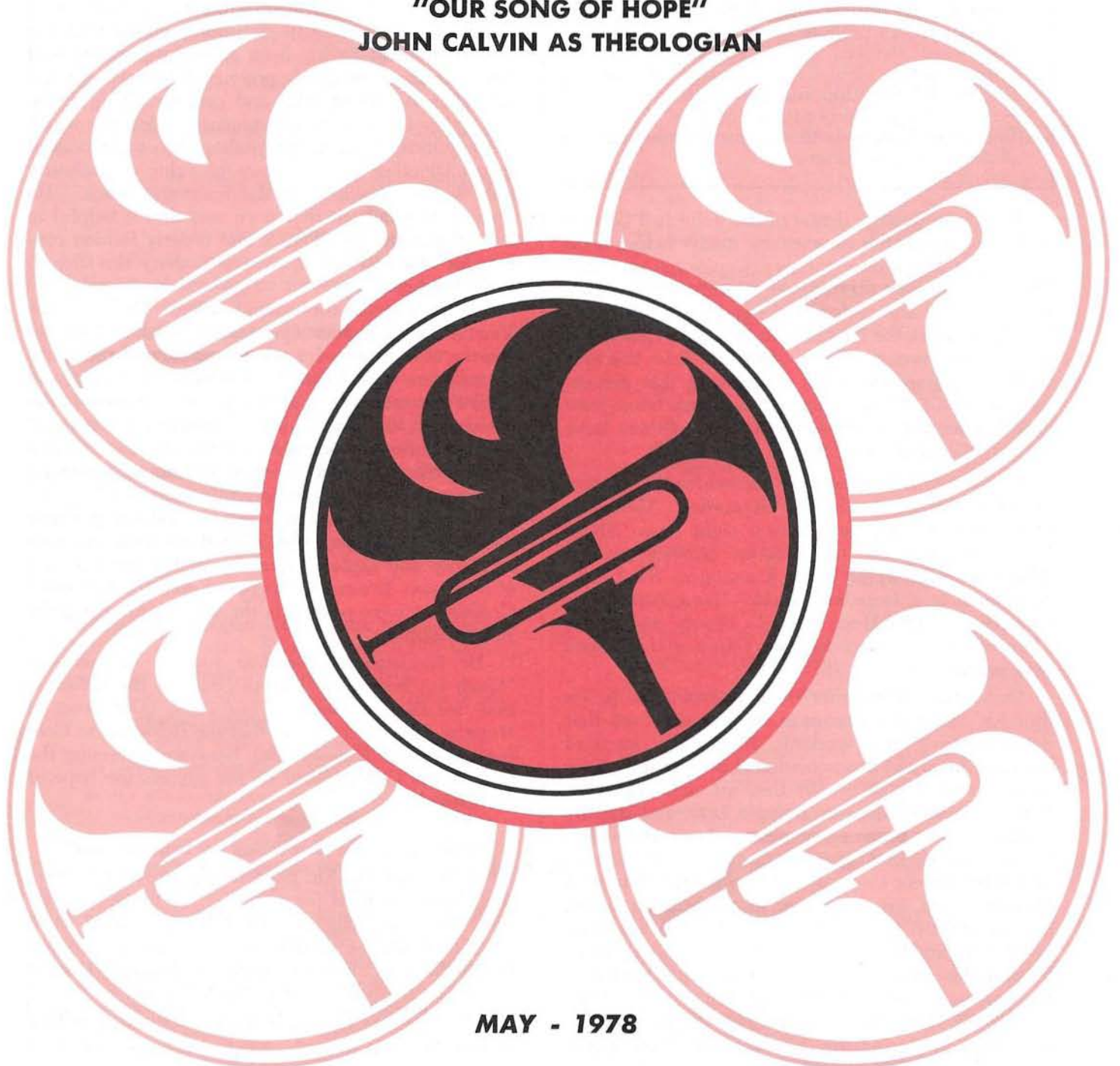


The Outlook

RELIGIOUS THERAPY
"OUR SONG OF HOPE"
JOHN CALVIN AS THEOLOGIAN



MAY - 1978

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

"Our Song of Hope" *a vague substitute*

JEROME JULIEN

In view of the increasingly closer relationships between our Christian Reformed Churches and the Reformed Church in America as well as our concern about the Reformed faith in general, our readers should be acquainted with the RCA's proposed new confession and the issues involved in its adoption. Rev. Jerome Julien, long-time secretary of the Reformed Fellowship and now pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa, provides us with this careful analysis of the important document.

When the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America meets this summer one matter before them will be the adoption of the new Confession of Faith, *Our Song of Hope*. If adopted, it will be used along side of the present confessional standards: the Heidelberg Catechism, the Netherlands or Belgic Confession and the Canons of the Synod of Dordt. Since this new confession came before the churches of that denomination in 1974, it has met mixed reactions. Some have hailed it as a fine statement of faith. Others have strongly disagreed with it.

Our Song of Hope is a unique confession, written in poetic form and arranged as a song. There are twenty-one stanzas, each having eight lines. These stanzas are arranged under seven different general themes such as "Hope in the Coming of the Lord," "Our Song in a Hopeless World," "Jesus Christ Our Only Hope," "Our Hope in God's Words" and so on. These stanzas are preceded by a refrain and followed by a prayer.

Ordinarily an "outsider" to a denomination is "on thin ice" when he presumes to be critical of that denomination's inner working. If, perhaps, he is of the same family of denominations his criticisms might be accepted, though usually they are not. However, I have no reservations in giving a brief and sketchy analysis of this proposed confession because the Reformed Church in America has asked for it. Marion de Velder, former General Secretary for the Reformed Church, wrote, "We hope for the widest circulation and use of OUR SONG OF HOPE 'to encourage many in all the churches of Christendom as well as those beyond the walls of the churches to participate in the process and make their suggestions'" (*Our Song . . .*, p. v). Dr. Eugene Heideman, secretary of the committee producing the document, also invites out-

siders to do this, in the introduction to his exposition of the confession (*Our Song . . .*, p. 2). Therefore with complete freedom a critique is offered.

Is a new Confession necessary?

But before we go any further we should ask, why a new confession? Is a new confession necessary or justified?

To answer these questions we must first consider why the Church has confessions at all. Obviously, the Church does not have them to place them above the Word of God in importance. Instead, being summaries of the various teachings contained in the Bible, they help the Church teach the truths of Scripture, defend these truths against heresy, sense a oneness in the faith and give a testimony of this truth to the world. A. A. Hodge wrote in his *Outlines of Theology* (p. 112): "The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament having been given by inspiration of God, are for man in his present state the only and all-sufficient rule of faith and practice. This divine word, therefore, is the only standard of doctrine which has any intrinsic authority binding the consciences of men. All other standards are of value or authority only as they teach what the Scriptures teach." He goes on to point out that since men find it helpful to have things put in a logical and orderly fashion confessions will be written. In this activity the Church has often been busy.

When is a new confession justified? Dr. Cornelius Van Til in his *Junior Systematics* syllabus indicates when a new or more specific formulation of the truths of Scripture must be made. He writes, ". . . it is not until Systematic Theology has progressed beyond the creeds that the creeds will themselves be revised" (p. 4). Continuing, he points out that there is no value in or justification for a statement of faith which would be more vague than one presently used.

In other words, there is reason to develop a new confessional statement *only* when it becomes necessary to clarify and explain more thoroughly the teaching of Scripture. It was for this reason that the Reformed Confessions were penned in the decades following the Reformation.

Dr. Heideman justifies *Our Song . . .* by writing, "Much has happened since the days of the Reformation; we face problems of our own" (*Our Song of Hope*, p. 15). He is saying that the Reformation Confessions are inadequate today because, expressing the faith of the Church, they do not express the hope of the Church.

Is the proposed Confession an Improvement?

If we grant that Dr. Heideman is correct in stating that there is a need for a further, up-to-date confession, then *Our Song . . .* must be scrutinized as to whether it fits the qualifications of new confessions. Is *Our Song . . .* a more precise confession? Does it go beyond the confessions of the Reformation?

The best way to answer these questions is to look at *Our Song . . .* itself. Since the purpose of *Our*

Song . . . , according to Rev. de Velder, is to express our "Christian faith in our contemporary world" a number of points must be included. It cannot focus, for example, on the sovereignty of God in salvation as do the Canons of Dordt. Its scope must be broader.

On the Trinity

The basic Biblical and Christian teaching of the Trinity must be present if this creed is to express the Christian faith in our world. All the way through we read of "God," "the true Son of God" or "Christ" and "the Spirit." The only reference to the Trinity as such comes in the opening portion which is called the refrain. There we read:

*Our God loves His world,
He called it into being,
He renews it through Jesus Christ,
He governs it by His Spirit.*

In an appendix we are told that these lines refer to the Belgic Confession, Articles 8-11, several of which deal with the Trinity. When I read the words of *Our Song* . . . many questions come into my mind. But when I read the Belgic Confession I can only label *Our Song* . . . as vague. It gives no new insights; it offers no greater precision of statement.

On the Scriptures

No confession would express the faith of the Church without speaking on revelation and inspiration. This would be especially true today since it is on this field where battle is being done; it is in this area of thought where precision must be sought. Does *Our Song* . . . help? It says, "He speaks to us now through His inspired Scriptures" (stanza 1). Why not "in His inspired Scriptures"? In the commentary on *Our Song* . . . , Dr. Heideman points out that the important question is "Do we hear God speaking when we read this book?" This is a subjectivism and one wonders whether it is an attempt to confessionalize neo-orthodoxy. Stanzas 6-8 do not remove this suspicion.

On Sin

Sin is another subject which must be included in an up-to-date confession. Stanza 2 puts it this way:

*We know Christ to be our only hope.
We have enmeshed our world in a realm of sin,
rebelled against God,
accepted man's oppression of man,
and even crucified His Son.
God's world has been trapped by our fall,
governments entangled by human pride,
and nature polluted by mankind's greed.*

What of the guilt and pollution which is ours through sin? What of sin's death? Is there a reason why Adam and his transgression are not mentioned? Is not original sin to be reckoned with, as well as actual sin? True, that "we have . . . rebelled against God" is mentioned, but the sentence's emphasis seems to be on only present rebellion, not the original rebellion of Adam against God. Do the words, "we refused to live in the image of God" really express our con-

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"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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dition, as Dr. Heideman suggests? He says that these words mean that we have denied "the very nature which God gave us from the beginning" (p. 24).

About Christ

Even the statements about Jesus Christ are vague! Is it quite correct to say, "He was born of the virgin Mary, sharing our genes and our instincts . . ." (stanza 3). An instinct is "the innate aspect of behavior that is unlearned . . ." according to the dictionary. Are not our instincts sinful, too? Or, is there no such thing as the total corruption by sin? If there is no such thing as total corruption by sin then the Scripture is wrong and so are our confessions. If there is such a thing as total corruption by sin then Jesus partook in that, too! I would hope that neither would be the view of *Our Song*. . . . Nevertheless, the vagueness of the new confession allows any view, it seems!

Why did Jesus come? This is also an important question in any age, not the least in ours. The confession states:

*Jesus Christ is the hope of God's world.
In His death,
the justice of God is established;
forgiveness of sin is proclaimed.
On the day of His resurrection,
the tomb was empty; His disciples saw Him;
death was defeated; new life had come.
God's purpose for His world was sealed.*

Does this statement say enough — does it even say the truth — about so central a Biblical truth as the atonement? After all, what is the Christian faith without the death — and resurrection, too — of Jesus Christ? Missed here is the emphasis on the satisfaction of God's justice. Instead, the emphasis seems to be on something like a "moral influence theory" of the atonement — heresy in the light of Biblical teaching. The commentary on this stanza warns against an emphasis on either a "universalism" or election!

Regarding the Lord's Return

When it comes to the return of Christ, this confession is also vague. It states (stanza 9):

*In each year and in every place
we expect the coming of Christ's Spirit.*

This coming the commentary relates to the Second Coming of Christ. You can read this any way and be in trouble. Is the return of Christ only the coming of His Spirit? There have been those who have believed this. Yet, we have always emphasized a personal, literal, visible return of Jesus because this is what Scripture teaches. If, on the other hand, we are told that the commentary is incorrect in relating this to Christ's return, to what does it refer? Is this statement on target if it is to mean something about the work of the Holy Spirit?

