a couple is sliding down the hill of self-pity and envy of the other party.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Again and again we see the truth of this Bible text, especially in the relations between the sexes. There are no such things as superior and inferior human beings according to the Scriptures. They are equal in the eyes of the Lord and in my view, no amount of equality movement will succeed in making things better. On the contrary, it is my opinion that women's lib and its push for equality may well result in the final analysis, in degrading womanhood to a species of creatures to be used and taken advantage of by men. Listening in to conversations among boys, young men and some not so young any more, this attitude has already taken hold of quite a number. The terminology used in these conversations is not fit to print, though it probably would enlighten and shock a few people into awareness of the state of affairs.

At one time we had reason to believe that in our own circles we did not have to worry about the loosening of the moral standards. Our men were working hard and were often tired but content in making living conditions better for their families. Our women stayed at home looking after their children and husbands, and took pride in their well organized households. Some helped their husbands in their respective busi-

nesses or spent a few hours doing housework outside of their homes, but by and large they were housewives seeing themselves as wives and mothers, loved, honored and respected in the community. The children went to catechism and church organized societies. The younger generation walked more or less in the "footsteps of their fathers," and the church grew in numbers. Few young men and women married outside the Christian church. Those who did so were the exception. Sad to say that most of those have, as far as we can judge "fallen by the wayside" to use a phrase from the Bible.

It seems that gradually things have changed. Mothers have taken on full time jobs, leaving their children in care of others. Marriage with outsiders is no longer an exception and, though not encouraged, is accepted as inevitable. Separation, divorce and common-law living have found the way into our church also.

"What" some may say, "has all this to do with equality of the sexes?"

I believe it has everything to do with it, because it is all rooted at the same stem; the human desire to mold and adapt the will of the Lord to our own insight. In order to do so, we read, re-read and re-interpret the Bible passages which somehow do not fit in with our present view of the new morality and other equality-associated life views. That these ideas have not by-passed our church doorsteps can be seen in the lengthy discussions and reports at our ecclesiastic assemblies. It appears that we have among us, left- and right-wingers and middle-of-the roaders, which makes it almost impossible to come to unanimous conclusions. This does not make a rosy picture of our situation. We can think of a lot of good things to say about our endeavours in Canada. But defending the walls of the city, putting up a heroic battle with the enemies in the gate, may turn out to be a failure if we let the enemies succeed in undermining the city walls and let them tunnel their way in. May the Lord grant leaders who can give directions to the churches.

There is the biblical equality which says, "there is no Jew or Greek, or slave or free" in the church of Jesus Christ. Some take that to mean that the church is like a democracy where the majority rules, and as a result they resent the authority of the head of the church and its officers. "The meek shall inherit the earth" says Jesus. This is one attitude we need more of — Church members who esteem their leaders. Deacons who can see themselves as the Lord's agents to practise charity. Elders who in humility rule the church, not as men pleasers, but as servants who will take a stand when the occasion calls for it. Teaching elders (ministers) who do proclaim the Word and teach the flock and do not dominate the ecclesiastical meetings, but are willing to submit to the doctrines of the church.

*And when the fight is fierce, the warfare long,
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song
And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong;
Alleluia, Alleluia!* Hymn 442:5

OUR QUESTION



REV. HARLAN G. VANDEN EINDE

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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.

"WHAT ABOUT TOTAL DEPRAVITY?"

From a Michigan reader comes a question about total depravity. In the context of the letter from which the question comes, there are a considerable number of references to Scripture which point to the fact that Jesus and His disciples urgently proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom, and called people to repentance and faith. Implied in the reader's letter is the thought that the church is not being faithful to that task today. Against that background, the reader asks: "Do we still believe in total depravity?"

Though the reader does not identify the "we" in his question, I assume he is referring to the we in the Christian Reformed Church. If my assumption is correct, then, from the point of view of the doctrinal position of our denomination, the answer is "yes, we do." And in the paragraphs that follow, I will attempt to explain what it means and why we believe it.

Let me begin with the "why?" I have no doubt but that this is not the most popular doctrine among us, nor that some would hedge on confessing it too openly or publicly among some of their friends. It's a truth that hurts. There is a strong emphasis in religious circles today on healing and helping and building up, all of which is fine, as long as the foundation for all of that building is not of sand. But therein lies the problem, for so much of this healing and helping and building up is attempted on the basis of the supposed inherent goodness of mankind.

It is an understatement, of course, to say that the Bible is an honest book. In His Word to us, God "tells it like it is." But that is not always what we by nature want to hear. If, however, we really want to hear the Good News, we first of all have to hear and understand the bad news, which is that all of us by nature are sinners. The Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ is absolutely pointless and meaningless to the person who doesn't know he needs it.

The Bible makes our need very clear. Wrote Jeremiah in 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt; who can know it?" And Paul, in Romans 3, quotes from Psalm 14 when he says: "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God . . ." (vss. 10, 11); and "for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God" (vs. 23). Again, in Romans 7:18 he says, "For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not." Again, in Ephesians 4: 18 he writes, "being darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God, because of the hardening of their heart."

So it is very obvious from the Bible that the message of the gospel hurts before it heals, it breaks down before it builds up. It very honestly tells us that by nature we are sinners who have offended God by our sin and who are alienated from Him. Only when we know that does the message of salvation through His Son begin to make sense.

But what do we mean when we say that by nature we are totally depraved? It is important that we do not misunderstand this doctrine, lest we do violence to the Scriptures, and hinder the progress of the gospel. The doctrine does not mean that we are as bad as we can be, or that there is not a single praiseworthy thing that anyone can do even in relation to his fellow men. But it does mean that sin has corrupted every part of our nature, intellectual, volitional and emotional, so that we are unable to do any spiritual good. Even those things for which others might praise us on the horizontal level are radically defective in God's sight, for they are not prompted by love for God, nor are they done in obedience to Him. So we are totally depraved in the sense that sin has penetrated into every part of our being; it has left no part of us untouched. Outside of Christ, we can do no spiritual good.

There is only one solution to our "total depravity" problem, and that is new birth in Christ. "You must be born again" said Jesus to Nicodemus. That is the message which must be proclaimed. And it is heard and believed through the Spirit's work, then as new creatures in Christ, we have a small beginning of new obedience, and begin to walk in the light of God's commandments. Not until that happens do we have a solid foundation on which to heal and help and build up, so that there may be growth in grace. Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift -- Jesus Christ!



WHAT'S COMING UP AT THE

ERC Synod?

PETER DE JONG

Every Christian Reformed Consistory member has again received a copy of the 1978 Synod Agenda. One wonders how many even of the delegates to that meeting will work through its 496 pages. To help consistory members as well as other readers to get acquainted with the synod's coming business, *THE OUTLOOK*, as it has done in recent years, again attempts to give a preview of it.

BACK TO GOD HOUR

The first report, that of the denomination's radio preaching of the gospel in eight languages throughout the world, appears, in some ways, to be the most encouraging news one can find in the whole book. Mail response, for example, to the Arabic broadcasts has risen from nothing to more than a thousand letters a month. The Chinese broadcasts, reaching into the most populous country in the world from which, as in many Islamic countries, virtually all other kinds of missionary effort are barred, give us a unique and growing opportunity to bring the Word of God there.

CALVIN COLLEGE AND SEMINARY AND DANCING

Among the items that concern the college and seminary, what seems likely to catch the most attention is the follow-up of last year's announced board decision to actively promote dancing on campus. Last year's synod turned down a motion to disapprove of that policy but directed that reactions to it be sent to the board. The board now reports that it has received hundreds of reactions, at least 85% of them critical, but is still of a mind to follow the announced course and that it expects the synod to support it (pp. 46-50).

WORLD MISSIONS

The report on overseas missions shows how at various points the evangelistic work is being taken over by national churches and an important part of our missionary effort has gone into seminary training for their leadership. One notices the pastor's training going on in the Philippines, Taiwan, Latin America and Africa. One wonders about the objectivity of the reporting when our churches are informed that the strongly promoted, ecumenical Theological College of Northern Nigeria's "student body continues to expand since the Bachelor of Divinity program was added two years ago" (p. 61). but our church public is told nothing about the fact revealed by a recent

missionary report that of a recent graduating class from that institution not one was going into the ministry but all were taking much higher paying government jobs in education! Neither do we find any reference to the remarkable fact reported by the same missionary that 300,000 people now attend meetings of the Tiv churches (more than the 287,656 total membership of our own CRC). The Tiv churches' Reformed Theological College (RTCN), operating as the Report says "on a shoestring budget" (p. 60), is expanding as it trains pastors to meet this enormous need as well as those of other churches.

