

The Outlook

A LAYMAN ON INERRANCY
THE WEDDING FEAST
THE VERHEY CASE

APRIL - 1979

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

"A LAYMAN LOOKS AT INERRANCY"

PAUL INGENERI

Two Different Views of Biblical Authority

I imagine that many of us have wondered over the past several years why we've been "treated to" so many study reports over which people with equally high credentials cannot agree. Some say we are giving in to the spirit of the world while others say we are clinging to an outmoded traditionalism. I think that the charge closest to the truth is that we are operating with two quite different views of Biblical authority — one flowing from a concept of inerrant Scriptures and the other from a view of errant Scriptures.

Listen to this short dialogue between a leading inerrantist and some other Christian scholars . . . "Do you hold to the inerrancy of Scripture?" — "No." "Do you believe the Bible to be inspired by God?" — "Yes." "Do you think God inspires error?" — "No." "Is all of the Bible inspired by God." — "Yes." "Is the Bible errant?" — "No." "Is the Bible inerrant?" — "No." That conversation was not contrived but is cited by R. C. Sproul as one which he has had with Biblical scholars on many occasions. If it seems absurd to you then I think you're normal. Yet the CRC, our own denomination, would have to answer in a like manner because we are in what some call "an official state of ambiguity" on the issue of the inerrancy of Scripture.

Some entire seminary faculties have lined up on either side of the issue and many times we as lay people are confused by this . . . puzzled by the fact that Christians of great learning can look at the same data and come to opposite conclusions. We say to ourselves, "If they can't figure it out, how can we? And so we don't even bother to dig into the issue. I feel this is a serious mistake because one of the things I've learned over the years is that people with several degrees though usually having much more knowledge than the layman may not be as good as a farmer at drawing conclusions. Also, everyone, scholars included, comes to the data with a host of presuppositions (things they assume before they start their study), and these may or may not be valid. So we as laymen can benefit from their knowledge while still being critical of their conclusions. In order to do this of course we have to read both sides of the issue.

Mr. Paul Ingeneri is Director of Education and Evangelism for the Seymour Christian Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Mich., and a student at Calvin Seminary. He also wrote in our November, 1978, issue.

The Bible, Errant or Inerrant?

But before we go any further, let's define some terms so we know exactly what we're talking about. In a nutshell, inerrantists say that because God is the ultimate author of the Bible and He cannot teach error, the Scriptures are inerrant throughout even in those areas which bear on history and science and is therefore entirely trustworthy and authoritative. The other position (and I'm trying to express these as black and white for simplicity . . . there are in fact many nuances to both sides) . . . the other position states that though God has inspired the Bible it was written by fallible men capable of and actually guilty of error in their written word especially in the areas of science and history and this is said to be backed up by many conflicting passages in Scripture.

Now how did we get to our present position or non position? The orthodox Christian Church through the ages has believed in the inerrancy of the written Word. They may not have used that word but it was inherent in most of their formulations of inspiration. Some like Jack Rogers of Fuller have tried to soften this conclusion but his attempts don't hold weight in light of the data. At Vatican II, the Roman Catholic church changed its traditional position of total inerrancy by drafting a statement which says that Scripture teaches without error "the truth which God wanted to put into the sacred writings *for the sake of our salvation*" (underline mine). By this somewhat ambiguous phrasing the council effectively made room for the view that there can be error in Scripture in those areas unrelated to "divine salvific intent" . . . whatever that means and whatever those are. In the Protestant church there has been a parallel development with some claiming that we should limit inerrancy or proportion inerrancy to the saving intention spoken of in II Tim. 3:15 "to make men wise unto salvation." That is, on matters not dealing with salvation there can be and are indeed errors.

"Reports 36 and 44"

In our own denomination with reports 36 in 1971 and 44 in 1972 on the nature and extent of Biblical authority there has been much debate. Report 44 (essentially the same as 36) makes many strong points against theological liberalism but several have commented on what they feel is a crucial flaw. It officially opened the door for two views of Biblical authority to coexist in the CRC by relating the nature and extent of that authority to the content and purpose of Scripture as the saving revelation of God in Jesus Christ. That's a mouthful . . . now what does it mean? We have always held that the authority of the Bible is related to the person who inspired it and lies "in its source and not in what is said . . . in the who and not in the what . . . in the speaker and not in the speech . . . in the origin and not in the content." Of course we take into account the concept of progressive revelation and the intention of the author in each individual passage of Scripture — which to my mind we can only find out by considering every word significant and the context as well.

But the position that opens the door to all kinds of subjective interpretations relates the nature and extent of Biblical authority NOT TO ITS SOURCE OR WITH RESPECT TO APPLICATION TO THE INTENTION OF THE SCRIPTURE AS EACH PASSAGE REQUIRES BUT TO A LARGE OVERARCHING PURPOSE OR INTENT — "ITS CONTENT AS THE SAVING REVELATION OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST."

Of course the Scriptures have an overarching purpose and this can be seen from passages like II Tim. 3:15; Jn. 5:39, 40, Lk. 24:27, 44. But as Pinnock states, "To convert this valid theological principle into a critical scalpel is to misuse it. It was not meant to give us license to limit inerrancy as we please. Jesus and His disciples received all of Scripture — not just the primary intent of a passage but the secondary details as well. They took all of the declarative statements of Scripture as reliable and true. If we take Jesus as our guide, then the only proper way to discover divine truth would be not to sift the Biblical teaching according to a somewhat general principle we call the intention to convey saving truth, but to inquire of each passage what its inerrant teaching is."

Some truths relate more to salvation than others, i.e. the atonement vs. the anti-Christ. But both are Biblical truths and we have no right to call one type errant or irrelevant. If we say then, that inspiration guarantees only the truths necessary for salvation and someone is of the opinion that he needs to know very little . . . does that mean that very little is inerrantly taught in Scripture? Some questions we might ask here are: "Doesn't the Bible have unqualified right to lay hold on our obedience?" "Isn't it the preacher's right and duty to say, 'Thus says the Lord', in terms of the application of his text?" "Who is going to stand over the text relating it to its role in the history of redemption and revelation and tell us where and when it has divine authority?"

Dr. Boer on the Bible

We move along in our brief history to 1975. Dr. Harry Boer comes out with his book, *Above the Battle? the Bible and its Critics* in which he plainly calls for our acceptance of an errant Bible. He comes to his conclusions by two main lines of argument. First he marshals in parallel columns several passages which seem to plainly contradict each other in historical and other details. Then he concludes that since no one is able to explain these apparent discrepancies to his satisfaction, the Bible writers erred.

Two replies can be made here. First, some of the passages have been dealt with satisfactorily in commentaries and books on alleged Bible errors. These facts seem strangely to have been ignored. Secondly, the church has been aware of the passages mentioned for ages, she has not been able to reconcile some of them, and yet the Fathers still held to an inerrant Bible. This leads us to wonder, "Maybe some are now looking at the data through different eyes, i.e. with different presuppositions?" And this is cer-

THE OUTLOOK

(USPS 633-980)



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

JOURNAL OF REFORMED FELLOWSHIP, INC.

Send all copy to Managing Editor, Rev. Peter De Jong, Box 34, Dutton, Mich. 49511. Phone (616) 698-8267.

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE: Arthur Besteman, John Blankespoor, John Piersma, Harlan Vanden Einde, Henry Vanden Heuvel, Sybun Voortman, Clarence Werkema.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES: Renze De Groot, President; Clarence Werkema, Board-President; Arthur Besteman, Secretary; Ronald Van Putten, Treasurer; Peter Wobbema Jr., Assistant-Secretary-Treasurer; John Blankespoor, John Piersma, Cornelius Rickers, Berton Sevensma, Harlan Vanden Einde, Henry Vanden Heuvel, Sybun Voortman.

Assistant to the Editor: John Vander Ploeg.

Production Manager: Peter Wobbema.

Business Manager: Mrs. Mary Kaiser.

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

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

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

Subscription Policy: Subscription price, \$6.50 per year, \$11.50 2 years (Canada rates \$8.00 per year, \$13.50 2 years). Unless a definite request for discontinuance is received, it is assumed that the subscriber wishes the subscription to continue without the formality of a renewal order and he will be billed for renewal. If you have a change of address, please notify the Business Office as early as possible in order to avoid the inconvenience of delayed delivery. Include your Zip Code.

EDITORIAL AND CIRCULATION OFFICES

THE OUTLOOK

4855 Starr Street, S.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506, Telephone 949-5421

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

After Office Hours please call: 452-9519

Mailing Address: 4855 Starr Street, S.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506

April 1979 — Volume XXIX, No. 4

Contents:

A LAYMAN LOOKS AT INERRANCY	2
Paul Ingeneri	
HARRY BOER	6
Edwin H. Palmer	
MEDITATION — THE DREAM OF PILATE'S WIFE	7
John Blankespoor	
ARE YOU ON A DIET?	8
Gertrude Van Putten	
THE WEDDING FEAST AT CANA	9
John H. Piersma	
THE VERHEY CASE	13
Peter DeJong	
OUR QUESTION BOX	15
Harlan Vanden Einde	
THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST	16
Jerome M. Julian	
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR	17
POINTED PARAGRAPHS	19
NEWS OF THE FELLOWSHIP	19
A LOOK AT BOOKS	19
WHAT WE BELIEVE	22
Johan D. Tangelder	

tainly the case here. The author's major presupposition in this area seems to be that whatever Biblical material cannot be logically assimilated must be seen as errant.

As I read Scripture, our reason is involved in our relationship to God. It is not a god in itself. And so we don't kiss our brains goodbye . . . we use them. However, we do stand under the text of Scripture, brains and all. The problem of evil, Jesus' incarnation, the Trinity, election, etc., all bring up apparent contradictions; yet we don't reject them because our logic can't assimilate them. Neither should we reject the inerrancy which Scriptures claim on the basis of a lack of logical integration of certain passages.

"Human" Does Not Mean "Errant"

But do the Scriptures in fact claim to be inerrant? This brings us to the author's second line of argument. One would think that he would have begun his examination with the question, "What did Jesus say about Scripture?" But Jesus is reserved for the next to last chapter in the book and the Lord and His statements are used in quite a different way than we would expect. Like Karl Barth years ago, Dr. Boer claims that our failure to confess errors and contradictions makes us guilty of docetism. And he draws a strange parallel between Christological docetism and Biblical docetism. What does all this mean? Docetism was a heresy in the early church which allowed Christ's deity to "eat up" His humanity and leave us with a Christ with only apparent — not real human nature. In like manner the author says that we've let the human aspect of the Bible be "eaten up" by the divine because we don't allow for error on the part of the human writers. Many writers have exposed the fallacious character of this whole argument of Barth; yet Dr. Boer adopts it and still promotes it as valid. Do you see the problem? Christ was sinless; yet He was still a man. Does the fallibility of man mean that He *can* sin or that He *must* sin? If it means He must sin (and this is what the author's argument rests on) then Jesus was not fully human, and this is not so. As Sproul notes, if Christ's sinlessness doesn't cancel His humanity why should inerrancy cancel the Biblical writers' humanity. The issue is not whether human beings can make mistakes but whether or not God inspires error. Our confession rests on the integrity of God. We aren't saying that the Bible writers were infallible men but that God was able to and did in fact guide them only into truth, as II Pet. 1:21 states.