Later (stanza 21), there is another statement about Christ's return. It says:

*God will renew the world through Jesus.
He will put all unrighteousness out,*

*purify the works of men's hands,
and perfect their fellowship in Himself.
He will wipe away every tear;
death shall be no more.*

*There will be a new heaven and a new earth,
and His creation will be filled with His glory.*

At first reading these words are rather beautiful. But for a confession are they sufficient? Are they specific enough? Do they go beyond what has already been written in our confessions? The answer to this is "no." In fact, they only confuse the issue, and intentionally, too. Dr. Heideman writes in the commentary: "When we read the great passages in Scripture dealing with the coming of Christ on the Great Day of the Lord, we often quarrel about their precise meaning." Some, he continues, want to emphasize the symbolic meaning, others the literal meaning. "Our *Song of Hope* does not want to leave the impression that these differing ways of understanding the words of Scripture are unimportant. It sees value in each position and sometimes speaks one way, sometimes another. We are conscious of the weakness of our understanding and wait upon the Spirit of the Lord for wisdom" (pp. 76f). Certainly this confession has not clarified an important Biblical teaching. It has only allowed it to become more vague. And in the day of Hal Lindsey's *Late, Great Planet Earth* who needs vagueness!

Besides lack of clarity on the return, there is lack of clarity concerning the judgment. Is it quite correct to put it, as does stanza 5:

*In the age to come, He is the judge,
rejecting unrighteousness,
isolating His enemies to hell,
blessing His new creation in Christ.*

Is there a softening of judgment here? Is it only "isolation" or is it "condemnation"? Why does this confession seem to deliberately side-step being specific?

Regarding the Holy Spirit

What about the work of the Holy Spirit? In a day of charismatic emphasis a precise formulation could be valuable, but again all we get is vagueness. Stanza 14 begins:

*God's Spirit leads us into Truth —
the Truth of Christ's salvation,
into increasing knowledge of all existence.*

What really does this mean? It continues:

*He rejoices in human awareness of God's
creation and gives freedom to those on the
frontiers of research.*

*We are overwhelmed by the growth of our
knowledge.*

*While our truths come in broken fragments,
we expect the Spirit to unite these in Christ.*

And the commentary shows that the Christian answer is not a Christian approach to all of life but the hope that on the Great Day when the refinement of judgment will take place all these bits and pieces of knowl-

edge which we have will fall into place and the gold and silver aspects will remain.

Election

The only mention of election is that it is unto service. It says:

*Christ elects His church
to proclaim His Word and celebrate the
sacraments,
to worship His name,
and to live as His disciples.*

The reason for this election is so that the Church will act in the midst of the world as Israel did of old. Where is the idea of election by sovereign grace, according to God's pleasure and for His glory? Where is the election which is unto salvation?

The Church and Means of Grace

There seems to be some confusion, also when it comes to the Church. We hear of "all Christ's people" in stanza 7. This is explained in the commentary as "the unity of mankind." Is this what the Church is? No wonder election is played down!

The means of grace are explained in a careless fashion, too. In explaining stanza 3, the commentary states, "We are willing in our baptism to be forgiven for our own individual sins . . ." (p. 25). Later on, in stanza 18 to be exact, we have a statement on baptism. Must this statement be understood in the light of the comment in Dr. Heideman's commentary, or is this point also to be ambiguous with reason?

When it comes to the Lord's Supper a whole new view is given. Stanza 19 states:

*Christ places His Table in this world.
He takes up our bread and wine
to represent His sacrifice,
to bind His ministry to our daily work,
to unite us in His righteousness.*

Explaining these words, Dr. Heideman points out that in ancient times the people would bring their own bread and wine to the Table as a thankoffering. They were "accepted by the minister on behalf of Christ. This bread and wine was then consecrated, broken and poured out, and served to the people. The Supper thus became a vivid act in which the fruit of men's hands was to be united to the ministry of Christ in the world. By using those materials, the people were reminded that Christ's life and ministry had not been some kind of spiritual activity apart from the physical life of the world. Jesus Christ, true Son of God, had lived as true man, with a physical body and blood, which had been crucified on a cross. The physical elements consecrated at the Table recalled again and again the nature of Christ's sacrifice" (p. 71). I ask you, is this an elaboration of the Biblical and confessional meaning of the Lord's Supper, or is it a substitution?

Evangelization

Evangelization is explained in two ways. According to the commentary, it is the Holy Spirit working

through social agencies for human justice! Of course, it is *also* explained as the proclamation of the good news. But you will notice that stanza 16 includes both emphasizes as being evangelization. In fact, both are apparently *preaching!*

*The Spirit sends His church
to call sinners to repentance,
to proclaim the good news
that Jesus is personal Savior and Lord.
He sends it out in ministry
to preach good news to the poor,
righteousness to the nations,
and peace among mankind.*

On Salvation

And salvation? What is it according to *Our Song of Hope*? In stanza 3 it is explained as:

*Being united to His humanity,
we know ourselves when we rest in Him.*

Stanza 20 also makes some vague statements about it:

*God saves the world through Jesus.
Those who call on His name will have life.
His hand reaches out beyond those who say "Lord"
to the infants who live in the atmosphere
of faith,
even to the farthest stars and planets — all
His creation.*

Besides finding a lack of precision, am I reading into all of this a deadly, unbiblical Arminianism or is it really there?

Besides all of this vague theologizing, if this confession is adopted, the Reformed Church in America is adopting some pronouncements on social issues which not all in the RCA would agree with, I would hope.

According to the commentary, stanza 10 allows for civil disobedience *even if it is revolutionary* (p. 47)! The confession puts it in veiled language:

*We must obey God rather than men,
waiting upon His Spirit,
filled with the patience of Christ.*

Family planning is confessionalized!

*He makes us the stewards of life
to plan its beginning,
to love in its living,
and to care in its dying (stanza 13).*

Abortion was apparently too hot of an issue to speak on.

Also in stanza 13 is a statement on divorce — though it is very soft!

*He makes us the stewards of marriage
with its lifelong commitment to love;
yet He knows our frailty of heart.*

Our Conclusion

Many more points could be made and each of those already mentioned explained and criticized more fully. There are underlying suppositions here which

are questionable. For instance, what really is the work of the Holy Spirit? However, we have seen enough of this confession to know it is vague, confusing and *not* an elaboration of confessional statements already held. The hope of the Church can only grow out of the faith of the Church. This is not encouraged in *Our Song*

It is to be hoped that the Reformed people in the RCA will rise up against such a confessional statement as this! I, for one, could *not and would not* live with it. Thankfully, this is *not* before the Christian Reformed Church. Would that our Reformed brothers and sisters were not troubled by it, either. Nevertheless, since it is before that denomination a word from God's Word is in order: "Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3b). ●

The Inerrancy Debate

WAYNE R. SPEAR

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (Covenanters) which was organized in 1774 traces its roots to the Scotch reformation and stresses the Lordship of Christ in the life of the individual, the church and the nation. In worship it sings only the Psalms, without instrumental accompaniment. Its seminary is in Pittsburgh and its Geneva College is at Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania.

The question of the authority of the Bible has once more become a subject of intense debate among professing Christians. In the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy of the 1920's and '30's, those who affirmed the great truths of the virgin birth of Christ, his miracles, substitutionary atonement, bodily resurrection and ascension, also stated their belief in the full inspiration of the Bible. In recent years, a growing number of evangelicals who profess to hold the orthodox doctrines regarding the person and work of Christ are expressing various degrees of hesitation in affirming the inerrancy of Scripture. The debate has been going on for some years, but it has gotten much more attention since the publication of Harold Lindsell's *The Battle for the Bible* (Zondervan, 1976), in which the former editor of *Christianity Today* charged a number of evangelical seminaries with having departed from a full commitment to the authority of

Scripture. A significant response has come in *Biblical Authority* (Word Books, 1977), edited by Jack Rogers of Fuller Theological Seminary.

In the face of such a controversy among evangelicals, it is important that the stance of our own Seminary be clear. The faculty of the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary is committed to the system of doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession, and believes that that system includes the teaching that the Scriptures, as originally given by God, are without error in all that they affirm. Further, all the professors concur with the statement in the revised Testimony of the R.P. Church, approved unanimously by the 1977 Synod, which reads,

God gave His written revelation progressively by holy men whom He chose, inspired and infallibly guided to write, inerrantly and completely, the revelation of His will. . . . In all that they wrote . . . they were guided by the Holy Spirit as to matter and manner so that their writings are indeed the word of God.

In order that our meaning may be clear in affirming the inerrancy of Scripture, and that our concerns regarding the rejection of inerrancy may be expressed, we will examine briefly what is being said about Scripture in the current debate.

1. It is said that since inerrancy is ascribed only to the original manuscripts of Scripture, and we have only imperfect copies, the concept is meaningless. It is true that we do not have any perfect copies of the original Scriptures, and that God is able to use the Bibles we have, even in translation, to make his will known for our salvation and life. However, in preaching and study of the Bible we must seek to be as accurate as possible, and that means that when there are variations in the manuscripts, we endeavor by textual criticism to determine the *correct* reading. The whole procedure of textual criticism assumes that there is an original form of Scripture which is the most authoritative. When we are confident that we know the original reading, we regard that as God's own word. It should be noted, by the way, that the number of variations is small, and affects no basic doctrine of Christianity.

2. It is said that the Bible is imperfect according to the rules of grammar and literary style of the original languages. This objection assumes that there is somewhere a perfect model of the Greek and Hebrew languages, to which the Bible should conform. However, rules of grammar are only descriptions of the way in which a language usually or often functions, and, as any student of English knows, there are many exceptions to the rules. The Bible is written in the language of common people, and the grammatical irregularities are there to communicate God's truth in a way that is vivid and clear.

3. It is said that the Bible uses "prescientific" language, and therefore states things about the natural world that are not literally true. For example, it

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speaks of the sun "rising," when everyone knows that it is the earth, not the sun, which changes position. No significant defender of inerrancy would deny that the Bible uses popular and poetic language when speaking of events in the natural world, but such language is readily understandable by both "scientific" and "non-scientific" people. No one calls it a mistake when the newspaper give the time of "sunrise" every day!

4. More seriously, some of those who are rejecting the term "inerrancy" are saying that while the Bible is generally trustworthy, there are actual mistakes with regard to details. We must not get lost in disputes over trivia, they tell us, but listen in faith to the central message of the Scripture. We must not debate how many people saw the risen Christ, and in what order, but must believe that he truly rose from the dead. The problem with this position is that the details cannot be successfully separated from the central affirmations. Resurrection appearances are described in the Gospels as the evidence of the bodily resurrection. If the evidence cannot be trusted, what grounds have we for believing in the event itself? Further, how shall we determine which teachings of the Scripture are central and which are details that are not necessarily to be believed?

5. Finally, it is being said that the Bible is infallible in matters that are "saving" or "revelational," but not in the areas of science or history. According to such an approach, scientific and historical investigation can establish what is true in these areas of study without any reference to what the Bible teaches about those matters. Then, the Bible's statements about the natural world and human events can be tested and rejected by the standards of secular learning, while its "religious" meaning remains unaffected. For example, if anthropologists tell us that no such person as Adam ever existed, we must accept that, and still believe the "saving" truth which is in the early chapters of Genesis. Not all who speak of limiting infallibility to the area of salvation are willing to go as far as the illustration does, but it is clearly the trend. Francis Schaeffer's books (particularly *The God Who Is There*) are helpful in understanding the kind of "two-story thinking" which wrongly separates religious truth from scientific knowledge. It is the kind of thinking which dominates neo-orthodoxy. While it would be wrong to label all those who are questioning inerrancy as being neo-orthodox, it is a matter of grave concern that three of the six articles in *Biblical Authority* speak in favorable terms of some of the theological contributions of Karl Barth. The question occurs, If inerrancy is abandoned, can neo-orthodoxy be successfully resisted?