Efforts continue in the several fields to coordinate the missionary effort with the relief work of CRWRC and the broadcasting of the Back-to-God Hour. The Latin America report aptly concludes, "At a time when many missionary organizations are losing their sense of identity and direction, the CRWM will serve Latin America best by refusing to be diverted from its essential task. It must keep pressing forward, proclaiming the Gospel to the unsaved and establishing Reformed churches, and doing it in complementary relationship to our other denominational agencies" (p. 67).

HOME MISSIONS

The Home Missions board report, in its introduction states rather well that, "As the denomination gets further from its ethnic roots and immigrant status and becomes more representative of the countries in which it lives, it must find its cohesiveness in the essentials: one Lord, one faith, one baptism. For stability it must depend increasingly on its biblical foundation." Mentioning also "kingdom consciousness" and "distinctive Reformed witness" it goes on to observe, "It must give itself in service in this world while remaining unspotted by worldliness" (p. 74). (While there are multiplying indications across the denominational scene that all of these aims are being considered out-dated by many, it is good that some in roles of leadership are trying to keep them in view.)

The report also indicates an effort to get away from long-term efforts that see little or no growth. "The Board of Home Missions is committed to beginning new fields as present fields are graduated." "Though presently Home Missions is somewhat behind the schedule of graduating five fields each year there is reason to expect the pace to increase" (p. 81).

BOARD OF PUBLICATIONS

The Publications Board notes the lack of usual protests (p. 93), increasing use of its materials outside of the denomination, especially among RCA churches (p. 97). (I did not notice any report on their use within the CRC.)

A supplementary "Report on Adult Education" calls attention to our "growing 'identity crisis,'" "Who are we as CRC?" "What justifies our continued denominational existence?" (p. 108) and "questions facing the church" such as "What is the Bible and how is it to be understood?", "What are appropriate roles of women in church and society?" "How should

Christians respond to economic disparity between nations and races?" (p. 110). The frank recognition that all of these have become questionable within the denomination ought to be compared and contrasted with the expressions of biblical and Reformed loyalty noted in the missions reports. These questions in fact rather accurately summarize what promise to be some of the major business of this synod of our increasingly divided churches.

WORLD RELIEF

The World Relief organization, having had to reduce its programs by 15% during 1977 because of lack of financing, presents a smaller budget this year. It is working for closer cooperation with other church agencies and seeking to avoid long-term commitments to aid programs. The work of the committee in many parts of the world in times of disaster has wide appreciation and support in the churches. The reader may wonder, however, how such activities as "re-forestation" and "transportation" (p. 121), "meeting literacy needs" improving "the functioning of community structures" (p. 120) and paying part of the director's salary for a "Family Counselling" project in the city of Edmonton where there are 8 mostly good-sized Christian Reformed Churches (p. 123) fits into the denominational effort to give help to these stricken by disasters or facing extreme problems of poverty. The evident intention of the organization to curtail or avoid long-term activity in such areas would appear to deserve support.

CHAPLAINS

Last year the Mission Principles report suggested the question whether in view of the reduced number and changing role of chaplains, the chaplains' work should be placed under the Home Mission Board where it used to be. Now the Chaplains' Committee which used only \$60,000 last year is operating on a budget of \$107,000 (p. 147). Increasingly chaplains are going into counselling services in a variety of institutions. The Committee feels that it must "bolster its recruiting and training program" to meet competition in the placement process (p. 141). The Committee also wants to go further into industrial and business chaplaincy. Included in the duties of such chaplains the Committee envisions "that of educating the constituency of the church on some of the inhumane and secularizing aspects of modern business and industry" (p. 141). Not surprisingly, in view of such envisioned aims, it has to call attention to the problem of determining when the work of a chaplain is still "spiritual in character and directly related to the ministerial calling" (p. 144). At this point we see another indication of the increasing confusion in the minds of the churches and their ministers about what their business in the world is supposed to be.

FUND FOR NEEDY CHURCHES

The FNC Committee is proposing that the minimum salary for ministers serving subsidized churches

be set at \$12,200 (an increase of \$200 compared with last year's increase of \$1,000), plus a (new) service increment of \$50 per year for up to 20 years of service, plus \$500 per child, plus \$1,000 car allowance to be equalled by another \$1,000 provided by the church (pp. 161, 162).

INTERCHURCH RELATIONS

In our interchurch relations with other members of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) it has become "evident . . . that we do have different approaches to the Bible and different ways of reading and understanding the Word of God. That led the Council to decide to sponsor a study committee on biblical hermeneutics." Our interchurch Relations Committee is recommending that the Synod endorse "*a conference . . . or series of conferences*" rather than such a joint study committee (p. 174). Last year, it may be recalled, our Synod approved the amendment NAPARC made to its constitution which affirmed that the basis of its fellowship was "full commitment to the Bible in its entirety as the Word of God written, without error in all its parts," but followed that strongly opposed decision with another which declared that this revision "does not bind the CRC beyond that which recent Synods of the CRC have endorsed" (*Acts 1977*, p. 36). It becomes only too apparent that our denomination is no longer willing to commit itself fully to faith in an inerrant Bible. Now this Committee will agree to a *conference* in which a variety of ideas may be aired, but not to a *joint study with those who take the Bible as inerrant*. It will be interesting to observe what happens when the major assemblies of four other denominations (members of NAPARC) who hold to an inerrant Bible will meet at Calvin College at the same time as our Synod meets there. The necessary rift between those who build on the Bible and those who don't will have to become apparent no matter how many declarations of ecumenical fellowship may be made. As we are asked to pray for this ecumenical development (p. 175), let us pray that God's Word may triumph over our denominational determination to compromise it.

The Committee Report devotes considerable attention to criticizing South African policy regulations and to its opinion on what the churches there should be doing about such matters (pp. 167-181).

LITURGY

For a number of years a standing committee has been issuing a variety of revisions of our old liturgical forms or new ones whether or not there seemed to be any general desire for them in the churches, and synods have been approving them. As that committee reviews its mandate since 1964 one notices the surprising fact that one of its duties has been to advise the synod "as to the . . . supervision it ought to provide local congregations in all liturgical matters" (p. 185). Although our churches in their synods decide on matters of common policy, doesn't it come as a surprise that

one of our synods regarded itself as having the job of "supervising" each congregation? It appears that according to that decision we have been Episcopalians (governed by supervising bishops) rather than Reformed (governed by local elders) for the last 14 years. It has become increasingly common that new forms were first approved for trial by those who wished to use them. More recently in connection with the Lord's Supper, it appears that the form was merely an *illustration* of the way the Lord's Supper might be celebrated (p. 191). Now the committee, fearful that this policy has created "anarchy and sheer congregationalism" determines that this freedom of the churches must be reined in. It "believes that it is time for the synod to begin to set . . . limits" (p. 192). It proposes to set up an order for the Lord's Supper in which it indicates what words must be used and at what points and to what degree they may be altered. This order may also be the order for other services than those at which the Lord's Supper is celebrated. Included as an option in it is what it calls "the Passing of the Peace." By this the Committee means Paul's "holy kiss" for which it would substitute a handshake and words such as "The peace of the Lord be always with you" (p. 193). The Report goes on to indicate how the three current forms for the Lord's Supper may be divided up and used piecemeal in different parts of the service. The net impression the reader gains from the whole business is that it is extremely and needlessly complex and arbitrarily cuts up our too many existing forms.

Many years ago when an attempt was made to impose upon the church a "new order of worship" which although complicated did have some logic, the churches overwhelmingly rejected it. There is little reason to believe that this effort to impose even more complex, confusing and arbitrary legislation would or ought to be more successful than that was.

To help guide the churches in the confusion it is creating, the Committee proposes that the Synod approve a loose-leaf Service Book which can be constantly changed!

Churches are asked to bring to the Committee their reactions to the new marriage form which was approved for trial last year, before September 1, 1978. That form in its capitulation to the modern liberation fad in the vows pointedly refused to recognize the God-given distinction between the role of man and woman in marriage and even tastelessly presumed to instruct God in the prayer how He ought to counsel the partners when they would become bored with each other!

One wonders about some of the doctrine expressed in the new forms found in the report. Where does the Bible ever intimate that the Christian "may joyfully bear the cross of Christ" (p. 188). We have crosses to bear, but never bear Christ's unique cross! Is this an unintentional slip or a deliberate heresy?