Jesus Didn't Teach Errors

Of course, Dr. Boer's argument would gain validity if Jesus knowingly or unknowingly taught error . . . and this is the focus of the next arguments.

1. Jesus accommodated Himself to popular views which we no longer accept in the then existing form.
2. Jesus was not omniscient and so when He assumed and taught e.g. that Moses was the au-

thor of the Pentateuch He was wrong but innocent because, being human, He participated in knowledge gaps and erroneous views of the OT common to His day.

3. We don't know what Jesus actually said anyway, because His teachings have come to us through a human medium.

On the first point hear this excerpt. "Notable here is Jesus' accommodation to the popular belief in sheol or hades as the abode of the dead with its two adjoining divisions of gehenna and paradise (Lk. 16:19-31)." On reading the passage, however, we find no evidence of any accommodation whatsoever. Hades here is, as Hendriksen states, "clearly a place of torment. It is hell." He continues . . . "the condition of the dead and the communication between them is represented here in very literal, earthly terms so that a vivid impression is created. It should be clear, nevertheless, that much of what is here conveyed cannot be interpreted literally. For example, we read about the lifting up of the eyes, of seeing people afar off, of a finger and of a tongue, even though we have been told that the rich man had been buried." Geldenhuys too says, "It is nowhere taught in the NT that the faithful at their death first go to the realm of the dead (hades)." In light of the passage itself and the above comments I find it impossible to believe that here Jesus is accommodating Himself to a two compartment Hades.

But when we open the door to this type of thinking what do we find? — people then saying that Jesus accommodated Himself to the OT stories, Adam and Eve, Noah's flood, Jonah, etc., though He knew these weren't actually true because He wanted to avoid "unimportant side issues" of authenticity and accuracy on these secondary levels. He simply went along with public opinion while presenting His doctrinal teaching. Gleason Archer's analysis is pointed here. He says that this view "is impossible to reconcile with the truthfulness and holiness of God. E.g. if Jesus knew that Jonah's deliverance through the fish was altogether fictitious, He could never have used it as an historical type of the experience of burial and resurrection that He Himself was shortly to undergo. This kind of accommodation would have bordered on the duplicity employed by unscrupulous politicians in the heat of an election campaign. In contrast to this read Jesus' claims in Jn. 8:26, 38." As a further objection Archer comments that Jesus refused to accommodate Himself to certain mistaken views current in His own time and cites Mt. 5; Jn. 8:24, 44; Mt. 19:9; 23:16-22; 15:11-20. "Jesus never stooped to accommodation in order to ingratiate Himself with His public. As Peter affirmed of Him, 'He committed no sin; no guile was found on His lips'" I Pet. 2:22.

Accusing Christ of Sin?

Let's look at the next argument — that Jesus was mistaken in many of His views because of His culturally conditioned humanness. This view like the last casts a shadow over Jesus' sinlessness. I quote

Sproul again: "Jesus does not have to be omniscient to be infallible. But He must be infallible to be sinless. That is to say, if Jesus, claiming to be sent from God and invoking the authority of God in His teaching errs in that teaching He is guilty of sin. The one who claims to be the truth cannot err and be consistent with that claim. Anyone claiming absolute authority in his teaching must be absolutely trustworthy in what he teaches in order to merit absolute authority. In light of His claims, Jesus cannot plead 'invincible ignorance' as an excuse for error."

Contradicting the Gospels

The third argument is the catch-all. We don't really know what Jesus actually said because "He left not a single written word to posterity. All that we know of His teaching we know through reports of the four evangelists. His words come to us therefore through the same kind of human medium through which the rest of the Bible comes to us . . . mediated by the Holy Spirit through human authors in ways past finding out." It's interesting that though the ways are "past finding out" the author is sure that one of the ways is not inerrant. Now it is true that we don't know word for word what Jesus said on certain occasions because the inspired reports are not verbatim accounts . . . but it seems that the author wants to stretch this to say something more. I say this for two basic reasons. First, the author believes that inerrancy is something wrongly added to our concept of infallibility. He sees the essence of infallibility as the "massive idea of the unbreakable, ever-valid revelation of the creation, redemption, and consummation of all things in Christ . . ." As Dr. Alex DeJong says, "It is apparent that the word 'infallible' is not applied to the Biblical text but only to the revelational realities which lie beyond, behind, or above the text." Here a wedge is driven between the Biblical text and infallible truth, which gives rise to all manner of subjectivism.

Boer claims that the inerrantist in trying to escape the dilemma posed by radical Biblical criticism can only resort to "pious self-contradiction," while his stress on this massive idea of creation, redemption, and consummation presents a responsible answer to their charges. Colin Brown's criticism of Barth is relevant here. "There have been those who wanted to have revelation in Christ without having to bother about defending the integrity of Scripture, trying to ignore the fact that the only Christ we know of is the Christ who is witnessed to by Scripture and who endorsed the integrity of Scripture. For Barth the Scriptures are true and false at the same time, being the inspired word of God and the erring word of man. It is not a case of some parts being inspired and reliable, whereas others are not, but of the same passage being both." To me the author's approach is self-contradictory and mystical. He holds that the Holy Spirit somehow "enables" us to bring to the non-Christians an infallible message through a book that is no more dependable than the fictions of pagan mystics.

More False Charges

Secondly, the author writes, "According to Matthew, Mark, and John, Jesus as we have seen met His disciples in Galilee after the resurrection. According to Luke 24:49, Jesus *immediately after His resurrection* (underline mine) instructed His disciples to remain in Jerusalem until the coming of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 1:4 this instruction is repeated. This contradiction is hardly reconcilable with the traditional doctrine of inspiration and infallibility." In other words since Luke reports that Jesus *immediately after the resurrection* told the disciples to remain in Jerusalem but the other three evangelists report that He appeared to them in Galilee, do we really have any idea about what Jesus really said or did here or on other occasions? Hear the author again, "This raises the question of Jesus' relationship to His own words and teaching . . ."

Take note of the author's added words, "immediately after the resurrection" and listen to Geldenhuys writing in 1951. "It is quite impermissible to deduce from these words that Luke teaches that the disciples never went to Galilee between the resurrection and ascension and that he thus contradicts Matthew, Mark, John, and I Cor. 15. Luke indeed does not represent vss. 44-49 as having been uttered on the same occasion as vss. 36-43, i.e. immediately after the resurrection. This follows from the fact that the contents of vs. 44 do not at all fit in with those circumstances. The whole portion (vss. 44-49) however bears unmistakable signs of its having been pronounced as a farewell message in which there is a reference to all that is past. And from Acts 1:4 it appears that these words were indeed the Savior's farewell words to His disciples before His ascension." This is further supported by Lk. 11:50-53. Also if the author wants to hold that vss. 44-49 were uttered on the same occasion as vss. 36-43 then to be consistent he should hold that the resurrection, appearances, and ascension all took place on the same day in light of vss. 50-53. And this is what others have tried to claim, but Luke is writing a compressed history here and certainly would not introduce a gross contradiction between the end of his gospel and the beginning of Acts. What the author seems to want to do is drive a wedge between what Jesus really said and our reports of His teachings.

Boer Contradicting Jesus

Why does Dr. Boer expend all this effort to claim that Jesus accommodated Himself to popular conceptions that He knew weren't actually true or that He erred unknowingly or that there's a big gap between what Jesus actually said and what the NT reports? Because "even a cursory view of Jesus' use of Scripture in debate, discussion and rebuke of His own disciples, added to an examination of Jesus' own submission to the authority of Scripture makes clear that He viewed it as utterly trustworthy and totally authoritative *in every area* on which it speaks" (Sproul). A split between Biblical-theological and historical-scientific truth is totally foreign to

Jesus' attitude toward and use of the Scriptures. So the reliability of Jesus' doctrine of Scripture and its authority for us as His followers must be somehow softened... in essence disposed of... in order to claim we have an errant Bible. Pinnock's comment bears note here. "The logical consequence of denying e.g. the authenticity of Jesus' doctrine of Scripture which pervades all our channels of information about Him leads a person to total pessimism regarding any historical knowledge about Jesus of Nazareth, a view completely unacceptable on critical grounds. And furthermore, it is far more likely that Jesus' understanding and use of the Scriptures conditioned the writers' understanding and use rather than the reverse. The originality with which the OT is interpreted with respect to the person and work of Jesus is too coherent and impressive to be secondary."

To set aside the clear teaching of our Lord on the Scriptures is to impugn His integrity and deny the normativity of His teaching as well. However if the author can show that there is accommodation and error on Jesus' part and finally that we don't even know what Jesus said anyway then he feels safe from the above criticism. I have tried to show that these arguments against inerrancy do not provide a way of escape. As in the arguments Boer is attacking Christ's integrity and authority, the consequence of that is devastating to our faith. ●

HARRY BOER THE HERETIC*

EDWIN H. PALMER

Harry Boer is a heretic to the extent that he asserts that the Bible has errors and in that he contradicts the Bible, the Belgic Confession (Article V) and the 1959 Christian Reformed Synod. Several consistories should protest, and through proper ecclesiastical procedure should forbid him from publicly or privately denying the inerrancy of the Bible.

I admire Dr. Boer's openness. He says boldly and clearly what he thinks. But in so doing he is wrong in violating his ordination vows. In those vows he "sincerely and in good conscience before the Lord" "promised diligently to teach and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine [the creeds of our church] without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same by... public preaching or writing." Moreover he promised that "if hereafter any difficulties or different sentiments respecting the aforesaid doctrines should arise in our minds, we promise that we will neither publicly nor privately propose, teach, or defend the same, either by preaching or writing, until we have first revealed such sentiments to the Consistory, Classis, or Synod..." (*Form of Subscription*, found in the back of the Psalter Hymnal).

Dr. Edwin Palmer is the executive secretary of the New International Version Bible translation.

To substantiate the charge of heresy that I have made I point to Boer's book *Above the Battle?* This was published by Eerdmans in 1977. Could anything show more clearly than this does what Boer believes and how he denies the historical Christian teaching of the inerrancy of the Bible? Let me enumerate some of his comments:

1. "Scholarly integrity has therefore made it necessary to face rather frontally the fact that many data in Scripture are not in harmony with each other. We cited a number of rather notable examples of this in Chapter 5" (p. 80).