Without denying the complexities and difficulties involved in the position of Scriptural inerrancy, the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary operates on that basis, believing that it is what is taught by Christ and the apostles. We believe that when we have correctly understood a passage of Scripture, its meaning possesses absolute authority over our faith

and life. We do not approach Scripture as critics and judges, but as students and servants, confident that in the very words of the Bible we hear the voice of our Master and Lord. ●

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RELIGION AS THERAPY

FRED P. THOMPSON

Psychology is on the throne and rules the day in a good many contemporary churches. Not just in liberal churches, either. Good, solid evangelical congregations have been swept along by the current of faddish and superficial psychological trends. These add up to a therapeutic approach to Christian faith.

It is evidenced by the language employed: transactional analysis, sensitivity training, behavior modification, reality therapy, stimulus hunger, stroking, etc. This jargon is indispensable for those who wish to play the new therapy game. It is being played by clergymen in churches all over the country. All it takes to play (even if you are the leader), is a nodding acquaintance with Thomas A. Harris' *I'm OK - You're OK* and/or Eric Berne's *Games People Play*. Of course, if you have also read B. F. Skinner's *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* you have a commanding edge on the other players.

The object of this religion-cum-psychology approach is the healing of persons. All at once popular writers on psychological themes have discovered that all of us are sick. It is not enough that the Gospel should be preached to us, that the full-orbed message of Scripture be taught us. We need more than the divine remedy. We need the powerful medicine of popular psychology. Our fevers will not subside until we have learned the secrets of TA (transactional analysis), and have received our needed quantity of "strokes" (encouraging and flattering words).

Are you a fulfilled person, total man or total woman? Do you manifest aggressive self-awareness? Does your personality exude self-confidence? If your answer is not a ringing affirmative you need to get the message. Never mind what the New Testament has to say about the self—we have an up-to-the-

Fred Thompson is president of Emmanuel School of Religion, Johnson City, Tennessee, a former pastor for 25 years and a writer of Christian periodicals.

minute word on the subject. You cannot be a healthy self unless you are a happy self. Is it not self-evident that everyone has the right to be happy? All right, then. Let's get with it. Accept yourself, love yourself, be good to yourself. You have a mate who is making you unhappy? Well, since it is your right to be happy, dissolve the marriage. Both of you may then have improved your chances for happiness.

Healthy mental attitudes must be developed. Think wholesome, positive, constructive thoughts. Fill your days with song and gladness. You will find enthusiasm for life increasing and your joy intensifying. Life is beautiful when you enjoy psychological wholeness.

The basic problem. Now, what is wrong with that scenario of the Christian life? Much in every way. For one thing, the discipline of psychology is far too complex to be mastered by reading a few popular books on the subject. Most preachers who are "into" this type of therapy are little more than rank amateurs totally unqualified to tinker with human psyche. Competent therapists — psychiatrists, psychoanalysts and clinical psychologists — undergo years of rigorous education and supervised clinical training before they are licensed to practice. And even then their work is far from fail-safe. Psychology is not an exact science and it is not an ancient discipline. It is a relatively new development in the arena of the therapeutic arts. Theories informing psychotherapeutic techniques and procedures vary from school to school and from year to year.

Moreover, the presupposition that everyone is sick and in need of some kind of psychological straightening out is not shared by the Christian's Source Book. The Bible talks about our basic problem in terms of sin. Some of us may be sick, but all of us are sinners. The Good News is proclaimed against that universal background. Jesus Christ offers pardon, reconciliation, eternal life. Freud, Jung and Alder all together cannot match that combination of gifts!

The Church is a therapeutic, healing community, but not because it has mastered the latest procedures of behavior modification theory. It heals because it shares the love of God with people who cannot live without love. In the fellowship of the Church men and women know themselves to be cared for, accepted, forgiven. Grace operates in the transactions of human beings, in the Body of Christ. And grace heals.

Touching and hugging are in vogue in many churches these days. Members are encouraged to have physical contact with each other. I wonder how many preachers who advocate this business know the Esalen story — nude encounter groups carrying touching just about as far as imagination permits. This California institution pioneered touch technique without regard to Christian ethical concerns.

Warm bodily expressions of brotherly love and entirely appropriate within God's family, if reasonable propriety is observed. Men are still men and

women still women after conversion to Christ takes place. We do the cause of Christ no good if we act as though it were otherwise.

Misdirected attention. I am also disturbed by the self-centered focus of the therapeutic interpretation of religion. In fact, the New Testament emphasis is in quite another direction. Jesus does not teach self-love, self-affirmation, self-confidence to His disciples. He calls for self-denial, for losing one's life, for bearing the cross. The attention of Jesus' disciples is directed away from themselves to a world in the throes of death. They hear the appeal to give themselves in self-forgetful mission to rescue the perishing.

Introspective preoccupation with one's ego-needs is not the way to personal fulfillment, according to the Scripture. Concern for the other is the passion that drives the Christian. To bear one another's burdens is to fulfill the law of Christ. So unself-conscious, in this respect, is the apostle Paul that he can say of his new life, "I have been crucified with Christ: the life I now live is not my life, but the life of Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20 NEB). We misunderstand Paul if we think this statement expresses contempt for his own person. On the contrary, the noblest style of personal life is that exemplified in Jesus Christ who loved not His own life even unto death. Self-sacrifice in redemptive service is the highest fulfillment of selfhood, the deepest joy a human being can know.

Sacrifice links our lives with the Crucified. The third day comes for all so identified, the day of resurrection. But no route to immortality is shown us that does not go by way of suffering, loss and death.

The biblical focus. Much mischief has been wrought in biblical interpretation by the oft-expressed view that the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount constitute Christ's prescription for happiness. "Happy are the poor in spirit," we have been told. The pop psychologists in clerical robes take over and explain how that pleasant prospect comes about. Obviously the text means that when a person becomes a follower of Jesus his problems and troubles vanish. Life is evermore a pleasant parkway down which we travel, smelling the roses along the way! Happiness is our appointed mood.

Nonsense. What Jesus talks about in the beatitudes is far more significant than our subjective feelings. Feelings are evoked by a multitude of circumstances and events. The "blessedness" of the child of the Kingdom is not circumstance-induced. It is his status before God that is in question. "Blessedness" is divine approval, support and providence at work in the believer's life. It is a reality which sustains us no matter what external conditions confront us. Persecution is no picnic. Sorrow is not happiness. But these are two of the conditions to which "blessedness" is attached in Matthew chapter five.

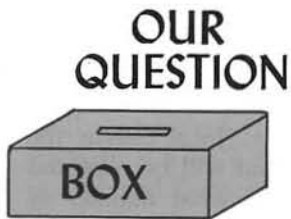
God promises no rose gardens in this life. "In the world you have tribulation" (John 16:33). Happiness, understood as freedom from care, is not held out as a biblical objective. Faithfulness to God and

service to fellowmen are the twin foci of Christian existence: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . and thy neighbor as thyself" (Luke 10:26, 27).

There is a great deal to be learned from research into the dynamics of human behavior. It is not my intention to put down the dedicated work of social scientists. The study of personal transactions and conflicts tells us much about the causes of hostility, fear and insecurity.

I only plead that the Church be the Church, and not a pseudo-psychology clinic. God's Word has power to heal and to save. The Church is called to proclaim a far greater message than that contained in the best textbooks of the therapists. Freud and his followers have soapboxes and forums aplenty. Let us who confess Jesus to be the Christ continue to preach the Word.

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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.

A California reader inquires about the propriety of our space ventures. "Do we have any business in going to the moon?" The reader points to Psalm 115:16 as probable evidence that we sin in trying to go to other planets: "The heavens are the heavens of Jeho-

vah; but the earth he has given to the children of men."

It was on July 20, 1969, that Astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buz Aldrin planted the first human footprints on the surface of the moon. If you were watching your television set on that historic evening, you remember that as Armstrong's foot left the landing step of the lunar Module Taxi, he was heard saying: "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." No human had ever walked there before, but for about two hours and fourteen minutes, two men roamed the moon's surface in the performance of a variety of chores.

Reactions to that historic event were mixed. The most common word used was "unbelievable." It seemed like a dream. Many people stepped outside of their homes, gazed up at the silvery moon in the sky, and had a hard time convincing themselves that two men actually were walking on the surface of that distant round ball in the heavens. There had been those who had been quite convinced that God would never allow men to set foot on the moon. There were others who believed that the staggering cost (\$350 million for one round trip in an Apollo spaceship) was too high, especially in the light of a multitude of needs right here on earth.

Does the Scripture have anything to say about our human ventures into space? Is there any clearly discernable direction in the Bible by which we can judge the "rightness" or "wrongness" of space exploration? Psalm 115:16, quoted above, can hardly be said to be a determining factor in our judgment. In that Psalm, the psalmist contrasts the idols of the heathen with the Lord God of Israel, and calls the people to honor the name of God. It is because God is the Creator of heaven and earth that He is to be praised by His people. But the psalm writer's concept of heaven and earth appears limited, as evidenced by vs. 17 where he says: "the dead praise not Jehovah." The Old Testament does not yet clearly reveal a heavenly church (ecclesia) where God is praised without ceasing, or a praising company consisting of angels as well as the spirits of people who died in the faith and a sharp contrast appears at this point between heaven and earth.

We must also remember that the word "heaven" or "heavens" is used in different ways in the Bible. To say, as the psalmist does in Psalm 19, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork," is to refer to that atmosphere above the earth, to that realm of space in which the sun and moon and stars are located. The Old Testament has no word for "universe," and to express the idea of it, the phrase "heaven and earth" is frequently used.

But the word "heaven" is also used in the Bible for the place of God's abode (Ps. 2:4) as well as the abode of angels (Matt. 22:30). It is also to that place that all of us as believers will be taken after this life is over, into the immediate presence of God. But where is that? Is it far out in space somewhere? Is it

really "up," and if so, how far? Beyond this universe, and farther away than the farthest known planet?

Though Scripture is relatively silent about the details of heaven, we have reason to believe that there will be a renewal of this world. In II Peter 3, Peter speaks of the passing away of the heavens and the dissolving of the earth, and then says in vs. 13, "But, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." This passage suggests that there will be a renewal out of the old world which will produce a purified universe. The point is this: we need not think of "heaven" as a place far away, millions or billions of miles from the earth, somewhere up in the sky, but only as another dimension, a spirit world for the present, to which we are not sensitive now in our finite humanness. Someday, when the end comes, God will bring forth a new heaven and a new earth out of the old, and we with body and soul shall dwell in God's presence forever. But we won't have to travel billions of miles to get there.

In the light of these things, I do not believe we do violence to the will of God in our space explorations. He has created a marvelous universe, so much of which is yet beyond our understanding, but all of which is yet beyond our understanding, but all of which declares his glory (Ps. 19:1). If space exploration is done with the proper motivation (and it is here that we as Christians have an important role to play), then it too can be to the glory of God.

I conclude my comments by quoting the words of a leading scientist associated with NASA, Dr. Rodney W. Johnson, who is also a Christian. He said: "Most . . . scientists, engineers and technicians associated with the space program . . . who have a faith in God hold this faith strongly, as if their association with the space program had acted to reinforce their belief. . . . Men are looking for a new verification of their faith, and I expect the space program to provide just this sort of thing sooner or later. . . . This could take the form of the confirmation of a significant Bible truth.

"Our humanity is verified . . . by our response to this divine command (to subdue the earth). The more we are able to do in a technical sense, the more human we become. God intended it to be this way, and us to behave this fashion. This event really demonstrates again, that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God. I have often said that scientific discoveries resulting from our space programs, may in the final analysis, be of lesser significance than the spiritual understanding derived from them.