Again, although the Bible instructs us to confess our sins to the Lord and to one another as we sin against him or her, where does it ever instruct us to

confess them to "the whole communion of saints in heaven and earth" (p. 194)? We should not say such things if we do not mean them. If we include such material in our liturgy just because it sounds grandiloquent, are we not in danger of turning the whole business into hypocrisy?

The committee's over all problem is difficult if not impossible to solve. Listening to the response of churches, it gets "no clear guidance. What one said tended to be cancelled out by another" (p. 191). Liturgy although important is a secondary matter. It must seek to express the faith and confession of the churches that use it. When there is no longer a real unity of faith and confession the problem of finding acceptable liturgy — or liturgies, must become hopeless. The Committee's problem in endlessly multiplying new or revised forms is that this increasing variation both results from and contributes to breaking up of the bonds that still hold our increasingly divided churches together. The Committee, now itself becoming fearful of the process it has encouraged, wants to stop it. That effort can hardly succeed.

MINISTERS

The Minister's Information Service notes "that there is an increasing concern about the question of being released from the office of the ministry and from the ordination vows. Would it therefore be wise to establish a period of probation prior to ordination? Or to remove the implication of permanency attached to the ordination vows" (p. 222)?

The Ministers' Pension Fund Committee remarks that its basic pension is now \$4,840 per year. It suggests that because of differences between the laws of the U. S. and Canada we may have to have two separate pension plans. It wants the Synod to designate \$3,000 of the pension as a reasonable housing allowance for retirees for tax purposes. It asks a quota of 75¢ for the supplemental fund which would also cover moving expenses in addition to the \$30.50 quota for the pension fund (pp. 221-231).

RACE

Last year the Race Committee (SCORR), burdened with an impossibly broad mandate (to "eliminate racism, both causes and effects . . . through the world . . .") and no assigned job, brought in a somewhat dispirited report. The Synod, however, continued it and raised its quota which had been cut the previous year. This year the committee lists among its activities the fact that it is helping to support a "Black" "Minister-At-Large" who works under an independent board in Grand Rapids as "an ombudsman for the urban poor and minority peoples." Admitting "the controversial nature of this ministry," the Committee tells us nothing of the religious or denominational commitment of this minister we are supporting (p. 260).

The Committee's report includes the 6-page "Koinonia Declaration" of a group of white Afrikaners who are objecting to some of their South African

government's policies. The Race Committee wants our Synod to endorse this declaration although it objects to that part of the declaration which condemns both Black as well as White nationalism. "Nor are we convinced that both White and Black nationalist movements ought to be condemned with equal force, as the Declaration seems to do" (p. 270).

Of its \$114,000 budget \$50,000 is for salaries and operating expenses and the rest is given to other agencies (and minority scholarships). How can giving special "minority scholarships," restricted to certain races eliminate race discrimination?

MINISTERS IN EXTRAORDINARY SERVICE

Increasingly ministers of our churches are being placed in roles which are quite different from the ordinate pastorate. When questions about how far a minister's ordination might be stretched to cover such duties arose two years ago, a committee was appointed to study the matter. Its report proposes that the description of the minister's task as "spiritual in character and directly related to the ministerial calling" be abandoned (p. 324).

It proposes a series of changes in Church Order articles 11-14 to deal with these matters. Some of these details seem to have some merit. What I find somewhat disturbing is the Committee's baldly stated assumption "that most stipulations governing the offices . . . are neither sacred nor biblically enjoined. To put it another way, the nature and extent of ecclesiastical office is what the church says it is" (p. 326). Although we all recognize that the Bible does not give us detailed regulations to cover every area of the churches' life, doesn't such a sweeping assumption as this contradict the principle that Christ governs His church by His Word and Spirit? In a variety of matters one senses that we pay less and less attention to anything the Bible says, but isn't it somewhat startling to see this Committee baldly claim such independence of Scripture as a basic church principle?

WOMEN IN CHURCH OFFICE

After noticing this last observation of a study committee we turn to the next Report which deals with "Hermeneutical Principles Concerning Women in Office."

We observe that it, in what may prove to be the most controversial item of the Synod's business would lead us to the same conclusion that the Bible tells us nothing clearly and that the church is free to do as it pleases. It may be worth recalling that this is the last of three reports that in one way or another have been dealing with this matter. In 1973 an 80-page report went through the Bible citing the many examples of the prominent places given women in order to prove their equality and dismissed anything the Bible taught about their not being put in the same offices as men as the expression of the male-dominated ancient culture.

In 1975 another committee first plainly exposed the fallacious reasoning of the earlier report and

called attention to New Testament passages which showed that special offices were not given to women. Then it observed that if these passages were taken literally they would forbid a few things which our churches were already doing. "Therefore" (*Acts* 1975, pp. 483, 484, 486, 488) the Committee sought and found excuses which it argued made such Bible teachings no longer applicable. By this curious process the Committee reached the same conclusion that the Bible didn't oppose the ordination of women. The Synod of 1975 appointed a new committee which was to study the way in which the Bible should be understood to apply to such matters.

This Committee found itself sharply divided, four of the professors (from Calvin College and Seminary) on one side, three others, two from Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi and one from Reformed Bible College) on the other. In that situation the Committee, instead of presenting two reports in which the positions of each group could be clearly stated and argued, was prevailed upon to stay together and attempt to bring one report which probably satisfies no one. Although the differing conclusions are indicated at the end, the argumentation, as Professor Van Groningen, himself a committee member, pointed out in last month's *OUTLOOK* (pp. 20-22), is confusing and far from satisfactory in many ways. A large part of the report consists of statements of abstract principles of interpretation.

As one moves through it, however, he notices an emphasis emerging that stresses the way biblical material was culturally conditioned. "Consideration should be given to the possibility that that which looks like a moral principle and has been long considered such by the church is in fact no more than an application of a moral principle." "Care should be taken not to transfer such applications directly to the different situations obtaining today" (p. 345).

Again, "the question may be considered whether a given word in Scripture, which appears to be the last word the canon speaks on the subject, is possibly open to the future for further development in connection with the coming of God's kingdom" (p. 347). Not surprisingly, the majority of the Committee, seeking for reasons or excuses to defend the modern movement to remove all distinctions between men and women in the church, as it refers to some selected Scripture passages, ignoring many others, laboring especially to dispute Paul's clear injunctions in I Cor. 14:33-36 and I Timothy 2:9-15 arrives at the desired conclusion that "the biblical evidence for allowing or denying women admission to the office of elder and minister as presently understood is not clear" (p. 376). It would now open the office of deacon to women, but would not yet admit them to become ministers or elders especially since "most of our churches do not seem to be ready at this time for women elders and women pastors" (p. 377).

Two of the minority, although dissuaded from bringing their own separate report differ from the majority's conclusion. They find some evidence in the

Bible for permitting women deacons (Rom. 16:1 and I Tim. 3:1) and would permit their ordination to that office, "provided that their work is distinguished from that of the elders" (p. 377). They "find no evidence in the Bible for opening the offices of elder and minister to women" and see the Apostle Paul (I Cor. 14:34 and I Tim. 2:12) stating "that a woman is not to have authority over a man." They would have the Synod declare that "the offices of elder and minister not be opened to women" (p. 378).

It seems to me that two additional observations ought to be made: (1) It should be observed that in the two passages just mentioned, which prescribes the order that must prevail in Christ's church (I Tim. 3:15; I Cor. 14:33), the Apostle grounds his barring women from ruling offices in *God's creation* and *His law*, and in "*the commandment of the Lord*" (I Cor. 14:38). Only if they want to set that aside can our churches ordain them to these leading and governing offices. (2) It is true that deacons are engaged in "serving" and there were women since Bible times who helped the sick and needy. That they were ordained to special "offices" in such service no one has been able to show. The Lord who accepted the service of women chose and called no women apostles. Furthermore, deacons among us not only care for the needy but also serve as part of the council and in it together with the elders govern the church. Therefore if our churches ordain women to this office as we have it, they thereby set aside the Lord's order for His church and really declare their independence from Him and His Word. This was exactly the sin Jesus condemned in the Pharisees, who "made the commandment of God of none effect" by their tradition and thereby made their worship "vain" in His judgment, "teaching for doctrines the precepts of men" (Matt. 15:3-9). He labeled them "hypocrites" ("actors") because while pretending to explain and apply God's Word they really set it aside.

ORDINATION OF LAYWORKERS

A Committee to deal with the old problem of to what kind of office lay-workers should be ordained presents a divided report. A majority recommends that they be ordained as elders; a minority would have them ordained to a new office of "evangelist." It seems to me that the first proposal better fits the Biblical pattern which provides for the office of elder but does not seem to point to a church's right to establish whatever new offices it may please.