2. "In these chapters, notably 5 and 6, I adduce mainly in parallel columns, some ten passages or groups of passages in which the Bible seems clearly to contradict itself with respect to specific data of circumstances, time, place, person, number and phraseology... If my conclusion about that comparative data do [sic] not hold, my whole house falls to the ground... We clearly do not have an inerrant Bible" (*The Banner*, Feb. 10, 1978).

3. The Bible "is not inerrant in the accepted sense of the word" (p. 82).

4. "Should we not rather understand the infallibility of Scripture in such a way that it does *not* include the assumption that all data in Scripture are necessarily harmonizable?" (p. 84).

5. The Bible has "literary, historical, geographical, numerical, or other disparities" and "in that sense the Bible *cannot* be said to be infallible or inerrant" (p. 86).

6. Let us "not fear to speak the offense of the literal fallibility of the Bible" (p. 88).

7. There is a contradiction between the statements of Matthew, Mark and John that Jesus met His disciples in Galilee and Acts 1:4 where He told them to remain in Jerusalem. "This contradiction is hardly reconcilable with the traditional doctrine of inspiration and infallibility" (p. 97).

These seven quotes clearly reveal that Boer contradicts:

- a. the Bible;
- b. the Belgic Confession ("believing without any doubt all things contained in them," Article V);
- c. the declaration of the 1959 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church: "It is inconsonant with the creeds to declare or suggest that there is an area of Scripture in which it is allowable to posit the possibility of historical inaccuracies."

Nowhere in all Scripture do we find one instance of Scripture putting down Scripture as Boer does. On the contrary, even in little, insignificant geographical details the New Testament appeals to the Old Testament for their veracity. Matthew 2:14, 15 (Egypt) and 4:13, 14 (Zebulun and Naphtali) are typical.

The supposed "contradictions" that Boer cites in his book are very old. They have been raised — and answered — time and again, even as far back as St. Augustine (354-430 A.D.). The pagan Faustus, the Manichean, raised the same kind of objections as Boer now raises 1500 years later. Contrast Boer's response with that of St. Augustine, one of the greatest Christian theological giants of all times. Augustine reacted to the arguments that Faustus

raised by saying that it is "inconceivable," as A.D.R. Polman puts it, "that the Holy Spirit, the real author of Holy Scripture should have contradicted himself" (*The Word of God According to St. Augustine*, 1961, p. 56). Rather, when confronted with these problem passages, Augustine took this attitude: "Either the manuscript is faulty, or the translation is wrong, or you have not understood."

Bravo! That has always been the position of historical Christianity.

The Christian Reformed Church is confronted with two choices: 1. Maintain its historic, traditional confession of the inerrancy of the Bible; or 2. depart from it by allowing the theory that there are errors in the Bible.

To follow the historical position, consistories will have to challenge in the proper ecclesiastical way Boer's blatant denials of the inerrancy of the Bible. If, on the other hand, it is thought that it is time to change and to depart from the Bible and our creeds, then nothing has to be done. When others see that nothing has happened to Boer, even though he contradicts the 1959 Synod, then they too will come forward and say aloud what they now believe in private.

In any case, every consistory — whether it likes it or not — is making a decision. Either the consistory protests and thereby maintains our historic teaching on inerrancy, or the consistory does nothing, thereby in fact tolerating Boer's denial of the inerrancy of Scripture. ●

*I hesitated to use this title, for it sounds so harsh. But my intent is not to be cutting but to wake us up. The Christian should always speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). The title of this article is true and it is written in love for Harry Boer. Truth and love never clash.

Meditation

THE DREAM OF PILATE'S WIFE



REV. JOHN BLANKESPOOR

When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.

Matthew 27:19

It is always extremely difficult to properly evaluate or even understand the sufferings of the Man of Sorrows. With His perfect, sinless, and spiritually sensitive soul He lived in this sinful world. With Him there were only pure affections and desires and

sinless thoughts. His soul was always thirsting for God.

How well our Lord understood Psalm 42, which speaks of the chased deer panting for water. This was Christ's daily experience. Because of His sinlessness He was the stranger of Galilee. He "sensed" sin in everything. For this reason He was also keenly sensitive of the wrath of God. All these things we must remember if we will even begin to understand something of the sufferings and passion of our Savior.

Pilate's wife has become well known in history. In the records of secular history she is given the name, Claudia. She made impressions in history. The Greek church canonized her, considering her to have become a Christian and a saint later. We hope so. Also, according to the Greek Orthodox Church, she became prominent and had an honorable position in the church. They tell us that later she became favorably disposed towards the Jews, and that in the latter part of her life she did much for them in the way of building schools. But what we can know of her reliably is only that which is recorded in the Scriptures.

We meet Pilate's wife in a crucial hour. The nomination of Barabbas and Jesus had been made in the trial proceedings. Soon the ballot would be cast. Pilate was sitting on the judgment seat, with the court in session. It was a tense moment in history! Who would want to be bothered at a time like this with anything else? What a time for a wife to demand the attention of her husband, least of all about a "mere" dream. But it is exactly at this time that the voice of a woman has a tremendous effect upon the governor's emotions.

It perhaps was an early morning dream. It was a bad dream, one of those scary and awful dreams. It really bothered her, in fact it plagued her. Matthew says that she suffered many things in the dream because of Jesus. Can this mean perhaps that she feared judgment of the heathen gods if Jesus of Nazareth would be put to death? Possibly so. At any rate her husband *must* know about it before it is too late.

How must we explain this dream? First of all we may say, I think, that the dream itself in some way was a very natural incident. This woman surely had heard much of Jesus, of His work, miracles, the royal entry of a few days ago, and surely of the ever ongoing conflict between Him and the Jews. And now the air was filled with rumors and expectations. Is it any wonder that this affected the wife of the governor, knowing that her husband would have to play a very important role in the trials of this Jesus of Nazareth? And so she dreamed about Him.

But this may also have been the work of the devil. Surely he can influence people in their dreams. Possibly also today. Even as the devil addressed the first woman in the garden to bring death into the world, he also "addresses" this woman to keep death in this world by having Pilate release Jesus at this time. But of course we also believe that all of this was controlled by God's providence. God also con-

trolled this dream and by this "special revelation" He warned Pilate. He must hear this voice from the "gods," not from God Himself. Jesus is innocent and must be released. This, no doubt, is the first purpose of the dream.

It must and does, however, mean more. In some way it must add to Jesus' suffering. Otherwise it would not have found a place in the sacred writings. Actually this woman humiliates Christ. Pilate, her husband, must have nothing to do with this just man.

Can or may anybody ever say that we should have nothing to do with the Son of God? Nothing to do with Him, the very Savior of sinners, who is the Way and the Truth and the Life in this world of sin and death?! Nothing to do with Him who is the embodiment of the "Good News"? Nothing to do with Him who will also be the Judge of all men? Isn't He the one for whom the church has waited for centuries? Isn't He the one in whom even the angels have been keenly interested throughout the ages? But Pilate's wife says, "Have nothing to do with Him. Don't bother with Him, forget about Him, let Him go and practice a hands-off policy."

And all this is said in connection with a dream. Don't think it to be so strange that God comes to this woman in a dream, and through her to Pilate, and finally to Christ. Dreams have often been a means of revelation in the Bible. Sometimes God came in visions, then with prophets, then with appearances called theophanies, then with direct inspiration, but also often through dreams. Dreams often were considered to have been the "lowest" form of revelation. Remember also that God came with dreams to unbelieving people like Abimelech, Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, all for the benefit of His people.

No doubt Jesus hears about this message, this dream of Pilate's wife. To Him surely this was a message from the "other words," the world of His Father. And with His sensitive but also suffering

soul, that is always thirsting for God, He will grasp every little straw that in some way will give him contact with heaven. What is the dream, what does it mean? Such questions possibly entered Jesus' mind. And the answer? Have nothing to do with this just man!

The writer to the book of Hebrews tells us that in the Old Testament God spoke through prophets and in other ways, but in the last days He spoke through His Son. And this was by all means the highest form of revelation. But He who came in this highest form of revelation is rejected and negated through the lowest form, that of a dream. No doubt here too again, many swords pierced the sensitive soul of Jesus. He saw meaning in everything. And because His way was the one of bearing the wrath of God He suffered in everything.

But our Lord remains obedient. He is willing to be negated, rejected, humiliated, and become completely emptied. Before God, man, sinful man, must become as nothing. That is our penalty which He bore for us. Later, however, we see the cross, then the open tomb and then Pentecost. Then young men and women will receive visions and dream dreams. What does that mean? This: in the Old Testament dreams and visions were given generally only to some special people, to give them knowledge of the Lord. But when the Spirit has come all people, even young people, will know Him through the Word, and the Spirit.

Finally, what is the message of all the Scriptures? Have everything to do with Him, who is the very Son of God and in whom alone there is life forevermore. Have everything to do with Him, who as the righteous One died that sinners who are worthy of the complete rejection of hell may have the blessed knowledge of everlasting life. And when we know Him we confess that He is our only comfort in life and death. And those who know Him begin to sing, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee?" and "Jesus is all the world to me." ●

reformed women speak

ARE YOU ON A DIET?

Diets and menus are a big part of a homemaker's conversation. Don't we eagerly exchange recipes, listen to different ideas and learn modern techniques? After all we are usually responsible for the preparation and serving of meals. Much time and thought goes into the selection of foods to include on our menus in order to offer the family well balanced meals. These must include the proper foods rich in vitamins, proteins, and minerals needed for strong development, growth and health.

Gertrude Van Putten, a former Christian school teacher, is the wife of Dr. Ronald Van Putten (our Board treasurer) and mother of five children.

GERTRUDE VAN PUTTEN

Stop for a moment and review your reading diet. Are we, as Reformed women equally concerned about what we feed our minds or do we consume a lot of "junk food"? Maybe your diet is made up of questionable or even dangerous food. Perhaps you live on nothing more than empty calories with very little nutritional value.

First, we must feed daily on the Living Word of God! This is basic for life and growth. Neither are we to be content with only the "milk of the Word" described in Hebrews 5:12 as the first principles or the ABCs of the oracles of God; but we must progress to the "strong meat" of that Word. II Tim. 3:16

says "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." In order to realize this, we must know this Word.

Second, we can add much other reading as supplements to this most important food. You might begin by exploring your church library for additional material.

Too frequently the objection is heard, "Oh, that material looks and sounds too 'deep' for me. I need something light that doesn't require much concentration." Do you really? Certainly we need to recognize and accept the variety of God-given talents, but are you making the most of your abilities? Would not your conscience bother you to call your family to dinner and serve them only dessert when they are really hungry for "meat and potatoes"? Accept the necessity of some meaty reading. Set some goals for yourself and then continue to persevere. Don't become discouraged in having to reread that magazine article a second time or actually study that chapter until you are sure you understand it. Share it with a friend or discuss it at coffee break; talk it over with your husband and thus encourage him also. Add it to your discussions at the dinner table.