"Reaching the moon, or Mars for that matter, must not be just another escape valve for an exploding population. It must not be another glorification of man and his technical achievements. Nor must it be permitted to become a substitute for theological meaning and spiritual expression in our day. Rather, it must be an extension of the revelation of God in nature. It must cause us to ask again the question: 'What is man that thou art mindful of him?'" (Ps. 8). ●

JOHN CALVIN

the theologian

B. B. WARFIELD

In reprinting this splendid article of B. B. Warfield we recall the observation which Dr. Hendriksen made in the June-July, 1951, TORCH AND TRUMPET about his writings: ". . . Our Reformed people should read what is best in Reformed literature. In that connection we mentioned Herman Bavinck, Abraham Kuyper, and B. B. Warfield. Warfield wrote in English. His published articles, some of which were gathered in book form are little masterpieces. Though one need not agree with everything he wrote, it will have to be admitted by every fair-minded person that Warfield's articles are still so thoroughly satisfying, and his discussions so penetrating, that one who has failed to study them has missed a rare treat. If you have not read *Christology and Criticism* and *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, we would advise you to do so at once." The same comment applies to other of Warfield's writings which have been reprinted by the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company.

The subject of this address is "John Calvin the Theologian," and I take it that what will be expected of me is to convey some idea of what manner of theologian John Calvin was, and of his quality as a theological thinker.

I am afraid I shall have to ask you at the outset to disabuse your minds of a very common impression, namely, that Calvin's chief characteristics as a theologian were on the one hand, audacity — perhaps I might even say effrontery — of speculation; and on the other hand, pitilessness of logical development, cold and heartless scholasticism. We have been told, for example, that he reasons on the attributes of God precisely as he would reason on the properties of a triangle. No misconception could be more gross. The speculative theologian of the Reformation was Zwingli, not Calvin. The scholastic theologian among the early Reformers was Peter Martyr, not Calvin. This was thoroughly understood by their contemporaries. "The two most excellent theologians of our times," remarks Joseph Scaliger, "are John Calvin and Peter Martyr, the former of whom has dealt with the Holy Scriptures as they ought to be dealt with — with sincerity, I mean, and purity and simplicity, without any scholastic subtleties. . . . Peter Martyr, because it seemed to fall to him to engage the Sophists, has overcome them sophistically, and struck them down with their own weapons."

It is not to be denied, of course, that Calvin was a speculative genius of the first order, and in the cogency of his logical analysis he possessed a weapon which made him terrible to his adversaries. But it was not on these gifts that he depended in forming and developing his theological ideas. His theological method was persistently, rigorously, some may even say exaggeratedly, *a posteriori*. All *a priori* reasoning here he not only eschewed but vigorously repelled. His instrument of research was not logical amplification, but exegetical investigation. In one word, he was distinctly a Biblical theologian, or, let us say it frankly, by way of eminence *the Biblical theologian of his age*. Whither the Bible took him, thither he went: where scriptural declarations failed him, there he stopped short.

It is this which imparts to Calvin's theological teaching the quality which is its prime characteristic and its real offence in the eyes of his critics — I mean its positiveness. There is no mistaking the note of confidence in his teaching, and it is perhaps not surprising that this note of confidence irritates his critics. They resent the air of finality he gives to his declarations, not staying to consider that he gives them this air of finality because he presents them, not as his teachings, but as the teachings of the Holy Spirit in His inspired Word. Calvin's positiveness of tone is thus the mark not of extravagance but of sobriety and restraint. He even speaks with impatience of speculative, and what we may call inferential theology, and he is accordingly himself spoken of with impatience by modern historians of thought as a "merely Biblical theologian," who is, therefore, without any real doctrine of God, such as Zwingli has. The reproach, if it be a reproach, is just. Calvin refused to go beyond "what is written" — written plainly in the book of nature or in the book of revelation. He insisted that we can know nothing of God, for example, except what He has chosen to make known to us in His works and Word; all beyond this is but empty fancy, which merely "flutters" in the brain. And it was just because he refused to go one step beyond what is written that he felt so sure of his steps. He could not present the dictates of the Holy Ghost as a series of debatable propositions.

Such an attitude towards the Scriptures might conceivably consist with a thoroughgoing intellectualism, and Calvin certainly is very widely thought of as an intellectualist *à outrance*. But this again is an entire misapprehension. The positiveness of Calvin's teaching has a far deeper root than merely the conviction of his understanding. When Ernest Renan characterised him as the most Christian man of his generation he did not mean it for very high praise, but he made a truer and much more profound remark than he intended. The fundamental trait of Calvin's nature was precisely — religion. It is not merely that all his thinking is colored by a deep religious sentiment; it is that the whole substance of his thinking is determined by the religious motive. Thus his theology, if ever there was a theology of the heart, was

distinctively a theology of the heart, and in him the maxim that "It is the heart that makes the theologian" finds perhaps its most eminent illustration.

His active and powerful intelligence, of course, penetrated to the depths of every subject which he touched, but he was incapable of dealing with any religious subject after a fashion which would minister only to what would seem to him the idle curiosity of the mind. It was not that he restrained himself from such merely intellectual exercises upon the themes of religion, the force of his religious interest itself instinctively inhibited them.

Calvin marked an epoch in the history of the doctrine of Trinity, but of all great theologians who have occupied themselves with this soaring topic, none have been more determined than he not to lose themselves in the intellectual subtleties to which it invites the inquiring mind; and he marked an epoch in the development of the doctrine precisely because his interest in it was vital and not merely or mainly speculative. Or take the great doctrine of predestination which has become identified with his name, and with respect to which he is perhaps, most commonly of all things, supposed to have given the reins to speculative construction and to have pushed logical development to unwarrantable extremes. Calvin, of course, in the pellucid clearness and incorruptible honesty of his thought and in the faithfulness of his reflection of the Biblical teaching, fully grasped and strongly held the doctrine of the will of God as the *prima causa rerum*, and this too was a religious conception with him and was constantly affirmed just because it was a religious conception — yes, in a high and true sense, the most fundamental of all religious conceptions. But even so, it was not to this cosmical predestination that Calvin's thought most persistently turned, but rather to that soteriological predestination on which, as a helpless sinner needing salvation from the free grace of God, he must rest. And therefore Ebrard is so far quite right when he says that predestination appears in Calvin's system not as the *decretum Dei* but as the *electio Dei*.

It is not merely controversial skill which leads Calvin to pass predestination by when he is speaking of the doctrine of God and providence, and to reserve it for the point where he is speaking of salvation. This is where his deepest interest lay. What was suffusing his heart and flowing in full flood into all the chambers of his soul was a profound sense of his indebtedness as a lost sinner to the free grace of God his Saviour. His zeal in asserting the doctrine of two-fold predestination is grounded in the clearness with which he perceived — as was indeed perceived with him by all the Reformers — that only so can the evil leaven of "synergism" be eliminated and the free grace of God be preserved in its purity in the saving process. The roots of his zeal are planted, in a word, in his consciousness of absolute dependence as a sinner on the free mercy of a saving God. The sovereignty of God in grace was an essential constituent of his deepest religious consciousness. Like his great master,

Augustine — like Luther, Zwingli and Butzer (Bucer), and all the rest of those high spirits who brought about that great revival of religion which we call the Reformation — he could not endure that the grace of God should not receive all the glory of the rescue of sinners from the destruction in which they are involved, and from which, just because they are involved in it, they are unable to do anything towards their own recovery.

The fundamental interest of Calvin as a theologian lay, it is clear, in the region broadly designated soteriological. Perhaps we may go further and add that, within this broad field, his interest was most intense in the application to the sinful soul of the salvation wrought out by Christ — in a word in what is technically known as the *ordo salutis*. This has even been made his reproach in some quarters, and we have been told that the main fault of the *Institutes* as a treatise in theological science, lies in its too subjective character. Its effect, at all events, has been to constitute Calvin pre-eminently *the theologian of the Holy Spirit*.

Calvin has made contributions of the first importance to other departments of theological thought. It has already been observed that he marks an epoch in the history of the doctrine of the Trinity. He also marks an epoch in the mode of presenting the work of Christ. The presentation of Christ's work under the rubrics of the three-fold office of Prophet, Priest and King was introduced by him; and from him it was taken over by the entirety of Christendom, not always, it is true, in his spirit or with his completeness of development, but yet with large advantage. In Christian ethics, too, his impulse proved epoch-making, and this great science was for a generation cultivated only by his followers.

It is probable however that Calvin's greatest contribution to theological science lies in the rich development which he gives — and which he was the first to give — to the doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit. No doubt, from the origin of Christianity, everyone who has been even slightly imbued with the Christian spirit has believed in the Holy Spirit as the author and giver of life, and has attributed all that is good in the world, and particularly in himself, to His holy offices. And, of course, in treating of grace, Augustine worked out the doctrine of salvation as a subjective experience with great vividness and in great detail, and the whole course of this salvation was fully understood, no doubt, to be the work of the Holy Spirit. But in the same sense in which we may say that the doctrine of sin and grace dates from Augustine, the doctrine of satisfaction from Anselm, the doctrine of justification by faith from Luther — we must say that the doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit is a gift from Calvin to the Church. It was he who first related the whole experience of salvation specifically to the working of the Holy Spirit's specific work in applying salvation to the soul. Thus he gave systematic and adequate expression to the whole doctrine of the Holy Spirit

and made it the assured possession of the Church of God.

It has been common to say that Calvin's entire theological work may be summed up in this — that he emancipated the soul from the uncertainties of human authority and delivered it from the uncertainties of human intermediation in religious things: that he brought the soul into the immediate presence of God and cast it for its spiritual health upon the free grace of God alone. Where the Romanist placed the Church, it is said, Calvin set the Deity. The saying is true, and perhaps, when rightly understood and filled with its appropriate content, it may sufficiently characterise the effect of his theological teaching. But it is expressed too generally to be adequate. What Calvin did was, specifically, to replace the doctrine of the Church as sole source of assured knowledge of God and sole institute of salvation, by the Holy Spirit. Previously, men had looked to the Church for all the trustworthy knowledge of God obtainable, and as well for all the communications of grace accessible. Calvin taught them that neither function has been committed to the Church, but God the Holy Spirit has retained both in His own hands and confers both knowledge of God and communion with God on whom He will.

The *Institutes* is, accordingly, just a treatise on the work of God the Holy Spirit in making God savingly known to sinful man, and bringing sinful man into holy communion with God. Therefore it opens with the great doctrine of the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti* — another of the fruitful doctrines which the Church owes to Calvin — in which he teaches that the only vital and vitalizing knowledge of God which a sinner can attain, is communicated to him through the inner working of the Spirit of God in his heart, without which there is spread in vain before his eyes the revelation of God's glory in the heavens, and the revelation of His grace in the perspicuous pages of the Word. And therefore, it centers in the great doctrine of Regeneration — the term is broad enough in Calvin to cover the whole process of the subjective *recovery* of man to God — in which he teaches that the only power which can ever awake in a sinful heart the motions of a living faith, is the power of this same Spirit of God moving with a truly creative operation on the deadened soul. When these great ideas are developed in their full expression — with explication of all their presuppositions in the love of God and the redemption of Christ, and of all their relations and consequents — we have Calvin's theology.

Now of course, a theology which commits everything to the operations of that Spirit of God who "worketh when and where and how He pleases," hangs everything on the sovereign good-pleasure of God. Calvin's theology is therefore, predestination to the core, and he does not fail, in faithfulness to the teachings of Scripture and with clear-eyed systematizing genius, to develop its predestinarianism with fulness and with emphasis; to see in all that comes to pass the will of God fulfilling itself, and to vindicate to God the glory that is His due as the Lord and

disposer of all things. But this is not the peculiarity of his theology. Augustine had taught all this a thousand years before him. Luther and Zwingli and Martin Butzer, his own teacher in these high mysteries, were teaching it all while he was learning it. The whole body of the leaders of the Reformation movement were teaching it along with him. What is special to himself is the clearness and emphasis of his reference of all that God brings to pass, especially in the processes of the new creation, to God the Holy Spirit, and the development from this point of view of a rich and full doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Here then is probably Calvin's greatest contribution to theological development. In his hands, for the first time in the history of the Church, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit comes to its rights. Into the heart of none more than into his did the vision of the glory of God shine, and no one has been more determined than he not to give the glory of God to another. Who has been more devoted than he to the Savior, by whose blood he has been bought? But, above everything else, it is the sense of the sovereign working of salvation by the almighty power of the Holy Spirit which characterizes all Calvin's thought of God. And above everything else he deserves, therefore, the great name of *the theologian of the Holy Spirit*.