WORLD HUNGER

A "Task Force on World Hunger" faces us with 70 pages of lengthy discussion on poverty in the world, some common sense recommendations that we waste and spend too much and ought to be more saving and give more help to the needy. Not content, however, with such practical and generally acceptable advice, it would have us take on the job of *restructuring the world* (p. 463)! It is confident that it will meet with opposition as it criticizes our "recreational vehicles

and Cadillacs" and "Florida vacations" (p. 459); it proposes that we give one percent of our income to a world hunger program, and vastly expand the work of the CRWRC. Since its aim to restructure the world system, "structural or systematic change both in North America and worldwide," is a bit ambitious even for that agency, it suggests that the Synod continue the work of this Committee to take on that problem (pp. 463, 465, 468). Without underestimating the competence of our modest "task force" to handle such an undertaking, don't we have to face the question whether the Lord has assigned this job to our churches (Luke 12:14)? This proposal despite its good intentions could develop into the most incalculably expensive boondoggle our churches have ever undertaken.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

A Committee to consider establishing a denominational "standing committee for social justice" first considers objections that this is going beyond the proper province of the church, then finds precedents we have established for a move in this direction and finally recommends establishing such committees on all church levels.

One observes in the case of a number of other churches that as they become less committed to or certain of the Bible and its teachings they often become more confident of their "prophetic" calling and competence to tell the world how to solve all of its problems. We seem to be seeing among us the same striking development in the multiplication of such committees to deal with all kinds of social problems at the same time as we are being assured by study committees that the Bible tells us nothing certain about anything.

OVERTURES

This Synod faces relatively few overtures from classes or churches. Overtures 2 and 3 deal with separation of ministers from their churches. Overture 5 would enlarge the Radio Committee and make it denomination-wide. Number 6 would "articulate the nature and strategy of Reformed Evangelism." Overture 7 would have agencies asking quota support report their salary and fringe benefit schedule in the Agenda. Haven't our churches a right to know what they are paying above the congregational level? Overture 10 from Wisconsin would revise Synod procedure "to require that all overtures, appeals and communications addressed to Synod and endorsed by a consistory or classis be duplicated and distributed to all delegates of Synod, if these communications do not appear in the printed agenda" (pp. 492-493). It argues that delegates should know on what they are voting and that those who bring overtures have a right to a hearing by the Synod. This overture if adopted might go far toward remedying the serious political abuse that is preventing our Synods from operating as the representative bodies they are supposed to be (see my article in the December 1977,

THE OUTLOOK, pp. 7-10). Pointing in the same direction is Overture 11 which would have personal appeals given to delegates with certain precautions. Overture 12 deals with Christian care for the retarded; Overture 13 would increase minister's pension benefits; Overture 14 asks the Synod not to approve of social dancing at Calvin College; number 15 wants the Synod to support the Koinonia Declaration, already mentioned. Finally number 16 would define the nature and authority of the Canadian Council of the CRC.

THAT URC -

a look around us

JOHN VANDER PLOEG

Recently at church, a good friend drew me aside and said, "The URC (United Reformed Church) is an old man's movement." Then he added that he himself was going on eighty-five and that he had no more fight left in him. A bit doggedly I countered by stating my conviction that the URC is *God's* movement. Besides this we may well be reminded that it was precisely when he "forsook the counsel of the old men" that Rehoboam met disaster and his kingdom went to pieces. Wisdom as the fruit of experience is found more often with the old than with the young. The flattering quip about the senior citizens being the "keen-agers" may even have a bit of truth to it.

But, be all that as it may, how sorely the vision and the vigor of youth are also needed if, under God, the church is to fare well. It is gratifying therefore to be able to share with the reader a communication from a young CRC minister and relayed to me by Rev. Peter De Jong to whom it was sent. The following background information may help to explain this letter.

It was in the July '77 issue of THE OUTLOOK that I wrote on "Desideratum - A United Reformed Church," at the outset of which editorial I ventured to say:

"Suppose that in God's gracious providence the day would dawn when Reformed Church bodies - of course, I am thinking particularly of the CRC - would experience a drastic housecleaning. . . . Suppose that such denominations would some day purge themselves of the foe within the gates and of those bold innovations that now threaten to undermine the Reformed faith. . . . And suppose that out of the tensions, all in God's gracious providence, a new denomination would emerge - a denomination that would not shilly-shally in its witness to the Reformed faith; but a church that would rather be unambiguous, consistent, and enthusiastic in the profession of it. . . . Just sup-

pose that some day God would be pleased to grant this, allow me then to suggest as a name, that it be called the United Reformed Church."

In addition to the various reactions previously published we now quote this young minister's communication. He writes:

"I have followed with interest Rev. Vander Ploeg's 'desideratum' regarding a United Reformed Church. I hope he will continue to write about this, and to keep this before our people. It seems to me that, barring some unforeseen, almost miraculous intervention, a split in the CRC is inevitable — it's only a matter of time and timing.

"I don't know exactly which event or decision of Synod might precipitate this split, but we ought to be ready for this split, while yet working to change the CRC while we are yet in it. As a student of church history, I am sure you are aware of the problem small splinter groups face after they leave an apostate denomination. There are many adjustments to be made, and as a result of having to deal with these adjustments, the fledgling denomination is often hampered in its work for several years.

"It is my conviction that when the split comes, we ought to affiliate with another solid, conservative Reformed group, such as the Orthodox Presbyterians or the Presbyterian Church in America. This would provide stability for the group that leaves, while giving added strength to the group(s) we affiliate with. . . .

"Along the lines suggested by Rev. Vander Ploeg, I am pursuing the following concrete steps, and suggesting them to those I know are committed to the historic Reformed faith:

"1) Get to know other conservative Reformed denominations that we might consider affiliating with. This may be done by subscribing to their periodicals, visiting the church, procuring a copy of their hymnal and creedal statements, church polity, etc.

"2) Once some of the above steps have been taken, study the materials prayerfully in the light of the Bible. Evaluate different positions, practices, etc., and compare them with our own. Thus you will be in a position to offer constructive criticism and advice when talk gets around to union with such a denomination.

"3) When you find a part of church polity, etc., that is better than our own, don't hesitate to suggest to the appropriate bodies that the CRC adopt this.

"Along this line, it seems to me our synod has entirely too much power. The RCA with all its other faults, has a good idea in requiring that major changes be approved by 2/3 of the classes before they are adopted. If the CRC had been following that policy, perhaps we wouldn't be where we are today.

"Well, hope this note provides some grist for your mill. . . ."

In a subsequent letter this correspondent calls attention to the NPRF (the National Presbyterian and Reformed Fellowship) as an organization with which readers of *THE OUTLOOK* would do well to become acquainted. According to an article in *The Banner of*

March 3, '78: "The fellowship is composed of individual Christians who seek renewal and hope among Presbyterian and Reformed people through reassertion of the Reformational principle of obedience to the whole counsel of God revealed in His Word."

The article states further:

"This fellowship is not a council of churches." We are also informed that the NPRF "is calling a national Congress for the summer of 1979, to be held in three sections" and that one of these sections is to be at Calvin College July 9-13, 1979, having as its theme, "The Word of the Sovereign God."

We are also informed that "persons interested in becoming members of the fellowship or attending the Congress can write for further information to Dr. George C. Fuller, Executive Director, National Presbyterian and Reformed Fellowship, Box 44, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania 19481.

Previously attention has been called to the League of Christian Laymen, a concerned element in the RCA (Reformed Church in America), with whom we would do well to seek closer acquaintance and fellowship. *The Reformed Record*, the publication of this League, may be ordered from League of Christian Laymen (RCA), Inc., 1711 Woodcliff, S.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506.

Moreover, beginning in the week of June 12 (right about this time) the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church in America, the Reformed Presbyterian Church North America, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church — Evangelical Synod, will hold their synods or assemblies on the Calvin Campus concurrently with the CRC Synod.

The above suggestions may point in the direction of moving at least a little closer to the realization of the goal of a URC, the Lord willing. ●

POINTED PARAGRAPHS

would you believe it?

CLARENCE WERKEMA

It was supper time; we were at the family meal when the phone rang — another one of these inconvenient interruptions that is so common in the parsonage. There was a young man on the phone wanting to talk to the pastor. He had a question, "Could he partake with the congregation at the Table of the Lord?" He had all the right credentials — a believer in Jesus Christ, saved by the blood of the Lamb, a confessing member of a distant CR Church. There was a bit more conversation and the young man went on to explain that he wanted to participate with this congregation because he understood that it rather carefully supervised the Table according to the Church Order and good Reformed tradition, heeding Paul's warning in I Corinthians 11:27 and 28. What seemed incredible was that the caller was only 18

years old—a teen-ager knowing and appreciating good tradition!