There is a great need for informed church members who know the various issues which threaten the very foundations of the Christian church. Ignorance, confusion and uncertainty concerning these matters are all too commonplace. Why is this? We have more leisure time than our mothers and grandmothers. How much of this is spent in reading that builds us up in the holy faith? Are we tossed about by every wind of doctrine, or can we stand up and defend our views as grounded in God's Inspired Word? Hosea 4:6 records "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge . . ." What a sad commentary on God's chosen people. What a severe warning!

Perhaps you've only recently been exposed to the riches of the Reformed Faith and the Spirit has given you a true desire for His knowledge and wisdom. Or maybe you have been blessed with a Christian heritage but now are in danger of taking it for granted. Pray for guidance and a true hungering and thirsting for these things. Satisfaction is promised. Study our creeds and catechism; read their historical background; acquaint yourself with the lives of church fathers. Let yourself be caught up in the history of the church, its many great leaders and their writings.

As homemakers and mothers we are badgered by the constant din of the women's lib propaganda. An intelligent person cannot possibly feel fulfilled being a mere housewife and mother, we are being told. Proverbs 31 gives such a beautiful portrait of the godly wife and industrious mother. Edith Schaefer's *What is a Family?* is an inspiration on just this subject. She truly challenges one to realize anew the high calling and responsibility of a wife and mother in the home.

Just as we teach eating habits, good or bad, at an early age in the home; we are also teaching our children either directly or indirectly by our reading habits. The world's current best sellers and magazines ought not to fill our bookshelves, easily acces-

sible to our youth. Instead, literature which reflects and teaches our Reformed convictions and commitments should be available for guidance and direction. Let the children observe us spending time and effort in daily devotions and worthwhile reading. Teach and encourage them to establish daily Bible reading habits on their own. Pray that they might come to know by the grace of God, that His Book contains wisdom for life and godliness.

Set aside time in your regular routine for a treat of daily reading. Look forward to it with eager anticipation, then ponder it as food for thought when you continue those numerous tasks which do not require one's full attention. Just because we spend most of our time in the home, does not mean that we must be dull or uninformed.

Science says we are what we eat. The same is true spiritually. What we read can make all the difference in the world. ●

THE WEDDING FEAST AT CANA: MARRIAGE AND "CHRIST'S HOUR!"*

JOHN H. PIERSMA

This third example of marriage taken from the Scriptures (the two previous were in Exodus 1, 2 and the Book of Ruth) we find in the New Testament. There are not many such examples in that part of the Bible. In fact, as rich as the Old Testament so poor is the New on this score.

There is no shortage of material on the meaning of marriage in the N.T., of course. To know what Christian marriage is you must open the N.T. It abounds in doctrinal and ethical instruction on this subject. Historical and personal illustration of marriage situations is quite rare, however.

Interestingly enough, John's majestic Gospel opens its description of our Lord's ministry with the account of a wedding. The promises and blessings of Christian marriage are so richly stated or implied in the Cana wedding feast that we may safely say that in it we have totally satisfactory answers to every basic marriage problem!

The Wedding Feast at Cana (John 2:1-11)

The location of the story of the Wedding Feast at Cana in John's Gospel is crucial. John sees it as something deserving *first mention*.

It is easy, however, to treat this passage superficially, and therefore unjustly.

*This is the last in a series of three articles on Christian marriage. They are based on material written in the fifties by the late Prof. B. Holwerda of the Theological School (liberated) in Kampen, The Netherlands. The writer assumes full responsibility, however, since this is more of a paraphrase than a translation.

For example, many apply this text to mean that our young people ought to be sure to include the Savior on their guest list when they marry. Great! *But*, is this really a fair reading of John 2:1-11? I think not.

B. Holwerda wonders if such an application does not do more to obscure than to explain this passage. He asks, What does it mean when we read that Jesus and His disciples were invited to this wedding celebration? How, or in what capacity, was He invited? Was He really invited because He was the *Savior* and *Messiah*? He believes that this is debatable. After all, our Lord had just begun His public ministry. Following His baptism by John and His temptation by Satan He had been busy forming the circle of followers known as "the twelve." True, John had been preaching for some time, and he had identified Jesus as the Christ, but only a few of his disciples had been sufficiently impressed to make the switch from him to Christ.

At this moment it seems as if very few recognized Jesus as the Messiah. The Cana invitation was not extended because He was "the only begotten of the Father" who would sit upon David's everlasting throne as the Redeemer of God's people. He was more likely invited because He belonged to a certain circle of people as the son of Mary. Perhaps His appearance was not really expected. That would explain the wine shortage. Unexpectedly seven guests appear whose presence is welcomed, but who put a heavy drain upon the festive drink.

It is hardly true, therefore, that the conduct of the Cana wedding party deserved our imitation. There are other things — of greatest significance for every believer's marriage — which we ought to see here.

The Difference between the Cana Wedding and Ours

Physically, of course, we can't invite Jesus to a wedding today. With respect to His human nature He is no more on earth. He is not here. He is risen, Nor *may* we invite Him as they did then. They knew Him only as Jesus, son of Mary and Joseph. Only Mary recognized Him as the Christ of God. The others saw Him as a nephew or cousin or friend. A cordial welcome was extended, it seems, even if He did "drop in" with six men friends. And even if the host and hostess could only wonder, Will there be enough wine?

To us, however, Jesus has been preached as *the Christ of God*. We may know Him in no other way (2 Cor. 5:16). If His blessing is desired it will come to us only because He is the Christ — especially on a wedding day. Indeed, He does exciting and marvelous things for His people in and through marriage. Real *miracles*, however, we may not expect. The time for that has passed. If the wine supply runs out today, and we have no money to replenish, we'll just have to do without. He is today the Christ whom you do not see with physical eyes, but to whom you lift up your hearts in heaven where He lives as our Advocate, at the right hand of His heavenly Father.

He comes to us now only by His Word and Spirit.

We are not Poorer but Richer!

Aren't we really quite poor compared to those people fortunate enough to be present at the Wedding Feast in Cana?

Not at all. It is to help us that Jesus went into heaven. He did that in order that He according to His majesty, grace and Spirit might ever remain with us. And this means everything for marriage as well as for all other things. Christ did not go into heaven for His own advantage. He went for ours. He went to lay hold upon a salvation and blessedness which is perfect in every way. A blessedness as great as the distance between the Cross and the right hand of the Father.

If we carefully read the Cana wedding account in John's Gospel we shall see that its unique feature is that it is told precisely so as to rule out the sentiment, "Would that we like them could have Jesus at our wedding feasts today." John relates everything in strict compliance with the truth that we must see Jesus as the Christ, God's anointed, and that believing we might have life in His Name.

John wants you to understand that because of Him as the promised Messiah, now in glory, you are not poorer but vastly richer than that bridal pair in Cana.

Not a Journalistic Report

Just how things happened at Cana is impossible to reconstruct. Several questions remain, no matter how we try. We can't say, for example, whether Jesus was present from the start of the feast, or if He came later (the latter seems more likely). And just when did the wine shortage come to light? Where were the stone jars located? Just where, then, did Jesus perform the miracle? Nor does John comment on the reaction of the people to the miracle.

This ought not to give us much trouble! John is not a journalist covering the wedding for his paper. He is an *evangelist* telling about the person and work of the Savior. He relates those details which serve that purpose. He wants us to see Jesus as the Christ.

This implies, of course, that we ought to take careful note of the details which are recounted. Each one is necessary to present the proper image of Jesus Christ. They are a beautiful mosaic revealing the Lord as our promised Redeemer.

The Purpose of John's Gospel

The general purpose — to show that Jesus is the Christ — can be further defined. There is a particular aspect of Christ's Messiahship that John wishes us to see. It can be learned by reading what he says in 1:17, "the law (the Gospel as revealed in the O.T. shadows) was given by Moses; but grace and truth (the Gospel of N.T. consummation) came by Jesus Christ." So Christ makes distinction between Himself and Moses. This fits in with that which is written in 1:14, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld *his* glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father."

John was given to see the greater glory of Jesus Christ as the divine agent of true grace.

This means that we must see the Cana wedding in a certain light. The wedding as such is perhaps the least of John's interests. Christ was there in order to reveal His glory. For the first time, at that wedding feast, the glorious revelation of God's genuine grace broke through the shadows of O.T. law. Moses is replaced by Him who is much greater, for He is God's only-begotten Son.

Mary's Viewpoint

You know what happened when Mary learned that the wine supply was exhausted — a great embarrassment for the wedding hosts! She seized the first opportunity to tell this to Jesus. Obviously this was more than a little talk, for then it would not have been necessary to rebuke her so pointedly. She pleaded vigorously with her Son. She was looking and asking for a wonder.

Some have argued that Mary could not have been so urgent because she had never seen Him perform anything miraculous. Such forget that Mary knew now for some thirty years that her Son was the promised Messiah. Would she, participant in the Incarnation, think that to turn water into wine would be impossible? Of course not!

For thirty years she has been waiting for the dawning of her Son's day. John the Baptist has been preaching beyond the Jordan for several months, and she knows that he is the forerunner of Christ. John preaches that the Kingdom has come near, and Mary can not help but think that *the hour* for which she has been longing has come.

And now, while at the wedding feast, who should show up but her dear Son. Not alone, but *with six disciples!* What else can this mean but that He was ready to make His move, to demonstrate His power, to vindicate her expectations?

This makes it easy to understand her as she talks with Jesus. The embarrassing wine shortage is no longer of any serious significance. It is an extremity which provides her Son with a needed opportunity! Now He can come into His Kingdom with a powerful display that will overwhelm everyone. The victory begins at Cana! That is implied in her words, "They have no wine." She means to say, "Son, reveal yourself. Show now the glory of your Sonship. Assume your rightful kingship over Israel. Do this wonder so that the people may know who you really are!"

Her Error: Trying to Force God's Hour

Mary's action is understandable but inexcusable. If it is in fact God's hour, would Jesus, whom she knew to be always busy with the Father's calling, ignore, misread, or rebel? Isn't it unmistakably plain that God's clock never needs our adjustment? If Scripture says anything it declares that God is not minded to look with favor upon any of our efforts to help Him with the execution or timing of the Savior's work!

This makes the meaning of Christ's shocking words understandable. "O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come." There is nothing of insolence or impoliteness in these words. Ladies were addressed in polite usage as *woman* in those days. If there is offense it lies in the meaning rather than the form.