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FIFTY VOICES OF PRAISE

RENZE O. DE GROOT

Is there anything more thrilling than the spirited singing of a well-trained concert choir? An unforgettable experience was given music lovers Tuesday night, March 28, at Calvin Christian Reformed Church, by the Dordt College singers under direction of Prof. Dale Grotenhuis.

This dedicated choir presented an all-sacred concert that proved most satisfying in musical excellence, and in earnest Christian presentation. Especially good at the opening of the Part III, was the filling of the whole church auditorium with song, when the choir dispersed throughout the aisles, and sang, each person a soloist, with clear diction, yet all in beautiful harmony.

The choir sung in excellent style but also, with an appropriate air of earnestness and humility before God. The band of young Christians was not afterwards available to the audience, until they had first retired to the church's lounge room, for post concert-devotions. The local pastor invited this fine Choir to make this event a special annual blessing for Calvin church and for Grand Rapids.

"CHRISTIAN" ENTERTAINMENT

RENZE O. DE GROOT

Friday evening I attended Christian High's presentation of "Annie Get Your Gun." It was played to a full house at Calvin College's FAC Auditorium, and I understand that good crowds attended the other three performances. Obviously this kind of performance "takes" with our people and the box office selling \$3 tickets took in thousands of dollars. The acting was first rate as the students had done a marvelous job of memorization. The orchestra was excellent and the stage settings were immense and striking, particularly the big, colorful, Indian scene.

As I watched the capable performance I wondered, however, what could properly be considered "Christian" in it. An opening prayer to God at a program by a Christian school would suggest that one might expect some Christian or Biblical dramatics. Instead, this opening prayer seemed completely irreconcilable with what proved to be a secular or worldly play. One scene gave us "entertainment" in social-dancing and liquor drinking. The hero and heroine engaged in prolonged kissing and embracing. The heroine vowed to show her prospective lover a few things when she would get to him with a low-necked dress instead of her wild-west hunters' garb. For no apparent reason, a card game was thrown in to complete the exercise in worldliness.

Where was Christian taste, not to speak of Christian supervision and censure in all this? Why should such a play be chosen for presentation by a Christian school? Have we no Christian dramatics? We ought to be able to get and act out moral dramas which reflect Biblical standards. It seems to me that such completely secular content and manner of presentation does great disservice to our Christian public and school.

How can such secular material possibly bring the glory to God to which we are supposed to be committed? How can it serve our spiritual and moral well-being? The Scripture says, "Bodily exercise (entertainment) is profitable for little, but godliness . . . for all things, having promise of the life . . ." (1 Tim. 4:8).

We are also warned in the Bible, "Love not the world." Surely such plays as this, play into the hand of the world and will cause many to stumble and fall from the way of holy living in obedience to God's law.

Dr. Renze O. De Groot is a retired Christian Reformed pastor living at Grand Rapids and president of the Reformed Fellowship.

the Presbyterian Church in America

PETER DE JONG

Two of the most encouraging developments to Bible-believing Christians in recent years have been (1) the return of the Missouri Lutherans to Biblical and confessional orthodoxy and (2) the rise and rapid growth of the new Presbyterian Church in America which is seeking, by breaking away from apostate denominations and establishing a new church organization, to restore such Biblical and confessional orthodoxy. THE OUTLOOK has from time to time outlined some of the Lutheran development. Now let's notice what has been happening among these Presbyterians.

A Story of Rapid Growth

Donald Dunkerley, Pastor of the McIlwain Memorial Presbyterian Church of Pensacola, Florida, writing in the December, 1977, issue of the *British Banner of Truth* nicely surveyed the history of the new denomination as he commented on its Fifth General Assembly meeting last September. He observed that in three years it had grown to include 62,000 communicant members, 405 congregations, 457 ministers, and had placed 90 missionaries on the field. Although it began in the South it now includes churches in many parts of the U.S., one of them a mission church in Hawaii.

Rocky Road to Reformation

Some of the most interesting items of Pastor Dunkerley's report are those which deal with the problems of restoring in the new church the long-lost Reformed faith and practice. He described the problem in this way:

Those who originally formed the PCA suffered from the effects of many years in a liberal-dominated denomination. Many had only limited contact with the Reformed faith over the years, and while expressing an openness to the Reformed faith and a willingness to learn more, their faith and practice was not so much a consistent Calvinism as a general evangelicalism of the sort one would associate with Billy Graham or Campus Crusade for Christ.

He observed that in the First assembly meeting a marked conflict arose between

the main body of the denomination and those who referred to themselves as 'TR,' meaning that they were self-consciously 'thoroughly Reformed.' In the opening assemblies, the TR's most of whom were recent graduates of Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi, tended to sit together and vote as a bloc. The belligerence of the TR group tended to cause many older men who were sympathetic with their aims to dissociate themselves from them.

Gratifying Progress

The writer went on to describe how these early internal differences are being surmounted.

This animosity, which was in the atmosphere of at least the first two assemblies, seems to have been dissipated by the fifth. Although many of the votes were on theological issues and voting tended to follow theological lines, the spirit was very good. The animosity was gone and so was the appearance of evident blocs. The assembly as a whole seemed much more Reformed, as is evidenced by the thrust of the debate and the nature of the votes, although, of course, there are still many inconsistencies.

He listed some of the factors contributing to the "emergence of the more Reformed majority." (1) "One certainly is the result of the influence of the thoroughly Reformed element in the church, which has itself matured, gaining wisdom and effectiveness." 2. "Also, the church as a whole is now much better educated in the Reformed faith and much more responsive to it." (3) The PCA has grown from sources outside of the old Southern Presbyterian Church now including many men from more strongly Reformed backgrounds such as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod. (4) Most new ministers ordained since the beginning of the denomination are graduates of Reformed, Westminster and Covenant Seminaries "giving them a much better theological education than that possessed by the majority of the men present at the first assembly."

Social and Political Action

The assembly decided to petition the President and Congress to reconsider the decision to withdraw troops from Korea and decided to inform the President that abortion is condemned by the Word of God. Although the new church strongly opposes the habit of liberal denominations, with which most of its members were only too familiar; of making pronouncements on all kinds of social and political issues, a majority felt that on these two issues the Word of God warrants a church body taking such action.

Educational Policy

A proposal to have the denomination share with

the Reformed Presbyterian, Evangelical Synod the ownership and operation of Covenant College, Look-out Mountain, Tennessee, was opposed by some who felt that such a move violated the principle of sphere sovereignty which does not permit a church to run a liberal arts college, and the matter will undergo further study.

The denomination also adopted a proposal for thorough reorganization of the traditional seminary training which would place more emphasis on practical and evangelistic experience, relying on "small tutorial seminaries, one in each presbytery," which is to be further worked out by a sub-committee.

Regarding campus ministries, the assembly after discussion adopted a motion that the principal thrust of PCA campus ministries should be distinctly Reformed, but it also approved, despite opposition, presbyteries supporting and supervising staff workers in non-church organizations such as Campus Crusade and Intervarsity. Pastor Dunkerley concluded his report with the observation that:

One thing appears certain: the PCA is not willing to be just another little denomination, Reformed in theology and Presbyterian in government. It is interested in innovating. It wants to do more than has been done before to reach the nation and to reach the world, not simply with the Gospel of Christ, but with the whole counsel of God, which we often call the Reformed faith.

Dr. Van Groningen's Observations

Much interesting additional light is shed on these developments in an article by Dr. G. Van Groningen entitled "Observations on Presbyterianism in the South Eastern Part of the U.S.A." appearing in the Australian magazine *Trowel and Sword* of October, 1977.

Problems of the Non-Seceders

First Dr. Van Groningen comments on the plight of "many consciously Reformed people" who have not as yet joined the new PCA but remained in the old Southern Presbyterian Church. Some felt that a break-away was premature, that there was no constitutional issue that warranted it, and they hoped that the old church might be brought back to its faith. These people face increasing difficulties as that church moves toward adopting a new confession (which is not necessarily to bind its members), as it ordains women as elders, and as that church continues to identify itself with the National Council of Churches and its obnoxious actions. The report takes note of the fact that there has generally been a surprising lack of bitterness between those who seceded and those who remained in the old denomination although some tensions are arising.

More on the Problems of Reformation

Dr. Van Groningen's report deals mainly with the new denomination and the problems which it is en-

countering in seeking to achieve a really Reformed Church. The underlying, main problem of the new denomination, as he analyzed it is the lack of unity and harmony among the diverse elements that comprise that church. These diverse elements came to one mind in their decision to secede from the old Southern church. As soon as the new denomination, the PCA was formed, and had to decide on its course the differences between the various elements that compose it became apparent. They were agreed on what they were *against* but not agreed on what they were *for*. Arriving at agreements between these various groups in determining a common policy for the new body seems to be its main problem.

Dr. Van Groningen distinguishes "five specific emphases" within the PCA which are "not always mutually compatible." Sometimes two may combine, but "in no instance do all five combine."

FIVE DISTINGUISHABLE EMPHASES

1. The "original Southern Church"

Although the motivation for leaving the old church and forming a new one was supposed to be loyalty to the Presbyterian Creeds, it has become apparent after the break that many who joined it were not moved so much by concern for the Reformed doctrines of those creeds as they were by their growing disgust with the actions of the old church leaders on social and political issues.

2. The TR's

A second group, as we have already observed, has been characterized as the "totally Reformed and/or thoroughly Reformed," or TR's. The phrase was allegedly coined by Dr. Morton Smith a leader in the PCA, to refer to those who wanted to be "not half-heartedly but consistently, completely" Reformed. Sometimes criticized for being harsh, or tactless, they want to be a totally Reformed church.

3. The Mission Enthusiasts

A third group consider missions, especially overseas missions, to be the only reason for the church's existence. Some of these favor cooperation with non-Reformed or non-Presbyterian bodies which will allow Reformed or Presbyterian activity. Their concern is plainly with wide-spread evangelism rather than with sound doctrine and this brings them into conflict with especially those who would strive for sound doctrine.

4. The Charismatics

Sympathizers with the charismatic (or "Pentecostal") movement constitute a fourth group; sometimes they are sympathizers with the mission enthusiasts but find themselves at odds with the first, traditionally Presbyterian, or second, doctrinally Reformed people.

5. The Independents

Finally, the writer observes people who want to

be independent and have independent, often big, individual churches.

The Struggle for a United Reformed or Presbyterian Church

With these diverse elements in the church it is achieving in some measure a united policy. At the same time the writer sees "overall tension . . . stronger than it was before."

Van Groningen describes the not-denominationally-connected Jackson Reformed Theological Seminary (in which he is a professor) as caught between and sometimes criticized (in opposite ways) from the sides of these various groups. An ingredient that will further complicate the situation promises to be the decision of the last assembly of the PCA to set up its own seminary training programs. In that program he foresees especially problems of getting qualified professors.

Through these problems the writer observes the Lord "blessing the work of the PCA, of those battling for the truth in the PCUS and of the Reformed Theological Seminary as it seeks to serve *all* those committed to the Lord and His Word of Truth."

Concluding Observations

The growing pains of the new Presbyterian denomination are not unfamiliar to those who know something of our Reformed church history. The records of our churches tell of similar problems in seeking to establish a common policy for a new, seceding church. The tensions between the evangelical old secession from a liberal state church and the later broader-fronted Kuyperian "Doleantie" lie deep with the history of our Reformed churches. But the growing pains of those who are seeking together to return to faithfully preaching and teaching the gospel of repentance and faith in Christ that includes the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:21, 27) are much to be preferred to the death pains of those who are losing that gospel faith and life. Let us pray for, seek and encourage such gospel revival.

The experience of these Presbyterian brothers is showing how necessary it is that in efforts toward church reformation we constantly emphasize the positive aims toward which the Lord's gospel encourages us to strive. Our necessary exposure and rejection of the evils that are destroying the churches' faith and life must always be part of our contending "for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). When the Lord gives the opportunity for reforming action either by restoration of the old church (as He seems to be doing among the Lutherans) or by secession (as He is doing among the Presbyterians) that action will be the more effective in the measure that those engaged in it see clearly the common Biblical aims they must try to achieve. Seeing and teaching those aims made John Calvin, Abraham Kuypers and other reformers. This is God's way of making reformers and reforming His church also in our time. ●

Dancing at Calvin and Christian Liberty

Edward Heerema

In presenting its case to Synod 1977 for the introduction of school-sponsored social dancing on the campus of Calvin College the Board of Trustees made use of the concept of Christian liberty (*1977 Acts of Synod*, pp. 223ff.). At the time this appeal puzzled me, and I am still puzzled. In sorting out my thoughts on this matter I have come to believe that this appeal is out of place. First of all there is an important sense in which the concept is misapplied. And in the second place the Board of Trustees has undermined its own case by this appeal to Christian liberty.