He went on to explain how unhappy and disillusioned he had become in "Jerusalem." He had worshipped in two of the "popular" CR churches, congregations where things "hang loose," and where the young supposedly flock. He had come away disgusted especially by the wide open invitation for all to come to the Table of the Lord (open communion in the CRC).

I am still amazed, for I had been wondering whether there were any young people left in the church who could appreciate its practices, traditions and teachings. Thank God that there are still homes and churches within the CRC fold where the sanctity of the Table is upheld and where a true and solemn warning is issued to all those approaching it—where people are not indiscriminately welcomed to the Table of the Lord. Thank God for young minds that understand and appreciate faithful adherence to the Infallible Word. Thank God for young people that still appreciate good order, decency and the confirmed tradition of the Church. ●

Meditation

NEVER WORRY



REV. JOHN BLANKESPOOR

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6, 7 (NIV)

What a tremendous statement! Worry about nothing!

Either it is completely unrealistic, or it comes from "another world," a source not of our world. The latter of course is the case here. It comes from God. But notice that it comes from above through a man who lived on this earth, in fact, from one (Paul) who lived in a stinking prison, a dungeon.

But isn't it natural to worry? Who doesn't worry?

Rev. John Blankespoor is pastor of the Pine Creek Christian Reformed Church of Holland, Michigan.

Everybody does, Christians included, from small children to the oldest members of the church. Teenagers, young adults, parents, husbands and wives, grandparents and old people, they all worry. But the Word of God still stands, be anxious about nothing.

Worry, or anxiety, is of course quite different from concern, or assuming our responsibility. The former arises out of unbelief that does not see the guiding hand of the heavenly Father. The latter arises out of a sense of duty, using the means the Lord has given us. We have worry and anxiety regarding things beyond our control. Concern on the other hand has to do with responsibility with the things we are called upon to do.

Concern we must always have. Worry we should never have. Never? Are there no exceptions? Aren't we apt to say, yes, but? But . . . here are no "buts" or exceptions. Worry about *nothing*, says Paul. The exhortation refers to all times. It makes no difference when we live, or in what circumstances we live, or what we experience, or how many problems we have. It's almost like a dream. Is it possible so to live? It's really too wonderful to be true. The very thought of such living already makes one sit back and relax.

What a tremendous truth in a world where the powers of the world are constantly engaged in a cold war of nerves. What more blessed assurance and blessings of real life could we receive regarding our future and the future of the church in this terrible age of dictatorial powers, materialism, and secularism?

Living like this is a little bit of heaven. Surely then we are filled with the Spirit, and almost on cloud nine, never worrying or being anxious!

* * * * *

Who doesn't ask, how is this possible? The answer is always the same. God is the possibility.

Isn't it always true that when we ignore Him, or pass Him by, that we find ourselves in trouble and also have all kinds of worries? And isn't it so often true that we seek help with so many other sources except with God?! And when we do seek help from other sources we discover that other men also have burdens and are equally helpless.

In everything, by prayer and supplication or petition, let your requests be made known unto God. Tell God about your needs in prayer. Be sure to live a rich life of prayer. Just tell God. Don't begin to rationalize, or reason, or ask why; no, tell God about your troubles and needs. That in itself already gives relief. Doesn't it help to unburden your soul to a friend who will listen and is interested? Here we are told to make all our needs known to our heavenly Father.

Be sure to notice, according to Paul's words, how we should approach God, or how we should begin our prayers. The first thing we should do is thank Him. Thank Him when our hearts are full of worries and fears? Thank Him from the heart when the water almost reaches our lips? Yes, that's exactly what Paul says. Here we see one of our greatest weaknesses. In

times of distress the thought of gratitude for the blessings and promises received in Christ doesn't usually even enter our minds. We simply are so overwhelmed that we lose the proper perspective of God's abundant blessings and promises.

Isn't it true that nearly all of our prayers are petitions, give me, give me, give me, Lord? Wonder why? Because thankfulness to God does not come naturally from the old man. Selfishness is still so deeply rooted in all of us. One of the first gifts of the Holy Spirit is to say from the heart, "Thank you, Lord."

The first question for you and me is not, did we pray today? But did we in our prayers thank Him? Thank Him as we first counted our blessings? Thank Him for the spiritual blessings, but also the material abundance and blessings we daily receive? Thank Him for the Bible, the knowledge of Jesus Christ, the forgiveness of sins, the promises that all things work together for good to them that love God? Thank Him for His faithfulness, but also for food, clothing, homes, shelter, friends, freedom, that we can hear, talk, see, walk and receive many physical blessings?

Do this, my friends, and you will experience that this in itself will already do something for you. This by itself will already give you a certain peace of mind and calmness of soul. Therefore discipline yourself in all your prayers, that the first thing is not, give me Lord, give me Lord, but instead, Thank you Lord . . . , thank you Lord. . . . And of course the central reason for our gratitude must always be the gift of His Son, our Savior.

Then we can come with petitions. To supplicate, to petition means to beg, beseech and ask Him in our helplessness. This we must do constantly. Too often we are like the sailor who, falling from the mast of the ship, cried, "O God help me." The next moment he found a rope to which he clung and almost subconsciously said, "Now it isn't necessary anymore, Lord."

The sum total of it all is, thank you Father for all He has given you and always ask Him for all the things you need. Do this from the heart.

* * * * *

And you will have peace, says Paul. The peace of God which transcends all understanding will keep your heart and mind in Christ Jesus.

Again, isn't this just ideal language? Is it really that simple?

Remember, these are the words of the inspired Paul. Remember also that he knew what he was talking about. Wasn't he the man who had fears from within and struggles from without? Who suffered much, endured much, sacrificed so much for Christ's sake?

The peace of God will guard our hearts and minds in Christ, says the text — to give us that peace which is beyond all human understanding.

The picture is that of a fort or garrison. Within the fort are the blessings of peace, calmness and tranquility. There the sheep lie beside the still waters in peace and security (Ps. 23). Outside is the world, and

all that is against us — worry, fear, danger, problems, anxieties, and confusion. With God there is always peace, perfect peace. This peace of God is like a guard, a power of the Spirit. This peace of God, acting like a guard, keeps us within the fort that stands in the midst of this world of worry, fear, and all evil powers. This peace of God controls our hearts and minds, protects them, so that we too have and enjoy that peace within the fort. The point is that God will so guard us in our needs and problems, when we are so apt to worry. Go to Him in prayer and first of all thank Him, and then petition Him for your needs.

God gives us wonderful promises here. Who doesn't covet such peace? How? Thank Him, *work at it* so that you may do this every day, and then ask Him for your needs. No, this doesn't mean that He will always give us what we want. But He will give us what we need, and, above all, that peace that surpasses all human understanding.

Those are glorious heights of faith.

I believe, Lord, but help me in my unbelief!

DE PROFUNDUS

WILLARD DE JONGE

Matthew 26:75b

Peter, it was your spirit that soared where eagles fly. It was your soul which was granted respiration in the holy atmosphere of God's heavens.

You were impulsive, yes, but you made a confession that was divested of all doubt and uncertainty when you declared: "You are the Christ!"

But Peter, you descended from this pinnacle of faith, plummeting like a falling star. The "rock" was shattered. Weary and perplexed, you exchanged the sunshine of God's Love for the utter darkness of despair. You deliberately abandoned true knowledge for the lie of denial — not once but thrice.

When the legendary "herald of dawn" proclaimed a new day, for you it was night. The shades of darkness smothered your being. For you, it was as though hope had ceased to be and the Light had been extinguished. You had denied your Lord.

But praise God, Peter, you wept! The tears were bitter, but they were tears flowing from the Fountain of God's Mercy. Hope still lives, Peter and the Light continues to shine.

Remember, Peter, the Master's promise spoken directly to you?

"Simon, Simon, behold Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you as wheat: but I made supplication for thee that thy faith fail not."

Peter, this promise too is yours: "I give unto you eternal life; and you shall never perish and no one shall snatch you out of my hand."

"Your sins are forgiven!"

And for Peter, the Light broke through.

ORDINATION OF WOMEN TO THE OFFICE OF DEACON

Right or Wrong?

JOHN VANDER PLOEG

Should the CRC now decide to make the office of deacon available to women?

This is not merely a theoretical or abstract question, but rather it is practical and very urgent right now.