Christ does, however, deliberately refuse to call Mary *mother* on this occasion. He appreciates her place in His birth and life (Luke 2:51). She is His mother according to the flesh. But His calling, His purpose in coming to earth was in no way determined by Mary. It came from the Father. With respect to His mediatorial calling Mary is just as far removed from Christ as any other person. She has no authority over Him in this regard. *As Christ* He has no mother! As prophet, priest and king He may tolerate no intrusion, by Mary, by Satan, by anyone else.

We are approaching what is perhaps the real point of this Bible passage. By virtue of His dedication to the Father's authority Christ saved "the world," including marriage. *Christian* marriage is established upon the foundations of His uncompromising obedience.

Divine Calling Comes First!

Think of Adam in Paradise. Covenant head, the first man, anointed officebearer of God, *he* (Adam) in the crucial hour of temptation listened to his beloved helper, his wife, flesh of his flesh, blood of his blood, rather than to his God!

That great sin lies at the beginning of our world's history. God's representative listened to the urgent appeal of "blood" instead of obeying the voice of the Spirit. Adam should have refused recognition of his wife at that moment.

But now we can see our salvation! In this crucial hour of His official service Christ did that which Adam did not do: He rebuked His mother. He conceded nothing so far as flesh and blood are concerned.

The parallel is obvious. Satan came to Adam by way of the woman. So now the Tempter comes to Christ by way of the woman closest, dearest to Him, striving to lead Him into sin.

Christ rebuked His mother because He knew perfectly the need for His total commitment to the will of the Father. This is implicit in the expression "my hour." This term has a consistent, definite meaning in John's Gospel. In every instance it refers to that God-ordained, God-approved moment when He would reveal Himself as the Messiah in the fullest realization of His mediatorial, blood-bought glory. He had been glorious before His birth, indeed. But the hour in which that glory might be revealed in terms of grace and truth cannot come except certain things happen first.

Listen to John 17:1, "Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son that thy Son may glorify thee." John 17 anticipates the full victory of the Cross. When Christ says that "the hour has come" He means the hour of resurrection triumph. That hour is His be-

cause of the suffering of our sins, perfectly accomplished when our Lord was crucified and buried.

Cana is only a beginning of that sacrificial service. Most of His saving work remains to be done. The right to an unlimited and everlasting revelation of His glory has not yet been earned. Not willing to claim His Easter triumph and rewards prematurely, that is, rebelliously, Christ lays upon His mother the awful words, "what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come."

A Real Temptation for our Savior!

We have been saying that Mary's actions — however unthinking so far as their ultimate effect goes — are of a piece with those of Satan when he tempted our Savior.

The important fact is that our Lord did not fall! It cost His mother some pain, no doubt, to be rebuked by her Son. And it cost Jesus much more pain to have to do it.

We all know that the direct consequence of Adam and Eve's first sin was the devastation of their marriage. Witness Adam's willingness to blame his wife for his transgression. The family brokenness which is all too evident in our days stems from that original disobedience.

For that reason it is good to see the "last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45) at the Cana feast. His perfect obedience demanded that He separate Himself from His dear mother. But that separation was accepted and implemented by Him in order that we might know the blessing of Christian marriage.

It can hardly be stressed enough that our young people must see the truth that Jesus Christ is also the only Savior of marriage for His people, and that husband and wife *must be one in the Lord*. True union is a union of faith. Marrying a partner without a common faith in Christ as the last Adam means that one places his marriage outside of the only saving fellowship. Apart from Christ your only fellowship is with the first Adam, which is a fellowship of sin and death. That means that your marriage is in principle broken the very day it is contracted. You cannot turn your backs on God and Christ and still hold fast to each other. The "mixed marriage" is a terrible mistake!

The Stone Jars

An interesting feature of John 2:1-11 is the perseverance of Mary in spite of her son's sharp retort. She believes that there is something that He might well do for her friends. This she expresses when she urges the servants to do "whatever he tells you."

Jesus does do something. He performs a great wonder in response to the need of the situation. He immediately creates wine, something which otherwise takes considerable time to develop.

This, however, is not the most unusual thing in the text.

The most unusual thing is that He uses the six jars which are standing there for the Jewish rites of purification. These were never intended to contain

wine. They were placed rather to conform to the regulations of the Pharisees which called for washing one's hands before and after each meal. That was not demanded as something hygienic, which would be unobjectionable. It was required because it was supposed to make one clean before God (on this read Mark 7:2-4). Strict observance of the Mosaic laws would *as such* bring righteousness with God. For that reason the Pharisees embellished and expanded these regulations unbelievably, and urged the strictest compliance.

The people at Cana took this seriously. They placed containers with a capacity of 150 gallons or so to serve this obligation. Theirs was a very strong desire — especially in marriage and family — to live under God's approval.

This is the old error of trying to find righteousness by the deeds of the law. It points up the fact that the greater need in Cana is spiritual, not material. Forgotten was the fact that the laws of Moses were pointers to the Christ, and that the way to hear and obey them was the way of righteousness by faith in Him who was to come. The Pharisees had lost sight of every semblance of the evangelical purpose of the O.T. law. And under their domination many in Israel had come to be estranged from the faith. They had given themselves to a fatal work-righteousness. The law is important in Cana, and it ought to be, but it is a corrupt and degenerate view of its function which they display in these six stone jars.

Gospel versus Law

Why didn't Christ ask for the type of container ordinarily used to hold wine?

Because the issue at Cana was not the wine shortage but the true nature of the Gospel. By this action He rejected the Pharisees and their ideas of purification as represented by the six stone jars. He was, remember, full of truth and grace!

Please note that this passage says nothing about how Jesus changed water into wine. The wine steward discovered that the water in the stone jars was now the finest imaginable. John placed in the foreground the fact that the wine was found in the jars placed there for a different purpose. By this Christ replaced the caricature of the law as found among the Pharisees with the fulfillment of the law in the way of pure grace. You don't have to wash your hands before you drink (as a biblical requirement) because the Provider of that wine has already made you clean.

This is the beginning of Christ's conflict with the Pharisees. That conflict will end on the Cross. Christ knows that well. What a Savior! Although His mother presses Him to claim His resurrection glory without the Cross, He sets His feet on the way to Calvary. He moves forward to "His hour" along the only valid route.

Mary whispers, This is your opportunity. Now is the time to "go public," to dazzle everyone with your might and glory. Christ's answer is the miracle at Cana, so obscurely performed that only a few serv-

ants know much about it. There is no premature demonstration to arouse an unwarranted admiration. Even His disciples are allowed just a glimpse of His glory, and that in order that they may believe in Him. So He forms them into a church, the gathering of believers, and that "for Himself" (L.D. 21, Catechism). Thus, when "His hour" really comes on Easter morning a church is there to believe and confess His glorious Name.

Life and Marriage after Easter is Richer!

We are much richer than the wedding guests at Cana. We live after the resurrection of our Savior — and nothing has been or could be the same since!

We are living in His hour. Christ has the right at present to live in open and unqualified revelation of His glory. He has been glorified with the glory which He had with the Father before the creation of the world. It is a real privilege to live in this time, to live "post Easter." Our marriage customs, ideas, style ought to reflect nothing less than His matchless glory.

But we live in "a vale of tears." Marriage must cope with all kinds of obstacles and opposition today. What good does it do us to believe in the Christ whose hour has come?

It means that we have a Lord and Savior who totally cares for and rules over us. It means that our troubles (marital as well as all others) are now essentially different than they would be if He had not been raised from the dead. Our troubles now happen under His perfect glory and dominion. They are not accidents or misfortunes which He might try to help us overcome. They are rather happenings designed by Him so that He may do something through us. He wills that we shall know what St. Paul meant when he said, "I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:9, 10).

The current glory of Christ is now our strength and confidence, and this is especially comforting for Christians undertaking or involved in marriage in this age. His splendor is a never-diminishing reality and a solid support. And it is never anything but the glory of His mercy and grace.

Christ, the Lord of Marriage

As Christ at Cana might not do anything but the Father's will, so we must adopt as our great purpose in marriage the service of the Lord's will. Marriage is often marked by selfishness and idolatry. Those "in love" can be sinfully satisfied with themselves and their own relationship. This is easy to cover by an appeal to the "sacredness of marriage."

The lesson of Cana condemns all such corruption of that precious, divine institution which was redeemed from sin by Christ's blood, in order that we might live together in simple obedience to Christ, the Lord of marriage.

Has this great calling lost its appeal for and its claim upon us today?

If so we need no further speculation as to the causes of modern marital distress. We need desperately, then, to re-hear those precious words of Mary (spoken *after* He had rebuked her!), "Do whatever he tells you." ●

THE VERHEY CASE — WHY PRESS IT?

PETER DE JONG

The case of Dr. Allen Verhey, which was before our Christian Reformed synods two and three years ago (and ought to have been settled then) again confronts the whole denomination as it is to reappear at our next synod. Why should this matter continue to trouble the churches? What makes it worth pursuing for more than three years? A summary (shorter than the April, 1977 OUTLOOK article) may interest our readers.

How It Started — the Examinations

In the Fall of 1975 when Dr. Allen Verhey was being examined by the classis with a view to being ordained as a Christian Reformed minister he repeatedly stated that he would teach people to read the Bible *critically*. Questioned further about this point, he stated that he did not believe that the serpent spoke to Eve as reported in Genesis 3 and that he believed that the earthquake reported in Matthew 28:2 should be understood as an eschatological symbol and not necessarily as a fact. The consistory of the Dutton church, convinced that these views were in conflict with the Bible and the creeds of the church, brought its objections to the decision to ordain him first to Classis Grand Rapids East and then to the synod of 1976. That synod after lengthy debate refused to rule whether the objections were valid or not on the ground that the man was already ordained. If we were convinced that these views were in conflict with the confessions we must bring charges against him as a minister, following the procedures outlined in the Form of Subscription and Church Order.

The Church Order Way

The Consistory, followed the synod's instructions and confronted Dr. Verhey with its objections to his views. Discussion of the matter with him instead of removing the objections, confirmed them. Therefore the Dutton Consistory took the next prescribed step and brought its objections to the Neland Ave. Church Consistory who hold his ministerial credentials. The Neland Ave. Consistory, after a year had elapsed, judged that his method of interpreting the Bible to which objections had been raised was permissible. The Dutton Consistory thereupon ap-

pealed the matter to the classis. The classis, after extensive discussion accepted the recommendations of a majority of its study committee and sustained Neland Ave. Consistory's defense of Dr. Verhey's views. Now the Dutton Consistory, still convinced that his views are in serious conflict with the Bible and the Creeds, must take the next step of appealing the matter to the synod of 1979.

The Substance of the Case

Dr. Verhey says that he believes that the Bible is the authoritative and inspired Word of God (and his consistory and the classis, mainly on that ground, defend his views). The objections, however, are not to what he says he believes about the Bible, but to his use and defense of a way of interpreting it that permits him at will to deny what the Bible plainly says.