The biblical teaching of the freedom which the Christian has in Christ is a many faceted treasure. This liberty means that the Christian is free from the duty of keeping the many demands of the Old Testament ceremonial law, free from the curse of the law, free from the unbearable burden of seeking to earn God's favor by keeping the law, free from the commandments of men and human tradition, free to keep God's commandments in the obedience of grateful love, free to enjoy God's good creation without being shackled by a host of inhibitions to "handle not, nor taste, nor touch." This treasure has another significant facet, as we learn from I Corinthians, chapters 8-10. These chapters deal with the eating by Christians of meat that had been offered to idols before it was put up for sale in the marketplace. The apostle Paul makes it plain that a Christian may feel perfectly free to eat such meat, that no sin is involved. In support of his position the apostle quotes Psalm 24:1, "the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof;" and he asserts that an idol is nothing and so can do nothing to the meat. Yet, there were Christians who were troubled by this. They felt they might be guilty of the sin of idolatry in eating such meat. To them eating such meat was therefore sinful. The apostle admonishes those who like himself see no wrong in eating such meat to abstain from eating it under circumstances in which their fellow Christians would be offended, that is, led to do what they judged to be sinful.

Each one, it is clear, was free to make his own moral decision, including the decision on the part of certain Christians to desist from the use of such meat out of respect for the moral sensitivity of fellow Christians. It was truly a situation of free moral choice. Now suppose the church at Corinth had somehow been involved in the sale or distribution of the meat

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in question. If the church had been so involved, the freedom of moral decision would have been very much compromised. Then those who felt that eating such meat was sinful would have been burdened with the task of demonstrating that the church was doing something wrong.

When Calvin College officially sponsors social dancing it is taking the issue out of the arena where Christian liberty properly belongs. Such sponsorship does not make for a situation of unencumbered free moral choice. The church institution is officially engaged in the dancing business. So the person who is persuaded that such dancing is wrong has his moral decision encumbered by the fact that he is going contrary to the judgment of his church, the holy house of the Lord. The moral choices at Corinth were free because the church was not involved in the meat business. The moral choices at Calvin can be free at this point if the church school is not involved in the social dancing business.

Furthermore, those in the Corinthian church who felt that eating such meat was sinful not only did not have to prove that the church was doing something wrong; they did not have to prove that their own position was right. They were not placed on the defensive. Their moral choice was simply a free decision of conscience. And on the basis of that conscientious judgment the apostle said that Christians like himself who were persuaded that eating such meat was perfectly all right should abstain from such eating under circumstances which might involve violation of the conscience of fellow Christians.

I trust my point is clear, and that in the limited area of the appeal to the concept of Christian liberty the Board of Trustees has undercut its own case for social dancing on the Calvin campus. It is evident that there are many members in the Christian Reformed Church who feel that social dancing, properly directed and controlled, is a very proper and desirable means of recreation, social interaction, and fulfillment of the cultural mandate. But it is equally obvious that there are many in the church who feel that social dancing is accompanied by moral hazards to which they do not wish to subject their young people. In their judgment such dancing tends to weaken the moral restraints that protect people from falling into sin, or the controlled program of dancing proposed for Calvin College will be a step toward participation in morally dangerous dancing. Such moral hazards are clearly expressed in a popular song of a few years ago, a song in which a "girl from Sheboygan" is quoted as saying to her dancing partner, "dance me loose."

It is difficult to see how the church can on the one hand agree to set up a program which many members feel is filled with moral danger, and then on the other hand appeal to the biblical concept of Christian liberty in support of that program. In my judgment there is an unresolved conflict here.

The proper path for the Board of Trustees to follow in this matter is to demonstrate to the church beyond a reasonable doubt that the program of social

dancing proposed for Calvin College is free from the moral hazards that the church has for so long associated with such dancing. Indeed, this demonstration ought to show that the proposed program will be an unqualified "good" in the lives of the church's sons and daughters at Calvin. Such demonstration should also face the question how the proposed program of social dancing is to avoid becoming an incitement to their dancing experiences that are more interesting and exciting than the antiseptic program at the college. Such demonstration is the responsible course for the church to follow out of respect for its own special character of holiness, and out of regard for the moral earnestness of the church's long history of concern with respect to social dancing. ●

Meditation

GOD— THE GOD OF THE LIVING



REV. JOHN BLANKESPOOR

But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.
(Matt. 22:31, 32)

To know the Scripture and the power of God is the answer of the Lord to all unbelief. That was Christ's answer to the unbelieving Sadducees of His day, the people who denied the resurrection of the dead and also the very existence of angels and spirits. They were the liberals of that day, and leaders in the church at that.

At this particular time they were confronting Jesus with what they considered to be a real dilemma. A certain woman had seven husbands. Whose wife would she be of these seven men, in the day of the resurrection? Then Jesus gave another one of those remarkable answers. "Ye know not the Scriptures nor the power of God." The power of God can change such things, for He is God. But they really did not believe the Scriptures. As a result they did not know the power of God. Neither intellectually nor experientially.

We all have many questions about the resurrection of the dead: What will it all be like? Will we miss people who now are close to us? Who will not be in heaven? — and many more. The answer to all such questions is the same basically, faith in the Scriptures and the power of God. With these same Scriptures which constantly speak of the power of God, Christ then proceeded to prove the very resurrection itself. Christ also lives by the Word. He quotes Exodus 3:6 where God said to Moses: “I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.”

Abraham was the first one to hear these blessed words. Shortly after he had entered Canaan God had said to him: “I am thy shield and exceeding great reward.” Notice the “I AM.” To a mortal, weak and still sinful creature, as we all are, God gave this glorious promise. The unchangeable One said to him, “I am thy God.” Regardless of what will happen in the future, God would be his God. Of course, Abraham received and enjoyed this through faith, which is how all Christians receive it. Later God said the same to Isaac and Jacob, “I am your God.”

• • • •

■ Many years later, to Moses standing near the burning bush, God speaks the same words. At this time Israel was groaning under the bondage of cruel Egypt. Remember, Israel is the seed of Abraham.

The cause of Israel seemed very hopeless at that time. They had been in Egypt almost four hundred years already, and that is a long time to people of time. Exactly at this time, while Moses stands near the bush that is not consumed, God repeats these words, “I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” But wasn’t Abraham dead a long time already now? Fact is, it was some five hundred years ago that he had died. It was almost four hundred years ago that Isaac had been buried in the same cave, and not too many years less that Jacob had gathered his feet into his bed and given up the ghost. How could God say at this time, five hundred years later, to Moses, “I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?” Wouldn’t it have been more proper to say, “I was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?”

And now Christ uses the same language, with the same tense. Now it is two thousand years or more since the patriarchs had died. But God still says, “I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” Today it is some four thousand years ago that these men sojourned on the earth. But God still says the same thing. Not I was their God, nor I will be their God, no very definitely, I am their God.

• • • •

■ Change the tense of this one word (am) and you lose the Gospel. Still more, you lose God and even deny the very being of God. God is the unchangeable One. With Him there is no time.

The changes that take place in us don’t really

change God, or His relation towards us. This is, however, true of us, at least in some ways. If you have a child, then you are its parent, and you remain its parent whether the child is at home, or out of the home, or even living far away from home. You are its parent regardless of what happens. And as a parent you will do what you can for that child, whether it is ten years old or fifty years old. Even a wayward child usually remains the object of much love and affection on the part of the parents. Even then you remain its parent. But when death comes you must say, “That was my child, and I was its parent.”

God is the rock, the unchangeable, the self-existent God. He surely is not affected by any change or time or circumstances on the part of His people. Even death can’t change this. When once God says to a sinner, “I am your God” nothing can change this, not even sin, or death, or the whole world of devils.

Of course, Christians also die. But really, so what? Does this change God’s attitude or limit His power? Of course not! Because He is the God of His people He sends Christ to make atonement and rise from the dead and be their Lord. And remember, Christ is not the living Savior, first of all because He arose. No, as God He is the living One, and therefore conquered death. He is the God and Savior of life. *The implication is that He is always the God of living people, never of dead people. As soon as God is our God He makes us alive. And this believer never dies, really.*

God’s very name and being are at “stake” here. What kind of God would we have if He would neglect His people in their misery and be impotent when they die? We simply wouldn’t have a God. Therefore all doubt about the resurrection is a questioning of the very existence of God.

In God and in His faithfulness is all the hope of the saved sinner. What a blessing to know that this God says to me, “I am your God.”

How can I know this? How can any sinner know this? How did Abraham know this? Through faith. That is the one answer. Wasn’t he a great man of faith and isn’t he called the father of all believers? If by the grace of God you are a believer, you can be assured that God says to you, “I am your God.” To every undeserving sinner who trusts in Jesus Christ as his Savior the Lord says, “I am your God.”

Our weaknesses and failures are still many, but trusting in our Lord’s finished work and committing our lives to Him we are daily assured, “I am your God.” Life still has many fears and anxieties, but in and through them all God’s Word comes to us loudly and clearly assuring us that He is and always will be our God. These promises are given every Sunday in church and in a special way by every administration of the sacraments.

The time will come when I can’t confess this truth anymore, my mouth and lips being silenced by death and the grave. But what a wondrous and glorious God we have, for He will continue to say even then, “I am your God.”

Remember this word the next time you are at a cemetery. There many saints are buried and their bodies may have already turned to dust. However, don't look at these graves without remembering the Word which God once spoke to Abraham and continues to speak to His people, "I am your God." These people are in glory today and will one day receive new bodies, exactly because of these blessed promises. Thank God we are not our own, but belong to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ. ●

to *The Banner*: we beg to differ

JOHN VANDER PLOEG

For the following reasons I feel compelled to protest against the anonymous article, "I Had a Struggle," in *The Banner* of February 24, 1978.

1. **First** — the article is an open, although anonymous, attack on what the Bible teaches. Note carefully the following excerpts from what the anonymous writer says:

a. **As to creation and evolution:** ". . . I went through quite a struggle before I stopped considering evolution of any kind as one of the devil's heresies or realized how the message of the Bible is actually enriched when we understand it in the context of the times in which it was written."

b. **As to the origin of man:** "So when I read that there seems to be much scientific evidence that God created the first man *by developing him from sub-human forms* [italics mine, JVP] and breathing into him the breath of life, I no longer feel threatened. For if God chose this method of creation, why would it be any less God at work in fashioning man from 'the dust of the ground' than if He had literally scooped a handful of dust and created him in a flash?"

c. **As to the early Genesis account:** "Nor am I any longer troubled when I hear someone say that the early Genesis account was written in such a way that it telescopes the history of aeons of time into figurative language."

d. **As to the serpent speaking:** "Did the snake have a literal serpentine voice box, or was this God's way of telling us that man disobeyed his Maker and listened instead to the voice of Satan. Either way, God's message to us is clear. . . ."

e. **As to the historicity of Genesis 1-3:** "I do believe that Genesis 1-3 is history — but history written so people of that day and all time could understand it because it spoke in the language and thought forms of the day."

Let's not be fooled by double talk. This is the so-called "new hermeneutic" a la Lever, Kuitert, Verhey and others.

Note: Be sure to read and reread this article for yourself in its entirety.

2. **Next** — this article is published in "the Official Publication of the Christian Reformed Church" — as every issue of *The Banner* tells us on the cover that it is.

I know that in the masthead of *The Banner* we are told: "The views and opinions of the writers and advertisers herein do not necessarily represent the position of this magazine nor of the Christian Reformed Church."