Why? Because the 1978 CRC Synod is faced with a recommendation from a study committee that this now be done.

The committee on *Women in Ecclesiastical Office* comes with a majority report and a minority report. Both reports are in favor of making the office of deacon available to women.

Bear in mind that the question is not whether the services of qualified women should or should not be employed for special work of Christian mercy. There is no difference of opinion about that. But this is the issue — **are these women to be or not to be ordained to the office of deacon?**

The majority report recommends that: "Consistories be allowed to ordain women to the office of deacon as delineated in the Church Order, Article 25." Note especially their first ground for this recommendation: "Women functioning in the office of deacon has biblical (Rom. 16:1; I Tim. 3:11) and historical precedent (Synod of Wezel, 1568)."

The minority report recommends that Synod declare: 1. "There is some evidence in the Bible for opening the office of deacon to women. At least two passages in the New Testament (Rom. 16:1 and I Tim. 3:11) indicate that women may serve as deacons (deaconesses). 2. "That consistories be allowed to ordain qualified women to the office of deacon provided that their work is distinguished from that of elders." As a ground for this the minority report states: "There is historical precedent for this in the Reformed tradition (See Calvin's *Institutes*, Book IV, Chapter 3, Section 9, and the Synod of Wezel, 1568)."

The grounds then for this recommendation to ordain women to the office of deacon are twofold: historical precedent and two passages adduced from Scripture. We now must give these our attention.

1. Historical precedent may be considered first.

a. With all due respect for the venerable John Calvin we are not necessarily to be faulted if we ask for more convincing evidence than his mention of women having served in the office of deacon in the *Institutes* passage adduced.

b. In regard to the **Wezel precedent** found in both the majority and minority reports, the following from

The Revised Church Order Commentary by Van Delen and Monsma (p. 104) should be noted:

"The Wezelian Convention (1568) judged that it might be well to appoint worthy women to the office under discussion. Evidently, the Convention did not mean that women should be ordained as deaconesses, but that they should be appointed to assist the deacons. For in 1581, the Classis of Wezel asked the Synod of Middelburg (1581) whether it would not be 'advisable to re-institute the office of deaconesses.' But this synod answered in the negative 'because of various inconveniences which might follow.' It did however declare that in times of widespread epidemics or much sickness, which called for nursing duties which the deacons could not perform with propriety, the deacons should call in the assistance of their wives, or other suitable women. . . . And thus the Reformed churches never ordained deaconesses. . . ."

2. The two Scriptural passages adduced in the reports must also be considered.

a. **Romans 16:1** — "I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant (or deaconess) of the church that is at Cenchreae. . . ." On this passage attention may be called to the comment by that scholarly exegete, John Murray, in his commentary on Romans: "It is common to give to Phoebe the title of 'deaconess' and regard her as having performed an office in the church corresponding to that which belonged to men who exercised the office of deacon (cf. Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 3:8-13). Though the word for 'servant' is the same as is used for deacon in the instances cited, yet the word is also used to denote the person performing any type of ministry. If Phoebe ministered to the saints, as is evident from verse 2, then she would be a servant of the church and there is neither need nor warrant to suppose that she occupied or exercised what amounted to an ecclesiastical office comparable to that of the diaconate . . . there is no more warrant to posit *an office* than in the case of the widows who, prior to their becoming the charge of the church, must have borne the features mentioned in I Timothy 5: 9, 10."

b. **I Timothy 3:11** — "Women in like manner must be grave, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things." Dr. Wm. Hendriksen, who is accorded wide respect as a New Testament scholar and author, in his Commentary on I-II Timothy and Titus makes a comment that may well be placed over against the idea that we find evidence here for women in the office of deacon. He writes: "The simplest explanation of the manner in which Paul, not yet finished with the requirements for the office of deacon, interjects a few remarks about women, is that he regards these women as the **deacons' assistants** in helping the poor and needy, etc. These are **women who render auxiliary service**, performing ministries for which women are better adapted."

Additional observations:

1. Make no mistake about it, if the 1978 CRC

Synod decides to approve of the ordination of women to the office of deacon the first step will be taken to ordain women to the offices of elder and minister also. Bear in mind that in 1973 the CRC Synod adopted as one of the *Guidelines for understanding the nature of Ecclesiastical Office and Ordination* the following: "The general term for 'office' in the Greek New Testament is DIAKONIA, meaning 'service' or 'ministry.' In this basic sense ecclesiastical office is one and indivisible, for it embraces the total ministry of the church, a ministry that is rooted in Christ." If ecclesiastical office is basically one, why stop then with the office of deacon in ordaining women?

2. In the CRC the deacons in practice as "office-bearers" are part of the "consistory . . . responsible for the general government of the church" (Church Order, Article 35), a "ruling" function to which women are not entitled. Think of the situation that will develop if women now come to occupy the office of deacon.

3. If women are ordained to ecclesiastical offices how long will it be in the CRC before the men step aside and leave it to the women altogether? History affords many valuable lessons for those who are willing to learn. ●

THE REVEALING RATIO:

its review and response

C. WILLIAM FLIETSTRA

The responsible church of Christ is expected to carefully examine the contents of each Synod's Agenda. In this year's 496-page volume the reader notes in Report No. 2 of Calvin College and Seminary two additional Appendices "A" and "B." Appendix "B," entitled "Report on Matter of Social Dancing," originates in a Synodical recommendation of 1977 (Synodical Acts 1977, p. 97). It is to this second Appendix "B" that I would alert the church of Christ as she gathers in Synodical assembly this coming June.

Appendix "B" analyzes the detailed information received from a questionnaire of the Board of Trustees sent to the churches. Synod had requested the church to express itself on the debatable position which the Board had previously taken on the introduction on campus of what was termed "social dancing." The responses of consistories and individuals were solicited and were to be forwarded to the Board Secretary. They were then tabulated and evaluated with a further conclusion for the Synod. This tabulation and the evaluation with conclusions are found in our 1978 *Agenda*.

Rev. C. W. Flietstra is pastor of the Christian Reformed Church at Hancock, Minnesota.

What do we discover in this tabulation of reactions from the heart of the Chr. Ref. Church? What do we learn as constituency in the Conclusion (Part III) of the Board of Trustees report? Let's take a good hard look at this tabulation and its relationship to the conclusions reached.

In the analysis of responses received, we find the following statistics:

"Of total responses received, about 85% raised questions and objections, 4% asked for information and 10% expressed approval. The breakdown of responses is as follows: 9 classes responded, 1 approved and 8 disapproved; 159 churches responded, 24 approved and 135 disapproved; 95 individuals responded, 2 approved and 93 disapproved; 4 organizations responded, 1 approved and 3 disapproved." So much for mathematical ratios and percentages on the problem. In reviewing these statistics what is one's obvious conclusion? That the great majority of the church voiced their sentiments in the *negative* with respect to Calvin's proposed introduction of a new mode of entertainment in social dancing. A ratio of 85% to 10% with 4% seeking further information is *not* to be discounted as irrelevant to the problem! Looking at the figures, one would normally conclude that the church by majority opinion and poll voices its wholehearted dissent to the proposal of the Board of Trustees for Calvin Campus.

But what conclusion does the Board arrive at in its report to Synod? Does it responsibly relate the dissent (85%) to the Synod and then recommend that such entertainment be discouraged or even categorically cancelled? Let's review the report. On page 50 of our *Agenda*, the Board of Trustees draws the conclusion "that the church must address itself to the growing practice of social dancing." So far, so good! But when the church does address herself and asks for grass roots opinion which evidences disapproval of such dancing, then what happens? The Board continues in its report to recommend — "We wish to state here that we value our Christian heritage. We cherish what our heritage has given us and we wish to preserve it. *However, it is our conviction that preservation cannot be accomplished by putting it away for safekeeping. . . .* Thus, we are persuaded that the *matter of social dancing must be confronted openly and honestly*, that the Board of Trustees *has done that responsibly* within the guidelines of Synodical decisions, and that *the church at large must now do likewise. . . .*" Then one reads that the "Board of Trustees *reaffirms its position re the Dance Issue taken in May 1977* and reported to the Synod in June 1977. . . ." They go on further to make their challenge to the Synod of our church by saying: "If there is a *basic uncertainty as to the meaning of the 1966/71 decisions and their application to social dancing*, we recommend that *synod take steps to clarify its position* while the Board of Trustees withholds implementation of its decision until the results of synod's study are available."