Although Genesis states repeatedly that the serpent spoke to Eve (Gen. 3:1-5, 13, 14) and the Apostle Paul in the New Testament (1 Cor. 11:3) also says that the "serpent beguiled Eve," Dr. Verhey says that he does not believe that the serpent spoke to Eve.

Although Matthew 28:2 says "And, behold, there was a great earthquake" he says that he does not believe that this actually occurred because Mark did not mention it. Such contradictions of what the Bible says also appeared in his writings in the *Reformed Journal* (May-June, July-August, 1976). Although Matthew states that Jesus regarding divorce spoke of one "putting away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication" (Matt. 5:32, cf. 19:9), Dr. Verhey denies that Jesus made any such exception, conjecturing that He said something else. The strict condemnation of divorce except on grounds of fornication (which Matthew attributes to Jesus and which our churches traditionally maintained), Dr. Verhey rejects as "perhaps" traceable to moral pride.

It is plain that this method of "interpreting" does not concern only one or two texts. It is not a minor inconsistency in an otherwise Reformed use of the Bible. Dr. Verhey uses and defends this way of contradicting and denying what the Bible says as a proper method of dealing with the whole of it. This treatment of the Bible comes to expression in his disagreement with the church's stand on abortion, his view of the status of women in the church, and many other moral matters.

His doctoral thesis written for Yale University in 1975 on *The Use of Scripture in Moral Discourse* sheds further light on the way his views of the Bible affect his treatment of moral questions. Although there too he says that he believes the Bible to be authoritative, he insists that we may not apply anything it says to present day matters unless we have other "warrants" or "authorities" which justify doing that. Among such other necessary "warrants" or "authorities" he mentioned such things as "the moral certainties whose source is other than scripture," "the congeniality of certain warrants to the modern mind," "natural man's understanding of his own moral existence," "tradition," community, and reason. Accordingly he also repeatedly objected to

the common evangelical claim that the Holy Scripture is the supreme and final authority in matters of faith and conduct, which since the Reformation has been called "sola scriptura."

Dr. Verhey insists that among the "warrants" needed to apply anything the Bible says to present matters one's own "experience" is the most important and "decisive" one. "It has an important priority in discerning and establishing warrants for the use of scripture" (p. 212).

Conflict with the Bible, Creeds and Synod Decisions

1. The Bible's pervasive teaching about its own authority as the inspired Word of God (2 Pet. 1:20, 21, 2 Tim. 3:15, 16), its warnings against tolerating self-chosen opinions (literally "heresies") (2 Pet. 2:1) alongside of or diverging from this inspired teaching, and the insistence of our Lord and His Apostle that this Divine inspiration extended even to the words of scripture (Matt. 5:18, 1 Cor. 2:13) plainly forbid the method by which Dr. Verhey sets aside the Bible's plain teachings and statements. 2. This method of interpreting and using the Bible is in conflict with the Confessions. One cannot deny what the scriptures say about the serpent in Genesis 3 and 1 Cor. 11:3 and about the earthquake in Matthew 28:2 and what Jesus said about divorce in Matthew 5 and 19 and still consistently confess to "believing without any doubt all things contained in them" (Art. 5 Belgic Confession).

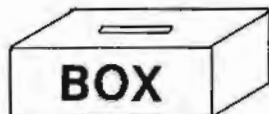
Insistence that we may not apply anything in the Bible to current situations without the "warrant" of extra-biblical authorities, especially of our own experience cannot be harmonized with the way the Heidelberg Catechism applies God's law as directly valid for us in questions and answers 94, 96, 99, 103, 104, 105, 111, 112 and 113. His denial of the sole and sufficient authority of Holy Scripture ("sola scriptura") contradicts Article VII of the Belgic Confession on "The Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures to be the Only Rule of Faith," particularly its statement "Neither may we consider any writings of men, however holy these men may have been, of equal value with those divine Scriptures, nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, since the truth is above all; for all men are of themselves liars, and more vain than vanity itself."

The denial that the earthquake reported by Matthew actually occurred does exactly what the Synod of 1972 warned must not be done. It uses a "method of biblical interpretation which excludes or calls into question . . . the event-character of biblical history, thus compromising the full authority of Scripture as the Word of God" (*Acts 1972*, p. 69, Art. 52,3e, decision on Report 44).

Because these views are in conflict with Scripture, our Confessions and Form of Subscription, and the decision of our Synod, and because the use of this method is destructive of our Christian faith and life, the Dutton consistory felt that it must appeal to the Synod to declare that this method of interpret-

ing and using the Bible is not to be tolerated in the Christian Reformed Churches and to take whatever measures may be needed to prevent its being preached and taught by Dr. Verhey as a minister in our churches. Because recent practice has excluded such matters, as this from the printed Agenda even when they are part of the synod's proper business and prevents even most synod delegates from receiving such material, the consistory decided also to notify all of our other churches of its action in this case. In this important "test case," are our churches going to maintain the requirement that all holding office must be obedient to the Scriptures and faithful to the Confessions or are they going to officially abandon this principle? This is an issue that may no longer be evaded. ●

OUR QUESTION



"SHOULD WE BAPTIZE INFANTS?"

HARLAN VANDEN EINDE

A Michigan reader reports that in a discussion group, the subject of infant baptism came up because they had just witnessed that sacrament in their church. Some wondered whether the wording of the form was too strong, since it seems to "imply that baptized children are saved at any age, since God does not negate His promises." And because there are children of believing parents who have been baptized, but who do not walk in the way of the Lord when they are adults, should we not wait until they are adults to administer the sacrament?

It is important to remember when talking about the subject of baptism that we are dealing with a "sacrament." And a "sacrament" is a sign and seal, a "sign," because it "points to" something, and a "seal" because it "makes authentic." As a sign, baptism points to the promise of God that affirms the washing away of sins through Jesus Christ, and as a seal, assures us that His promise is authentic. But the sacrament itself does not wash away sins. God lets us see in the sacrament what He lets us hear in His Word, and the purpose of that sacrament is to help us visualize through the use of water what God promises to us in His Word about the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Now what does God promise to us in His Word? The promise is spoken to Abraham as recorded in Genesis 17:7, "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee." And then we read about the sacrament that was to accompany that promise, or to serve as a sign or token of it in verses 10 and 11, "This is my covenant which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee: every male among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of a covenant between me and you." And verse 12 indicates that the covenant promise extended even to the children, for God said: "And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every male throughout your generations..."

It is evident from Scripture that God intended His covenant promise to be primarily a family promise. But that is not to say that every covenant-family member automatically is guaranteed salvation. The sacrament is not the "instrument" of salvation, but Jesus Christ is. It is through His sacrifice on the cross, His substitutionary atonement, that we have salvation. The sacrament is a sign which points to the promise of salvation which is the possession of all who believe in the Lord Jesus. We do not baptize anyone, infant or adult, as a "means" to salvation, but as a sign and seal of the promise that God made to those who are in His covenant.

To say that infant baptism should be rejected because there are examples of baptized children who have grown up never to walk in the way of the Lord, is hardly valid. Are there no examples of those who have been baptized as adults, who have later turned from walking in the way of the Lord? Surely there are; but we do not refuse to baptize any professing adults because of instances such as that.

Perhaps we get into trouble in our thinking about infant baptism because we sometimes read more into the sacrament than God intended. We identify it with salvation. And that is to make more of it than is in it.

God promises to be a God to us and our children after us, throughout our generations. That is a source of tremendous comfort and joy to believing parents, but also a tremendous responsibility. It means that we see our children as belonging to God, and that we deal with them as His, providing a covenant atmosphere for their nurture and development in home, church and school.

Oh yes, these covenant children must also acknowledge and accept these wonderful promises when they grow up, lest they become covenant breakers. That's why a public profession of faith is required for communicant membership. But if on the basis of an anticipation of that not happening, we were to deny our children the sign and seal of covenant membership, we would be denying them something to which God says they have a right by birth. We ought to thank God for His gracious covenant, and pray for wisdom and strength to be able to carry out its accompanying responsibilities for ourselves and to our children. ●

THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

JEROME M. JULIEN

When the Christian Faith is put in systematic form it is generally organized into six sections: theology (the Doctrine — the Biblical teaching — of God), anthropology (the Doctrine of Man), Christology (the Doctrine of Christ), soteriology (the Doctrine of Salvation), ecclesiology (the Doctrine of the Church) and eschatology (the Doctrine of Last Things). The first two segments — the Doctrine of God and the Doctrine of Man — were explained by the Rev. Elco Oostendorp in a series of articles running in THE OUTLOOK from March 1977 through January 1978. Now we turn to the segment which is commonly called Christology or the Doctrine of Christ.

The Doctrine of Christ is absolutely essential to the Christian Faith. Without Christ there would be no Christian Faith and without Christ there could be no faith which is explained as “a sure knowledge” and “a firm confidence” (*Heidelberg Catechism* q. 21). In other words, He is central in the revealed system of Truth which we call Christianity, and unless He came to do the work for the salvation of His people there could be no subjective experience of faith, either.

To see the need of Christ all we need do is look at Romans 1-3. There, by means of revelation, Paul builds up a case against man. After pointing out that Gentiles and Jews alike are sinful and in need of righteousness before God, he quotes from a number of Old Testament passages to prove his point. He quotes:

There is none righteous, no, not one;
There is none that understandeth,
There is none that seeketh after God;
They have all turned aside, they are
together become unprofitable;
There is none that doeth good, no, not
so much as one . . . (Romans 3:10 ff).

And then in only a few words he crystalizes his argument: “for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God” (3:23). These words would sound with utter hopelessness were it not for the gift of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. In sin, man is in utter misery, under the just condemnation of God. Our *Heidelberg Catechism* reminds us that God’s “justice requires that sin which is committed against the most high majesty of God, be also punished with extreme, that is, with everlasting punishment of body and soul” (q. 11). We are reminded in the 12th question: “God will

Rev. Jerome Julien who writes this series of doctrinal studies was for some time the secretary of the Reformed Fellowship and is pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa.

have His justice satisfied; therefore we must make full satisfaction to the same, either by ourselves, or by another.” Obviously, *we* cannot make satisfaction because by our sin we daily increase our debt to God. God must provide a way out of this death and corruption or we will never know salvation. We will know only death and the curse.

Paul, in writing to Rome, reminds us that God has provided the way out: we are righteous through faith in Jesus Christ (3:21ff).

The clear teaching of Scripture is that Jesus Christ came to be the Mediator of the Covenant (Hebrews 9). We are taught that Christ is the Priest and the offering before God. He shed the “blood of the covenant.” Through His work — through His death, we then know the friendship of God’s covenant (Psalm 25:14).