However, the "I Had a Struggle" contribution did not appear as a letter in *Voices* but rather as an article in a series of articles by the anonymous writer or writers. We have no way of knowing whether these articles were planned and solicited by *The Banner* or whether they were accepted and published at the request of the anonymous writer or writers. However, those in charge of *The Banner* cannot wash their hands of the responsibility of aiding and abetting the propagation of "the new hermeneutic" throughout the denomination at the very time when this matter is pending in the further consideration of the so-called Verhey case. Instead of disavowing the objectionable contents of this article, those in charge of *The Banner* provide the writer of it with shelter or refuge in anonymity.

Because *The Banner* is the "official publication of the CRC, because it is subsidized by a denominational quota, and because we, as members of the CRC have a corporate responsibility in this, a vigorous protest is therefore very much in order.

3. **Finally**, the publication of this article in *The Banner* is definitely reprehensible because it appeared *anonymously*.

With good reason, anonymous letters or articles are considered fit only for "file thirteen" or the wastebasket. In the masthead, *The Banner* regularly states that "anonymous contributions will not be published." However, for some reason, those in charge of *The Banner* do see fit to allow this in the case of this article with the false teaching that it sets forth.

Now it may be that we will be told that the identity of the writer of the article is known to the editor of *The Banner* and possibly to the members of the Periodicals Committee. But what justification can there be for allowing this attack on Scripture to appear with no one identified as the writer? If the false teaching espoused in this anonymous article is the position of those in charge of "the official organ of the CRC" let them say so. The cowardice of hit-and-run drivers makes it difficult, if not impossible, to apprehend them. Let's at least have the courage to sign our names to what we write and be open and above-board on issues of such great significance to the entire denomination. ●

reformed women speak

Laurie Vanden Heuvel (Mrs. Thomas Vanden Heuvel) has consented to replace Miss Johanna Timmer as editor of "Reformed Women Speak." We welcome her as new editor of this department. Copy for this department should be sent to:

MRS. LAURIE VANDEN HEUVEL
6159 Riverside Dr.
Chino, CA 91710

PASSING THE BANNER

With a mixture of sadness and joy we learned of the passing of Miss Johanna Timmer to the heavenly home prepared for her. We were sad because the church had lost a spiritual giant and warrior. With clarity and conviction Miss Timmer had zealously taught the doctrines of Scripture, calling the church back to the Word of God when she appeared to drift. But the Lord has called Miss Timmer from the church militant to the church triumphant. What can we do but rejoice?

The word of the church goes on. That banner of truth must be passed from one generation to the next.

Have you ever watched a relay race in which two members of opposing teams run with a banner to a specific destination and back again, passing the banner to the next in line until one line finishes first? In a way, the spiritual race is like that. Christ's team and Satan's are fighting a battle. One team carries the banner of truth and the other the flag of falsehood. All praise to our God - Christ's team will win! But it takes effort, responsibility, determination and a strong commitment to Christ's cause on the part of each team member to actively pass Christ's banner of truth. That banner does not mysteriously float from one team member to the next.

There are no bench-warmers in Christ's race. Every Christian is a runner and must have the triumph of Christ's Kingdom in view as his goal. Empowered by Christ's Spirit, every runner must conquer in Christ's name, enforcing Christian principles in the fields of education, marriage and the family, economic and political life, to name only a few areas of human activity.

Miss Timmer was used of the Lord as editor of this column to carry the banner of truth. It was her task to instruct and inspire men and women of God in doctrine and in the practice of that doctrine in daily Christian living. It was also her task to enlist other women as fellow-contributors.

Since Miss Timmer has been translated to her heavenly home, the Board of Reformed Fellowship has passed this banner to me. I accept it humbly and gladly. With God's help we will fly it faithfully.

What the Bible says

about

WOMEN IN CHURCH OFFICE

GERARD VAN GRONINGEN

The efforts to put women in church offices have been causing increasing trouble within our churches as they also have in other denominations. What should decide this matter for any church should not be what most people around us may think, but what God's Word says about it. The Christian Reformed Synod of 1975 appointed a study committee to deal with what the Bible says about this matter. This committee ("re Hermeneutical Principles on Women in Ecclesiastical Office") is now to report to the 1978 Synod. Dr. Gerard Van Groningen, professor at the Reformed Theological Seminary at Jackson, Miss., and a member of the committee, points to the lack of agreement in this committee on how the Bible must be understood in dealing with this question. In the interest of having this matter as widely studied and discussed as possible in the brief time before the synod meets, we welcome his article. It is suggested that church officers who will have received their agendas for the Synod by the time this issue is printed compare the agenda report with Dr. Van Groningen's comments on it.

It is my intent in this article to present some items concerning the Synodical Committee's Report on the Study of Hermeneutical Principles, particularly as these apply to biblical passages which speak to the question of whether women should be ordained to ecclesiastical offices or not.

There will be two parts: 1) a brief review of my involvement in the work of the committee and 2) some comments about the report itself.

I.

WORKING IN THE COMMITTEE

I served on the committee (referred to hereafter as H.P.W.E.O.); and found it a very difficult experience. And that especially for three reasons. First, it took much time and effort; (it was a real concern also that thousands of dollars of church money were spent). Secondly, in the committee there was no common approach to the basic problem before us. Thirdly, in September of 1977, six months before the report

was to be prepared, I came down with an intestinal upset, was hospitalized for a short period and continued under doctor's care for approximately six months. Hence, I had to be absent from a number of committee meetings, and therefore was not able to contribute as fully to the work as I had planned. I did keep abreast of the committee's work and submitted, in writing, some of my insights, evaluations and recommendations.

Shortly before the committee concluded its work and submitted its report for publication, I communicated two specific conclusions I had come to: 1) That much as I felt a minority report was necessary, because of problems I had with the majority report, I had neither the health, strength, time and therefore the desire to produce it in the few weeks that remained before the time the report was to be submitted for publication; 2) That, having seen the initial draft of the recommendations Drs. P. Bremer and S. Kistemaker made, I was prepared to sign my name under them. However, I wished to have it understood that signing the "minority recommendations" was not to be construed in such a manner that the problems I had with the report had been resolved.

When the committee discussed my conclusions, it was decided that I had two options: 1. Write a minority report if I wished to sign recommendations, or 2. Agree to have a note inserted which referred to my illness and problems with the report. As stated above, to write a minority report, and that within a very brief period of time, was really not a viable option for me.

II.

THE SYNOD REPORT

There are, as I see it, at least four problem areas with the report. I intend to refer to these and give examples, rather than to discuss these problem areas at length. Should it be deemed good that a fuller statement be made, there is a possibility that this could be done.

The four problem areas are closely related and interrelated. One might wish to argue with me that I have not presented these in the proper order. However, as I see it, I wish to refer to them in the following order.

1. Important Omissions

Important material has been omitted: there is no review nor evaluation of the cultural situation in which we live today, which influences us in the formulation of our questions, which motivates us to approach the Scriptures as a problem-solving book, or as a source of confirmation for opinions that have arisen in the modern cultural situation. A study of this material should have been included and placed in close proximity to the hermeneutical section, because it is vitally related to hermeneutics. It was

agreed that the matter of application is a very important aspect of hermeneutics. In fact, a category for that was specified and included. How, then, could it be justified to separate a discussion of the contemporary hermeneutical situation from the section on hermeneutical principles. The argument against inclusion could be that it didn't really fit under the last heading "Contemporary Situation" Part II. I maintain that it could have been included there if a proper transitional statement was formulated.

2. Structure of the Report

The structure of the report is a matter of concern and that for three reasons. The principles in Part III have not been arranged and formulated properly and are presented in a formal way; so much so that the actual thrust of them is difficult to express in a meaningful manner for the specific Bible study, which was requested of the committee.

The second reason for my concern with the structure is the two-line development. I was not able to attend the meeting (in 1976) due to my wife's physical situation, when it was decided to adopt the two-line approach. This two-line approach causes much ambivalence or, to use a phrase that has been used in other instances, a flip/flop method: flip line says this, flop line says that. Flip line has reasons given for its line. It does not develop the reasons why the flop line is unacceptable. The flop line position is stated. There is not sufficient argumentation presented why flop line is taken and little if any argumentation is present as to why the flip line is not followed. This two-line approach with its lack of exegetical arguments **pro** and **con**, makes it well nigh impossible to come up with definite grounds for the two sets of recommendations. And this leads me, then, to the third reason for my problem with structure.

The recommendations, neither those of the minority nor of the majority, flow clearly and directly from the report. To sign the report as it is means each one of us would be saying, in effect, that we grant the position of flop line as well as of the flip line. I repeat, there is no clear line then between the report as such and the recommendations. In addition, the recommendations of the minority include grounds which have hardly been mentioned, much less carefully evaluated with either/or considerations. And this, I contend, is due to the undesirable structure of our report.

3. Bible Exegesis

The next major area of my concern with this report is the exegetical aspect. I will cite three specific instances under this heading. First I refer to the matter of the selection of passages for exegesis. Some very important passages that deal with our whole subject have been omitted: e.g., Isaiah 3:8-26; Amos 4:1-3 re women in society; Ephesians 5:21-33 where the headship principle of mutual yet different submission are clearly enunciated and applied and where

the church and family/marriage/home relationship are set forth; and the passages in the Pastoral Epistle which deal with qualifications for the office of elder and deacon.

My second problem in the exegetical area is that there is no complete or balanced argumentation. I've referred to that under structure. I will illustrate. Genesis 1-3 is not properly exegeted in view of the subject material that is before us. The concepts of male/female and how these relate to the image of God are not sufficiently exegeted. Neither is the concept of male headship (generic headship as well as headship in the marriage relationship) which comes to expression both implicitly and explicitly in chapters 2 and 3. Nor is the continuity of headship properly argued in chapter 3, in which Adam's work is continued, Eve's wifeness is continued, and in that same context, Adam's headship is continued.

A third reference under this exegetical concern is the improper use of exegetical methods. One glaring example can be found in comparing the effort to deal with Genesis 2 and Galatians 3. In Genesis 2:18-24 the last verse is said to state the theme of the passage in the light of which the entire passage is then to be evaluated. When one turns to the work done on Galatians 3, that same approach is not taken. Verse 29 is the last statement of Galatians 3. It is a climactic statement. "And if you belong to Christ, then you are children of Abraham, heirs according to the promise." That indeed is a summing up statement. It repeats what has been said explicitly throughout chapter 3 and even referred to in the previous chapter. The theme is, "Faith, promise, incorporation in the body of baptism, membership in the church." It is not as the Judaizers would say, "works, law, circumcision, and thus membership/incorporation in Abraham's body, the church." Thus the thrust of the passage is the establishing of a relationship between the head of the church and Abraham's true sons, and this has some meaning for interpersonal relationships. Verse 28 is an explicatory statement, or an illustrative statement, to give expression to this principle of "By faith the promises are made real to all those who are baptized." By raising this point, I do not want to imply that every passage has to be dealt with in exactly the same manner. In fact, Genesis 2 is structured differently from Galatians 3. I suggest that the method that was applied to Genesis 2, where it is not properly applied (the last verse expresses one implication of what has been said about man's generic headship), is a method that should very definitely be applied to Galatians 3.

Other areas of exegetical concern could be pointed out. For brevity's sake, I will limit myself to the three that I have mentioned.

4. Applying Principles of Interpretation

The fourth area of concern is in the application of hermeneutical principles. It seemed quite obvious that Synod's mandate was: state the hermeneutical prin-

ciples, indicate *which* hermeneutical principles are to function and *how* they are to function. This the report fails to do in various important instances, and in this respect I find that the committee is most remiss in its report. This may also be the cause of the other areas of concern. One may ask: where and how then were the hermeneutical principles to be applied? Suggestions are: when a passage is dealt with, it would be most appropriate to point out as, e.g., in Genesis 2, of what use the context is. It is a very important factor to help us decide what is implicit and what is explicit. So, also, in regard to Galatians 3. If the principle of context (immediate context and the broader context) were clearly stated and spelled out in an explicatory manner the readers of the report would be able to understand what we were saying and from what direction we were coming.