What does this say to the church constituency

wrestling with the problems of our modern dance, with rock-n-roll and discotheque? In my opinion, our board has disregarded the negative response of the church with its deep concern. It is further clouding the churches' thinking by asserting a confused consensus in the interpretation of the Synodical decisions of 1966/71. It elicits "different views on dancing" in the context of Christian liberty. The statement is made in the report that "we believe that every area of life, including the social dance, is subject to the redeeming power of our Lord." Again, "The sanctified exercise of Christian liberty in all of these activities (eating, drinking, and *entertainment*) including the dance, is clearly our responsibility." Finally, we read that "the Board has therefore *encouraged the departments to continue toward the goal of providing the moral sensitivity and social skills necessary in using dance as a pleasant and wholesome opportunity for social interaction.*"

Is this the proper route for the Chr. Ref. Church constituency who by majority have voiced their "No" to the questionnaire of the Board? Consistories, classes, and honest Christians, raise your voices to support your convictions in a "trumpet cry" of warning to our Board and our 1978 Synodical delegation. Tell them what is their responsible duty to Christ's church and to its Lord.

Maybe if we go back and review what our Synod of 1928 emphasized regarding the spirit of worldliness in the dance and carefully study those principles set forth as to what worldliness includes, we shall strengthen our convictions that Synod 1966/71 with their "cultural mandate" emphasis did not speak the same language as Synod of 1928. The evil philosophy prevalent in 1928 has not disappeared, 50 years later in 1978! ●

Hermeneutical breakthrough or bankruptcy?

JOHN BYKER

History is studded with the harmful effects of self-interested pressure groups made effective by unthinking, indifferent and apathetic crowds. These groups often have no norm or absolute standard and are directed only by self-interest.

On April 11, 1978, we were treated to a demonstration by a pressure group within the church. The Committee for Women in the Christian Reformed

Church had asked Dr. Andrew Bandstra, chairman of Synod's committee on Hermeneutical Principles Concerning Women in Ecclesiastical Office to summarize and comment on the work of the committee whose mandate was:

"to undertake a study of the hermeneutical principles which are involved in the proper interpretation of relevant Scripture passages, to apply these principles in an exegetical study to relevant passages, and to present Synod with the results of their study."

It should be borne in mind that three committees have studied this particular matter in the last eight years. Each committee used the same Bible, ostensibly the same texts; however, in no case can one consistently follow the hermeneutical principles used. It should also be mentioned that in 1957 Synod accepted the report of another study committee with respect to women in ecclesiastical office which found their ordination unscriptural. The reader who finds the volume of literature and the numerous study reports which have bombarded the church a bit ludicrous can hardly be blamed for feeling confused and unable to comprehend the modern mind.

Anticipating Victory

The meeting of April 11 was, in my mind, a clear demonstration of that modern mentality. Calvin Seminary Auditorium was filled to capacity with a partisan crowd; a carnival atmosphere and jocular spirit pervaded the meeting. It would not have seemed strange or surprising if during the intermission or at the conclusion we would have sung "We Shall Overcome." The *immediate goal* of the Women's Committee, ordination of women to ecclesiastical office, was in sight. The meeting so informed the partisans and gave reason for celebration. There were no new Biblical directives discovered, but rather, an over-riding theme of liberty, equality and fraternity was present.

Why this celebrating spirit? Those representing the cause of Women in Ecclesiastical Office announced a hermeneutical breakthrough. What was this breakthrough? Chiefly the discovery that Scriptural givens are ambiguous with respect to women's eligibility for the office of elder and minister. In fact, the committee dogmatically declares: :

No Biblical passages speak directly to the question of women in ecclesiastical office as presently understood (*Agenda* '78, p. 374, 3a).

Mrs. Joan Flikkema, chairwoman for the CWCRC and Dr. Bandstra both pointed to this breakthrough in their opening remarks. The chairwoman said that the commitment to women's ordination was because of Spirit direction. Bandstra stated that the

level of understanding of Scripture of the CWCRC (this Committee for Women) is quite different from the general level of understanding in the CRC in that they conceive of the

ordination of women into office as the "Spirit directed outcome of the teachings of Scripture."

It would seem that the Spirit works in tandem with the 20th century mentality in the CRC to give them a higher level of understanding Scripture. Much of what was said by Dr. Bandstra that evening pointed to Scripture's lack of clarity.

The Problem: Understanding the Bible

The committee chairman stated that it was not all that difficult for the committee to attain unanimity on hermeneutical principles; the problems arose when applying them to Scripture. To many of us this was a foregone conclusion. *What many refuse to see is that the real difficulty in the church is in the view of Scripture and its authority. As long as the church is not unified on its view of Scripture, it will attain unanimity on nothing else.*

That our concept of biblical authority is at issue is immediately apparent to one reading the majority report and its recommendations (*Agenda* 1978, p. 374 and 375). The committee is sure of nothing because it is not sure of Scripture's authority. These recommendations are loaded with elusive words and phrases such as "difficulty, impression, perplexing facts, historical situation, involves an element, may also involve, may also teach, imprecision, not clear," etc. According to the report, it is clear that the Bible does not give the needed direction.

Because the committee differed in understanding Scripture, Synod is being presented with a majority and minority conclusion to its report. The initial question dividing the committee was: Is headship in Genesis 2 to be confined to the husband-wife relationship or does it include man over woman? Understanding the authority of Scripture in its historical sense, this becomes a false dilemma in the light of I Corinthians 11 and 14 which clearly teaches the headship of man and I Timothy 2 which teaches this headship as a creation ordinance.

The majority report asking that Synod approve the ordination of women to the office of deacon is based on the following four premises:

Scriptural givens are ambiguous with respect to the office of elder and minister;

The Bible declares the equal worth of woman and man;

There is some Biblical evidence that women served in the capacity of deaconess in the New Testament church (Romans 16:1; I Tim. 3:11, 12) and;

There are no compelling arguments against it.

To say, as does the majority report, that there are no compelling arguments against opening the office of deacon to women is pure sophistry. There is no recorded instance of a woman being ordained; there is question as to the nature of the office of deacon;

and there is no reason to speculate that the mention of Pheobe (Romans 16:1, 2) even remotely intends a divinely ordained office. And how the committee in this connection could cite I Timothy 3:11 and 12 escapes me!

The minority report maintains that the Bible gives some evidence to allow women to function in the church in the same way as deacons and asks Synod to open the office of deacon to women provided a clear distinction is made between the office of deacon and that of elder and minister.

The last request of the majority report asks that "in view of the Bible's lack of clarity on this issue the church be asked to continue to reflect upon the office of elder and minister as it pertains to women." I cannot suppress two observations: (1) How is it possible to make such a recommendation in view of the alleged Scriptural ambiguity and (2) If Scripture is unclear now, how will it help us to reflect on Scriptural givens, unless we are seeking wisdom from something other than the Bible? Which, of course, we must be expected to do.

The Committee Chairman's Apology

Professor Bandstra closed his presentation by expressing two regrets. First, painfulness because the report fell short of recommending that the office of elder and minister be opened up to women. This, especially in view of the fact that Mrs. Rienstra has been at the Seminary for six years and feels deeply her calling to preach; that in view of her obvious gifts we wish to take seriously her sense of calling; and that the church is not ready to open the ministry to her. Secondly, the report and recommendations must seem piecemeal and insufficient to the women in the light of the Women Committee's statement of purpose which is:

our belief that the ordination of women to ecclesiastical office is the spirit-directed outcome of the teachings of Scripture. Therefore, the equal participation of both men and women in the life of the church is our ultimate objective.

Dr. Bandstra expressed no pain that Scripture was unclear; he presented the calling to office as a matter of feeling, i.e., spirit-directed, and seemed not to be so much concerned with the Scripture's teaching as with the "spirit-directed outcome of the teachings of Scripture." Actions are not here directed by revelation — but by one's conception of "Spirit direction." This is subjectivism. If Scripture is unclear, what but feeling can direct us? This is the modern man's predicament.

The speaker's apologetic attitude concerning the report was justified. In response to questions, Dr. Bandstra acknowledged that little, if any, headway had been made in exegeting the various Scriptural passages; that he was unsure of the committee's distinction between the office of deacon and that of

elder and pastor; he thought that the committee had perhaps provided some guidelines not present before; and could only answer "Yes and no" to the question, "Are you proud you signed the report?" His comments made it rather clear that the concrete givens of Scripture are insufficient, not so much because the principles of exegesis are ignored, but because Scripture does not have the answer.