Herman Bavinck in his *Our Reasonable Faith* writes (p. 281):

Christianity stands in a very different relationship to the person of Christ than the other religions do to the persons who founded them. Jesus was not the first confessor of the religion named after His name. He was not the first and the most important Christian. He occupies a wholly unique place in Christianity. He is not in the usual sense of it the founder of Christianity, but He is the Christ, the One who was sent by the Father, and who founded His Kingdom on earth and now extends and preserves it to the end of the ages. Christ is Himself Christianity. He stands, not outside, but inside of it. Without His name, person, and work there is no such thing as Christianity. In one word, Christ is not the one who points the way to Christianity, but the way itself. He is the only, true, and perfect Mediator between God and men.

Christ alone bridges the chasm of sin and removes the barrier between man and God. “For there is one God, one mediator also between God and men, *himself* man, Christ Jesus . . .” (I Timothy 2:5).

That word “mediator” is an important one in the Christian Faith. We often hear it used, and use it ourselves. Let’s understand clearly how Jesus is the Mediator.

The common use of the word pictures a man called in to arbitrate in some dispute between conflicting parties, such as a dispute between labor and management. He, therefore, is acceptable to both sides. Jesus Christ is *not* this kind of Mediator!

As Mediator, Jesus Christ stands between the offended God and the offending sinner. By His work He brings the offending sinner to be one with God. Of course, He is not acceptable to the sinner. Christ is “despised and rejected of men.” Sinners do not want the kind of Mediator He is. The Mediator Jesus Christ is God’s gift to an undeserving people. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

To be saved we must believe on Jesus Christ as Savior. By grace we must be related to Him spiritu-

ally. Some put it very simply: we must have Jesus in our hearts. But there is more to it. We must also know about Him. Through this growth of knowledge our love for Him grows. In our feeling-oriented age many professors of Christ see no need of knowledge. All that is necessary, they say, is having Jesus in our hearts. But we don't really know someone unless we know about him. Further, the more we know, the more our love for him grows. So it is with Jesus Christ. In order to really say, "And I believe in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord" we must see what God has revealed in His Word about this matchless Savior.

As we consider the Doctrine of Christ we must look at the various aspects of His Person and Work. Who is He? What do His names say? What does it mean to call Him the God-Man? What was His God-given assignment when He came into this world? How was it, and for whom did He make satisfaction? Do the various aspects of His work in history mean anything to us? What do we really believe about Christ?

The Puritan John Flavel wrote in his *The Fountain of Life* (1671):

Take heed . . . that you rest not satisfied with that knowledge of Christ you have attained, but *go on to perfection*. It is the pride and ignorance of many professors, when they have got a few raw and indigested notions, to swell with self-conceit of their excellent attainments. And it is the sin, even of the best saints, when they see how deep the knowledge of Christ lies, and what pains they must take to dig for it, to throw by the shovel of duty, and cry, Dig we cannot. To your work, Christians, to your work!

HIS WAY IS BEST

*I came to a fork in the road
one day
(I thought I was doing God's
will)
But He turned me around
And later I found
That His way was far greater
still.*

*At first I rebelled; "Lord, how
can it be?
The plans I have laid are so
fine!"
But in His great wisdom
And bountiful love
He said, "Child, these are the
plans of mine."*

*And when I gave way to His
infinite sway
A joy and a peace filled my soul:
And I knew that the plans
I had already made
Were also within His control.*

*And now as I travel the difficult
path,
The one He has chosen for me;
Whatever the test
I know His way is best —
And someday His face I will see.*

Annetta Jansen
Dorr, Michigan



THE BIBLE'S INSPIRATION

It ought to be said and said plainly: Some of our professors at Calvin College & Seminary hold to views of the Bible's inspiration which are questionable, to say the least, and not in harmony with a biblical view of inspiration, to say a bit more. And it is misunderstanding of the nature of *inspiration* that lies behind many of the prob-

lems we are facing in our church today: regarding marriage and divorce, homosexuality, women in office, etc. That's not just a matter of exegesis or hermeneutics as such. It has to do with the much more fundamental question of inspiration itself. Do we really believe without any doubt all things contained in the Holy Scriptures? That's the real question.

Let me illustrate. In the book, *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin*, Prof. Willis DeBoer, in writing about John Calvin's interpretation of Paul regarding the role of women, asks the question whether Paul, in reflecting on Genesis is "reflecting the interpretation of the material he had learned through his training in the Jewish Community and among the rabbis."

Prof. R.O. Zorn, in a book review in *Vox Reformata* (Prof. Zorn is principal of and teaches in the Ref. Theol. College of Geelong, Australia) says about this: "When one begins to question the apostolic interpretation of Scripture, as DeBoer seems to do, one is paying too dear a price for alleged exegetical insights thus gained. For one cannot undermine the unity of Scripture in an effort thus to gain a better understanding of it. In the long run this simply breaks down the basic Reformed hermeneutical

rule that 'Sacred Scripture is its own interpreter.'"

I fully agree with Prof. Zorn.

In the same vein, the Rev. P.J. Jonker, in his *Minority Report* to the 1973 Synod regarding Women in Office, wrote that "the hermeneutic principle by which we have to approach the Scriptures, as I understand it, forbids us to make this conclusion" (namely "that Paul was influenced by a rabbinistic view of the woman").

We were told more than once in Calvin Seminary too that one could only understand Paul if he took into consideration his rabbinic upbringing and background.

To my mind, this is not a proper approach to Scripture. For, as the Rev. Jonker points out, not only did Paul clearly violate and overthrow Rabbinic regulations on more than one occasion, but more important, Paul was not only giving his own human interpretation. For men of old wrote "as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). So that "Paul says" and "the Holy Spirit" says are interchangeable, as the Bible itself indicates in various places.

Unless we clear up our view of inspiration, and once again become like children in our approach to the Scriptures, we are not

going to solve the problems facing us today, but will instead be faced with more such problems in the days to come.

J. TUININGA
Lethbridge, Alberta

*Tell-a-scandal on the tel-e-phone,
And it travels faster,
Than the speed of light.*

S.C.W.

EVALUATION OF "OUR TESTIMONY"

From the very outset, I wish to state, that I can agree wholeheartedly with about 95% of what has been written in this excellent treatise. Generally speaking, I would say that it is an exhortation to greater faithfulness to the Word of God and the Creeds. Exhortations do not accomplish very much unless they are carried out by those who are exhorted. Furthermore, Our Testimony does not present a program of action to remedy the passivity, the spiritual lethargy, and doctrinal deviations found in our denomination.

In the past, I have taught Reformed Doctrine in two of our Christian High Schools, fourteen years at Dordt College, and catechism classes in four of our local churches. My greatest disappointment in teaching the youth of our churches in these institutions was to discover that they knew very little about the basic truths of our creeds. Several of our ministers intimated to me that the most frustrating experience in their ministry was attempting to teach doctrine to high-school catechumens. This situation is deplorable. Today, our denomination is reaping the bitter fruits of a constituency uninformed about the creeds of our church. If this situation of doctrinal illiteracy among our constituents is not changed, the Christian Reformed Church will eventually go the way of many other churches.

Since the "little foxes" are beginning to enter the Christian Reformed vineyard, we must mend our fences and take a new look at the educational program of our churches. We as ministers and consistories should adopt a program of actions, in which we determine to indoctrinate the youth in all the basic truths of the Heidelberg Catechism. Our young people should have these doctrines on their finger tips. They should know what it means to be Reformed and why they should be Reformed in their thinking and living. They should be able to detect any deviation from the Reformed faith. Beyond catechism, every church should have a class in Reformed doctrine for young adults, using Berkhof's Manual of Reformed Doctrine, as a textbook. Consistories should see to it that such a catechetical program is carried out by their pastors and supported wholeheartedly by parents.

We must work at the foundations of the church. Foundations will be restored when the youth of our church know the doctrines and love them. In this way, we will eventually have a constituency, which will be zealous for the truth and the purity of the

church. And the many problems of spiritual laxness and indifference to doctrinal deviations will be solved.

Besides this, we as ministers and consistories, must be deeply concerned about our Christian schools. There must be a much greater working together of consistories and Christian school boards in maintaining the Reformed character of our Christian schools. Christian character development is more important than academic standards. In hiring teachers, our boards must be certain that those hired to teach are well versed in Reformed doctrine and love it. If we lose our Christian schools, we will eventually lose everything, as far as the spiritual well-being of the church is concerned.

When the church is fighting for its very existence, why speak about claiming every area of life for Christ through organizations? If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? The Christian church and the Christian home constitute the indispensable foundation upon which every institution in society rests. Consequently, all our energies and efforts must be centered in making the church a powerful institution — a mighty fortress for truth and righteousness. It is only through the preaching of the Gospel that sinners are converted. And when that happens, our greatest impact upon society is realized. Organizations will not do it. The Bible says, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). And the Spirit operates only when and where the Word is preached.

C. VAN SCHOUWEN
Sioux Center, Iowa



Dear Editor:

On reading Jonathan Chao's interview with Joel Belz on China in the February issue of *Outlook*, I found it interesting and informative, though possibly a bit over-optimistic.

I am well acquainted with Jonathan Chao. Some years back he was a student in my classes, and he graduated at Geneva College.

He speaks of the China Graduate School of Theology but nowhere mentions the fact that this is not located in China but in the British Crown Colony of Hong Kong, a 400-square mile piece of territory adjacent to southern China. The security and freedom which the China Graduate School of Theology enjoys, it owes to the protection of the British flag under which it exists.

I doubt if one American in a hundred knows that Hong Kong is not a part of China. I would not know it myself if I had not lived in China for several years. Your readers are likely to jump to the conclusion that this worthy institution is tolerated by the Red Chinese.

Mr. Chao's father is in Taiwan where he is secretary of the Reformation Translation Fellowship. There he has full freedom to publish Reformed literature.

JOHANNES G. VOS
China missionary 1930-1941

Dear Editor,

Having read a favorable review of E. L. Hedden Taylor's *Economics, Money and Banking* (Craig Press, 1978) in the February 1979 issue of the *Outlook*, I recently purchased a copy of this book. I find that Hedden Taylor's thinking in this area is strongly influenced by such writers as Gary North (*Introduction to Christian Economics*) and R. J. Rushdoony.

Since some *Outlook* readers might be inclined to think that these writers represent the only truly Reformed approach to economic questions, mention should be made of the excellent book of Douglas Vickers entitled *Economics and Man* (The Craig Press, 1976). Dr. Vickers takes issue with the line of thinking of North and Rushdoony, and indicates that it can lay no special claim to being either Biblical or Reformed. Dr. Vickers himself is well-qualified to author such a critique. He is Professor of Economics at the University of Western Australia, is a Presbyterian who fully adheres to the Westminster standards, and is a close student of the writings of Dr. Cornelius Van Til.