Another manner of applying hermeneutical principles would be to trace through the entire Scripture a number of themes or principles which were important for the study. E.g., the principle of headship, enunciated in Genesis 1-3, could be shown to be present within the progressive revelation of God which was given within the historical process, and it could be shown how this headship principle was applied throughout the course of history. This headship principle is seen throughout Scripture by the feminists and they therefore speak of the cultural context as "patriarchal." The feminists see it and try to remove it. Why does the report ignore it? Why does the report not indicate that the headship principle is not a product of cultural evolution but that it has been divinely placed and upheld?

A second principle or theme is prophecy. Material on this was presented to show how the concept of prophecy refers to various activities. Here, the principle of continuity, modification, and discontinuity within the historical context, could be clearly enunciated.

A third principle that could have been carried through with an illustrative demonstration of how hermeneutical principles function would be in regard to delegated authority. This study should have included the matters of office, anointing, and ordination, and these in distinction from the concept of service. These concepts, important as they were in the times of the Old Testament, should be shown as continuing, modified or discontinued, into the New Testament.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it is my studied opinion that the report of the committee on H.P.W.E.O. has not properly carried out the mandate of Synod; that the report has some areas which cause much and deep concern and that it cannot serve as a foundation for a change in the life and functions of the church. I do wish to repeat, however, that on the basis of the study made (the report does not reflect all of it!), the minority recommendations are to be judged correct and therefore should be adopted. ●

A LOOK AT BOOKS

VALUABLE REPRINTS

REFORMED DOGMATICS: SEVENTEENTH - CENTURY REFORMED THEOLOGY THROUGH THE WRITINGS OF WOLLEBIUS, VOETIUS, AND TURRETIN. Edited and translated by John W. Beardslee III. Grand Rapids, Baker, 1977. 471 pp., paperback, \$6.95. Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien, pastor of the Frist Christian Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa.

Baker Book House is to be congratulated for making available many of the helpful and oftentimes out-of-print volumes included in the Twin Brooks Series. This volume is especially welcomed.

The material included is the full *Compendium Theologiae Christianae* of Johannes Wollebius, short portions of Gisbert Voetius' *Selectae Disputationes Theologicae* (concerning practical theology), Locus IV (regarding God's decrees and particularly predestination) from Francis Turretin's *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, together with a lengthy introduction by Beardslee.

These three theologians represented the Reformed thinking of the period around and immediately after the Synod of Dordrecht. They all condemn Arminianism. This is systematic theology in early form and it is well worth our reading. The simple style makes this work the more useful. Reading it may correct much of today's fuzzy thinking about the decrees of God.

Turretin's complete work in translation may become available through the labor of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary of Grandville, Michigan.

THEREFORE STAND: CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS, by Wilbur M. Smith. Grand Rapids, Baker. Paperback edition 1974. 614 pp., \$7.95. Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien, pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa.

This is the thirteenth edition of this popular and thorough classic in apologetics. It has been around since 1945.

Anyone who has read Wilbur Smith knows that he is thorough, interesting and devout in his work. Among the eleven chapters are these: "The Forces and Agencies Engaged in the Modern

Attack Upon Evangelical Christianity," "Some Reasons for the Unbelief of Men and Their Antagonism to God" (named are the darkness of natural man's mind, the pride of man, and materialism, among others), "St. Paul's Address to the Athenian Philosophers" (he answers the question: did Paul fail in Athens?), "Suggestions for an Immediate Vigorous Offensive in the Defense of Christian Faith," and "The Creation of the World by God; the Apologetic for Our Era of Scientific Emphasis."

Smith writes that the outstanding work on theology published during this century was that of Louis Berkhof. From it he takes a definition of creation. This chapter on creation is full of valuable thoughts, quotes and insights.

The dispensationalism of Smith comes out in his chapter on the Judgment. This book, like others, must be read with discrimination.

In his last chapter, which concludes with the challenge "Therefore Stand," he chides the ministers of today for not proclaiming the truths of Scripture from the pulpit. If that was true in 1945, how much more is it true today!

GOOD MORNING, LORD - PRAISE FROM THE PSALMS by Nelle A. Van der Ark, 60 pp. **GOOD MORNING, LORD - DEVOTIONS FOR SHUT-INS** by Patricia Van Dalfsen, 52 pp. **GOOD MORNING, LORD - DEVOTIONS FOR GIRLS** by Greta Rey, 60 pp. Published by Baker Book House, 1019 Wealthy, S.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan. Price \$2.45 each. Reviewed by Hester Monsma.

Each of these devotional books is a gem in its own way. Written by different authors, for different purposes, they nonetheless all focus on one basic need: that of enriching the Christian life of the reader. All are highly recommended.

Good Morning, Lord - Praise from the Psalms. In this booklet the author makes the Psalms live for us today in a very effective way. Through her selection of various Psalms and her treatment of them, she succeeds in inspiring, instructing, comforting, or even correcting the reader. Everyday things are made special and one is made acutely aware of the God who stands behind and directs all of life. The use of this book would provide an excellent way to begin - or end - the day.

Good Morning, Lord - Devotions for Shut-ins is written by one who herself is a shut-in and who puts into words what many in a similar position must feel. It is a very personal testimony of the pain, the loneliness, the discouragement, and even the misunderstanding which shut-ins may experience. But the reader is also challenged to rise above these afflictions and to let God's strength take over. A valuable booklet, not only for shut-ins, but for anyone who desires to understand our shut-ins better.

Good Morning, Lord - Devotions for Girls. These devotions, again often drawn from personal experience, will speak effectively to every adolescent girl. The author shows she understands well the moods and problems, the ups and downs which a growing girl faces. She combines this understanding with an appreciation for the ordinary, common things of life, and offers many helpful and practical suggestions. Through it all she points the reader to the God who created us and who controls us and who controls our lives. Short prayers are included, as well as appropriate Bible passages to be read, thus making this an excellent help for our young girls in their daily devotions.

WHEN I SURVEY . . . Herman Hoeksema. Free Reformed Publishing Association, Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1977. 538 pp., \$9.95. Reviewed by Rev. Henry Vanden Heuvel, pastor of the Bethel Christian Reformed Church of Sioux Center, Iowa.

This is a reprint in one volume of six lenten studies written during the course of Rev. Herman Hoeksema's ministry. They are here put together under the title, "When I Survey . . ." and edited by his son Rev. Homer Hoeksema.

At the outset it should be said that this material is an excellent work on the topic of the suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ. The six individual works which together comprise this edition were all messages preached by Rev. Hoeksema while serving as minister of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids. Many also were given as lenten messages on the radio program of the Protestant Reformed Church. The meditations are filled with a God-centered, God-glorifying emphasis which is refreshing in a day of man-centered theology. And when this emphasis in the sovereignty of God's grace is found in the subject of Christ's suffering, it is doubly to be appreciated.

Each of the six books views the suffering of Christ from a slightly different perspective. Book One is "The Amazing Cross" in which the author examines the amazing judgment and the amazing obedience of Christ. In a perceptive treatment of the suffering of Christ, Hoeksema confronts the world, the church, the people, and the government with the question, "What will you do with Jesus who is called the Christ?" And then, considering the obedience of Christ, he shows how He came executing the plan of the Father to save the elect. "Father, glorify Thy Name" is the great purpose of Christ's obedience.

Hoeksema's treatment of the passage in John 12 from which the words, "Father glorify Thy Name" are taken, is questionable. He feels that when Jesus said, "Father, save me from this hour," He was referring to His resurrection by which He is saved through His suffering. William Hendriksen in his commentary on John's Gospel is closer to the correct interpretation when he says that these

words of Christ show the human nature of Christ shrinking from the error of the cross and its suffering. Obviously, both writers say the words do not speak of the disobedience of Christ to the plan of God for the salvation of His people.

In "The Royal Sufferer" which is Book Two, Rev. Hoeksema considers Christ's suffering as the suffering of the King, the Lord Jesus Christ. The author examines the various texts dealing with the suffering of Christ as King. Texts such as these about the crowds desiring to make Christ King in the account of the feeding of the 5,000 in John 6; the devil's temptation of Christ offering to give all the kingdoms of the world to Him in return for His worship; and the mockery of the soldiers crying out, "Hail, King of the Jews" are carefully analyzed. These meditations are balanced by an examination of the victory of the Christ as King over death and the grave in His resurrection.

In Book Three, "Rejected of Men," Hoeksema traces the sufferings of Christ from the point of view of His being denied and scorned by men. The theme is taken, of course, from Isaiah 53. The various chapters in this third book are based on such texts as John 15:25, "They hated me without a cause"; and Psalm 69:8, "I am a stranger unto my brethren."

The Fourth Book is called "The Power of the Cross." In it the author concentrates on passages of Scripture that speak of the effect of the cross and the power of the redemption of Christ to change the lives of God's people. He deals in this part of the book with such passages as I Corinthians 1:18, Hebrews 2:14, 15, and others. What is particularly noteworthy in all of the meditations of the book is that even though the primary emphasis is, of course, on the suffering of Christ, every section of the book has a strong emphasis on the resurrection of Christ. And this is not done without careful thought. The author is firmly convinced that one cannot consider the suffering of Christ apart from the resurrection. To separate these two great events is to deny the central scope of Scripture.

The Fifth Book is entitled, "... And Jesus in the Midst." The title is taken from John 19:18, "They crucified Him, and two other with Him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst." Rev. Hoeksema looks at the events of the cross, several of the words of the cross, and concludes with the victory of the resurrection. His treatment of the first word of the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," deserves comment. There is no doubt that this first word of the cross is the most difficult of the seven to interpret. What did Jesus mean by this prayer? Hoeksema rejects the interpretation favored by some commentaries that the idea of forgiveness is postponement of judgment until they do know what they do. Rather he believes the prayer refers to full forgiveness, but only for the elect who do indeed repent and believe. Thus, says Hoeksema, Christ was praying for all the elect who shall ever live, for their sins nailed Christ to the cross. It seems to me that this is an example of reading into the text something that is not there. To suggest that Christ was praying only for the elect whose sins nailed Him to the cross is to ignore the plain and obvious meaning of the words of the Lord which one would have to see as referring to those who were actually perpetrating the crucifixion.

The last section of the book follows the sufferings of Christ through the prophecies of the book of Isaiah, especially chapters 50-53.

The emphasis in this book on God-centered theology, on the antithesis, on the centrality of Christ is much appreciated. The Biblical exposition is wonderful. Hoeksema's books all show an excellent grasp of Scripture, and a clear awareness of the Bible as God's infallible Word. And this book is surely no exception. Although one misses the warm gospel invitation that should be present in such a work as this, the over all emphasis in this book of meditations on the suffering of Christ is excellent. The book is highly recommended as beautiful lenten meditations. Ministers looking for help with lenten sermons will find a fruitful source of ideas here. The book

is modestly priced, and the format of the pages makes it easy reading.

OUR REASONABLE FAITH — A Survey of Christian Doctrine by Herman Bavinck. 568 pp., \$6.95. Reviewed by Rev. Sy Voortman, Dorr, Michigan.

This book is a monumental work, dealing with eternal truths, that comes to us from the dawn of this century and, for the most of us, from another tongue. It was written by the late Herman Bavinck in the Dutch language — coming out in 1909. The translation is by Henry Zylstra and thus in clear, precise readable English.^o The current paperback edition was issued by Baker Book House.

Though this is a theological work by a scholar of considerable erudition, I found it to be inspiring as devotional reading and, in a somewhat profound sense, practical. Its special value though is as background reading and resource material for sermon preparation and Bible teaching.

It would hardly do to pick out chapters as being exceptional. There are good chapters on creation, art, man, eternal life — but then they are all good. Current doubts and distortions with respect to the extent of Scripture's authority lends importance to the excellent chapter on "The Holy Scriptures."

On one occasion when I was a student and had picked up my copy of Berkhof's "Systematic Theology," I noticed that my father, then an emeritus pastor, had written on the inside cover, "study this book through and through." The book under review is also a classic. It stands as a bulwark against the itching ears, the turning from truth to myths, and the indifference and hostility to doctrine so characteristic of our age. I recommend that especially pastors and teachers obtain a copy and that then we "study it through and through" and know it from cover to cover. This would most certainly be a real aid and blessing in our ministry.

^oSomeone once observed that this book is even better in translation than in the original language! — the Editor