Reaction of the Women

Jinny DeJong and Marchiene Rienstra, two leaders in the Committee for Women in the CRC, responded to Dr. Bandstra's presentation. Their basic reaction was that the recommendations of the majority report did not go far enough. However, both Mrs. DeJong and Rienstra found a positive contribution in the fact that the report recommended that women be ordained to the office of deacon. Both found consolation in the fact that the majority report requests Synod to expurgate from the record, "that it is necessary to adduce compelling Biblical grounds" for changing, "the practice of excluding women from ecclesiastical office." (See *Acts of Synod* 1975, p. 78, D1, *Acts* 1978, p. 376.) And further, in this connection, each woman expressed the opinion that the church needs something beside Scripture to guide her. Jinny DeJong pointed out what Bandstra had earlier noted, that the committee of Synod (1978) consisted of all males, all ministers in the CRC and all holding Ph.D.'s in theology. It seemed the audience took his statement as a pun; however, Jinny pointed out that the committee, being all male, was limited as to experience and should have another viewpoint and that passages quoted in the report from the Old Testament which restrict the position of women were possibly precursors of modern sexism. Seminarian Rienstra commenting on the same point, said the section of the report on hermeneutical principles was useful but too narrow. "One cannot," she said, "theologize Scripture without regard to the situation in which people live." She then stated that because sociological and historical factors were being ignored, women in office is an issue at present and that sexism might have something to do with how the Bible has been interpreted, thus ignoring people's lives. Further, general revelation is a revelation, and science, history and experience, particularly of the recent past, must be given their due consideration. Mrs. Rienstra illustrated the point that life's situation must be taken into account when theologizing by saying that counselors in general do not define headship as generally conceived, i.e., in the sense of boss or solely in relationship to what the Bible says. Her conclusion was that rather than only exegeting traditional texts, such general principles expressed in the Bible as — loving your neighbor — using to the full the gifts of the Spirit given to all members — and, maybe most important of all — using the examples of the way Jesus dealt with women — should be used to decide the issue of women in office. Jinny DeJong further emphasized the need of extra-Scriptural revelation by referring

to the report where it says, "This makes it difficult to formulate rules on the basis of Paul's teaching taken only from a few of his explicit statements," and saying that she wished the church would take more into account than a few statements from Paul.

How Easily We Parrot the World

Both women were unclear and vitriolic when speaking of headship, ruling, authority and submission. Both observed that four out of seven committee conclusions mention one or another of these concepts without defining the terms (*Agenda* 1978, p. 373). In response to the statement of the majority report, "On the one hand, Genesis implicitly gives to the man a degree of authority over the woman, at least in marriage, and Genesis 3 affirms that the husband 'will rule over' the wife" (*Agenda* 1978, p. 376, item 2), Mrs. DeJong says that the committee affirms what has happened, but not what ought to be. She stated that this appears to be a power word. Further, in response to the quote "the one sets forth the female's equal worth with the male" (*Agenda* '78, p. 374, 2) Mrs. DeJong said she wished it were true that women were equal with men as stated in the report. She believes that she does not share in the full privileges of church fellowship. Her response to the statement "When the church seeks to restrict the conduct of a group of believers (women) it should do so on the basis of unambiguously clear biblical evidence" was, "the church does not *seek* to restrict but *restricts*."

Both female participants felt that the church should continue to reflect upon the office of elder and minister as it relates to women as recommended in the report and that the church should see it as her responsibility to use "all the gifts of the Spirit given to all of its members." They felt that the church is not doing this.

Mrs. Rienstra recommended Synod's adoption of the majority report for three reasons: (1) the report represents a major step toward full ordination of women in the office of elder and minister and pointed out that a large number of Reformed scholars hold the position that the office of deacon is essentially the same as the other two, (2) while the majority of churches are not ready to have women in the offices, some are — by adopting the recommendations of the majority, the churches would be able to see that it works to have women in office and thus they would gradually accept them (you see, it is only a matter of tactic and education); and (3) she underlined what Mrs. DeJong had previously said, that if there was no clear Biblical evidence, then male restriction of the office should be removed.

Marty Rienstra was asked what her attitude would be if ordination of women meant splitting the denomination. She expressed the opinion that the issue requires great wisdom, but by waiting say ten years, it may be too late; and while some may leave if such ordination takes place, some have already left or are leaving because women are not placed in office. Es-

entially, the answer was: The knife cuts both ways, take your choice.

Two suggestions were given by the ladies as to what could be done: (1) Overture your consistory and possibly classis to support the recommendations of the majority report, and seek to clear away the obstacle Synod 1975 created by saying "that it is necessary to adduce 'compelling biblical grounds' for changing 'the practice of excluding women from ecclesiastical offices'" (*Acts* 1975, p. 78, D1 and *Agenda* '78, p. 376) and (2) Continue education in the church and also in life in general on how men and women ought to relate to each other in the light of spiritual understanding. She noted a great deal of sexism and stereotypes in male and female relationships which are accepted as absolutes.

Some Impressions and Observations

The Committee on Hermeneutical Principles Concerning Women in Ecclesiastical Office was designated as a blue ribbon or prestigious committee because of its personnel. On listening to its chairman's speech I was embarrassed. If the vacuous report represents the height of Christian Reformed Scholarship we have reason to be concerned. The chairman was inept in trying to appear conservative while promoting a liberal cause. The meeting clearly demonstrated what happens when people seek to place the Bible on trial and stand in judgment over it. On the one hand we heard that Scripture was unclear; while on the other hand when it suited ones purpose, we were told it was easily understood. Paul could not be understood when he spoke of the relation of men and women, yet he was accepted as speaking clearly on using the gifts of the spirit. Scripture was charged with being culturally conditioned, while I Timothy 2, which speaks of the man-woman relationship as a God established creation ordinance was not mentioned. Christ used the same creation consideration to point out that marriage was not to be looked upon as a culturally conditioned institution in Matthew 19. Was he also, perhaps, culturally conditioned?

One is led to wonder if the Seminary has not been playing games with the church? For six years Marchiene Rienstra has been a student in the Seminary; never has she hidden her intent of seeking ordination; yet apparently the faculty left the propriety of her aim an open question.

While the ladies justifiably criticized the weakness of the report, there was no real substance in the argument which they presented. They demanded that we give women what they want. The church was asked to look beyond the Bible to general revelation for the proper solution to this problem. Is it too much for the church to ask by what norm the conclusions from general revelation are to be judged? Looking concretely at the women's movement in the church, do we find it using any other norms than those set by the godless women's lib movement? It was said that Mrs. Rienstra's motivation for seeking ordination was the desire to preach the gospel. I regret to say

that I personally saw very little concern for the gospel or the Scriptures in evidence on April 11.

I cannot understand how the activists can be so blind as not to see that the end of the women's movement is the opposite of that for which they hope. What I observe is that the liberation program of the women is creating sexism and bondage. To prefer an elusive freedom and equality set by secular society in preference to God's ordinance can be described in Malcolm Muggeridge's words, as "absolutely laughable" (*Christianity Today*, April 21, 1978, p. 11).

In one point I was in total agreement with the ladies. I believe that they are right in holding as contemptible the religious neutralism of silent consistories and the double-talk of the committee. If it be true that a majority of churches do not want women in office, a statement I do not find convincing, why is it that we hear nothing from these consistories. I am not convinced that there will be much disturbance if women are ordained — there may be a little complaint at first and then, silent acceptance.

I do also suggest that women ask their consistories to be heard on the issue, whether they are for it or against it. The Lord is no more pleased with religious neutralism than with ordination of women.

After spending approximately two hours reciting the weakness of Scripture, the unacceptableness of a culturally conditioned apostle, how there was *some* indication of room for ordination of women as deacons, etc., etc., the meeting was closed by asking God's help.

For what should we ask Him?

Should we perhaps have asked Him to abdicate to make place for our best scholars and women, beside a host of others filled with the gifts of the Spirit who have found His Word and the authors of the Bible lacking for our day? It was made plain that step by step we would achieve our end, regardless of what Scripture said. I personally thought that, in the face of the announced division in the church, the growing indifference, the moral problems, the desperate state of the church in the world, the awful forces aligned against the gospel and the state of the world itself, it would be better to pray in the spirit of Daniel, "Lord, we are helpless" (Daniel 9:18, 19, 14).

I am shocked by what Synod is asked to take note of, acknowledge, declare and decide about Scripture, quite apart from what it decides about ordaining women deacons. I am willing to speculate that, should Synod approve ordination of women deacons, Mrs. Rienstra will then announce that she is preaching in a Christian Reformed Church pulpit on the basis of what she has openly said.

Whatever decision Synod makes on this present issue, we may be assured that the church of Christ will not be advanced by the means evident in the majority report and evident at the April 11, 1978 meeting. ●

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