Economics and Man is also valuable as a positive contribution of Christian thinking in the field of economics. The nature of the economic order is described, and economic objectives and policies are carefully and lucidly discussed from a Christian perspective.

TIMOTHY J. BROWN
Pastor, CRC, Lucas, Mich.



Dear Brother in Christ:

Having been absent from North America for the last year and a half, I am a late comer in adding my voice of protest to Synod's decision (1978) admitting women to the office of deacon. Subject decision is contrary to the Word of God (I Tim. 2:12, I Cor. 11:10, I Cor. 11:3), the Church Order (Art. 47, 95) and the Belgic Confession (Art. 30). Further, our office bearers at one time or the other have signed the form of subscription, which has a fourfold significance: 1) it is a declaration of agreement, 2) a promise to teach and to defend, 3) a promise to reject and refute all errors, 4) a promise to report doubts or changes of mind and of subjection to examination.

It is concluded that a) Synod's decision is a declaration that the Bible is not God's Word any longer in totality — no longer the sole source of authority; b) The majority of the delegates to Synod have not adhered to at least three out of four points regarding the form of subscription and consequently have promoted and live a lie.

Among engineers it has often been said that we must be truthful, i.e. pursue responsible design lest someone gets hurt. Synod's decision seems to lack this responsibility.

Under the circumstances I feel free, even obligated to call on the membership of the CRC, educated or uneducated, young and old, to raise a voice of protest and write to the stated clerk of Synod. Have you never written to Synod before? Neither had I!

JOHN VAN VEEN

POINTED PARAGRAPHS

Dr. Palmer, unable to place this in The Banner, asked us to print it because he feels it is too important to drop. We agree and print it.

Leonard Verduin writes in *The Banner* that there are errors in the Bible (Feb. 9). The example he gives concerns the temptations of Jesus. Matthew, he says, gives the order of the temptations as ABC, whereas Luke says it is ACB. "These two representations cannot both be true to fact, cannot both be 'infallible' representations as to what happened. One of the 'autographa,' the 'originals' (probably the one given by Luke), is therefore in error as to the order followed in the temptations."

I am amazed that *The Banner* allows such statements to be printed. To say that the Bible is in error is contrary to the Scriptures, our confessions and the Synod of 1959 ("It is inconsonant with the creeds to declare or suggest that there is an area of Scripture in which it is allowable to posit the possibility of historical inaccuracies"; and "Scripture in its whole extent and in all its parts is the infallible and inerrant Word of God").

As for the order of the temptations of Jesus there is no contradiction at all between Matthew and Luke. Matthew may well be presenting the chronological order, as is indicated by the connectives "then" (v. 5) and "again" of v. 8. But Luke has no such connectives. Luke is simply mentioning the three temptations without regard to the chronological order. It was not his purpose to state them chronologically. There are plenty of places in both the Old and New Testaments where the written order of events is not the chronological order. It is wrong to say that there "is therefore error as to the order followed in the temptations" when the author did not intend to give us the chronological order.

And it is not wise for *The Banner* to allow such statements to appear in the official publication of the Christian Reformed Church.

EDWIN H. PALMER

NORTHWEST CHAPTER IN REVIEW

Pursuing its aims and purposes the Northwest Chapter of the Reformed Fellowship in Lynden, Wash., had an active year in presenting speakers to inform and instruct members and community.

On Jan. 23, 1978, Rev. T. Vanden Heuvel van Chino, Calif., spoke on "Does the Church Need Healing?" based on Mal. 4.

After the business meeting on April 14, 1978, Jerry van Groningen, youth pastor in Lynden Third C.R.C., introduced his father, Dr. G. van Groningen, professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Miss. Dr. van Gronin-

gen then spoke on the topic: "The Hermeneutical Crisis in the C.R.C. as it comes to expression in the study of Women in Ecclesiastical Office."

Rev. Peter De Jong, of Dutton, Mich., editor of the *Outlook*, spoke on Nov. 13, 1978. His subject was "Forming and Reforming the Church." Since Rev. De Jong formerly served in the northwest and was one of the original group now known as Warm Beach Family Bible Conference, his visit was a special time of fellowship.

The most recent meeting was held on Jan. 15, 1979, with Rev. A. Cammenga speaking on "Women in Church Office in Light of Scripture and the recent decision of Synod."

At each meeting opportunity was given for questions and discussion, followed by a time of fellowship over a cup of coffee. The Board, under its president Steve Kramer, thanks God for the interest shown by members and community and looks forward to a good year under the new president:

Mr. Jack Appel, 6605 Northwest Ave.
Ferndale, Wash. 98248

Some of the messages are on tapes. For more information on this please contact the president.

JOHN A. TIMMER
Secretary

NEWS OF THE FELLOWSHIP

CONGRATULATIONS

Our congratulations are extended to Rev. and Mrs. John Vander Ploeg who recently celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary. Rev. J. Vander Ploeg was for some 14 years editor of the Christian Reformed Church's periodical, *The Banner* and after his retirement in 1970 edited the *Torch and Trumpet* and *Outlook* for seven years. During the last year he has continued to help this paper as assistant to the editor. The members of our fellowship gratefully remember his years of faithful service in the Lord's cause.

"OUR TESTIMONY"

The carefully prepared "Testimony" which was printed in the *OUTLOOK* of October and November, 1978, has been reprinted as a separate brochure and is being readied for mailing to every consistory in the Christian Reformed denomination so that every officer in every church should receive a copy of it. After its distribution we intend to print an updated list of ministers and churches who wish us to publicize their endorsement of it. Copies of the Testimony are available from the Reformed Fellowship at 25¢ per copy or 5 for \$1.00; reduced rates for larger quantities.

Editor



ABRAHAM KUYPER: a biography, by Frank Vanden Berg. St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada: Paideia Press, 1978; 282 pp. \$4.95, paper. Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien, Pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church, Pella, Iowa.

Some men really stand out in the Reformed tradition. One of these is Abraham Kuyper. But as great as he was and as important as he was to the development of Calvinism, until Vanden Berg's biography first appeared in 1980 the only biographical material was in Dutch. Now, after the book had been out of print for a number of years it is once again available thanks to Paideia Press.

Kuyper's early life, conversion, ideals, struggles and triumphs are all laid out in an interesting and readable fashion. His Free University, his reformation of 1886, and his Antirevolutionary Political Party are all here. And what a story they make! Necessary historical background is included so that the reader understands the life and work of this illustrious Christian minister, editor, and statesman. While Vanden Berg's presentation is obviously favorable to Kuyper it cannot be considered a presentation blind to Kuyper's faults. They are here, too. The reader, though disagreeing with Kuyper on one issue or another, can only admire and respect this great man.

This biography is an outstanding contribution to the understanding of Reformed Church history. It is worth our time to read this book. Thanks, again, Paideia Press for making it available to us.

*Atheists rise no higher,
Than their mists, than their mire.*
S.C.W.

*Sorrow is a lower note,
In life's oratorio.*
S.C.W.

THE EPISTLES OF PAUL TO THE GALATIANS, EPHESIANS, PHILIPPIANS, COLOSSIANS AND THESSALONIANS by James Fergusson and **THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS** by David Dickson, in one volume; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978; 500+82 pp. \$17.95. Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien, Pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa.

If you are looking for a critical commentary or a commentary similar to the many sold today, this book is *not* for you. If you are looking for one which will direct your thoughts devotionally or to ideas for the spiritual application of these great epistles, you want this book. The great Spurgeon spoke highly of both writers whose work is included in this volume. Fergusson he called: "a grand, gracious, savoury divine." According to Spurgeon, Dickson and Hutcheson were also in this same class. Of Dickson's work he wrote: "We need say no more than — get it, and you will find abundance of suggestions for profitable trains of thought." Of course, honest use of these comments would mean that good exegesis should be done first, then they can be used in application. And no one who uses this book will be disappointed.

Both writers lived in the 1600s. Both were second generation Reformers in Scotland. Both pastored very near each other. Together they, along with George Hutcheson, intended to provide expositions of Scripture for the common man which were plain and useful. Here is a part of that necessary labor in the name of Christ for His Church. Earlier (1959), the Trust published Dickson on the Psalms — now out of print, and Hutcheson on John — still available. Perhaps the Trust will one day reprint Dickson on Matthew, which Spurgeon called "a perfect gem."

BAPTISM: ITS SUBJECTS AND MODES, by J. G. Vos; Pittsburgh, Crown and Covenant Publications of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America: Board of Education and Publication, 48 pp. 75¢ paper. Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien, pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa.

Apparently two separate lectures (meant particularly for the constituency of the Reformed Presbyterian Church) have been put together to make a very interesting and helpful booklet. Anyone (whether RP or not) would benefit from a reading of this scholarly but *not* heavy publication.

The first part deals with the subjects of baptism. Vos points out that while those who are against infant baptism try to show that their position is the strongest, it is, nevertheless, very weak. And the principles on which they build their argument prove too much.

The second portion of the booklet discusses the issue of which mode of baptism is the best: immersion, sprinkling or pouring. Vos considers the Baptist argument for immersion and concludes: "Our disagreement with our Baptist brethren . . . is not because of their practice of immersion, but rather because of their un-

justifiable and unscriptural claim that immersion alone constitutes Christian baptism" (p. 48). In coming to this conclusion Vos analyzes each of the arguments for immersion (including the idea that baptism signifies burial) and shows how they all are in error.

GET OUT! A GUIDELINE FOR REFORMED CONGREGATIONAL EVANGELISM, by G. VanDooren; Winnipeg, Premier Printing Ltd., 1973, 98 pp. \$3.95, paper. Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien, pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa.

Recently this book by a minister of Canadian Reformed Churches and lecturer in their Theological College was reprinted. In many ways it bears reprinting, too. The author intends to lay out a Reformed approach to the much discussed subject of evangelism. He spends much time laying down principles and discussing them in the light of current objections. He introduces the history of evangelism in the Dutch churches and he gives some guidelines for action on the part of the churches. We commend him for his constant emphasis on the Reformed Creeds and Confessions. This is a refreshing note in this day of bland evangelism.

It is hoped that the new edition is so written to make this book more useful to the general reading public. Dutch words which are left untranslated limit the use of the book.

PROMISE AND DELIVERANCE: VOL. II, THE FAILURE OF ISRAEL'S THEOCRACY; S.G. De Graff; trans. H. Evan Runner; Paideia Press: St. Catharines, Ont., Canada; 456 pp. \$10.95. Reviewed by Rev. Henry Vanden Heuvel, pastor of Bethel CRC, Sioux Center, Iowa.

This is the second volume in the projected four-volume translation of De Graaf's *Verbondsgeschiedenis* by Dr. and Mrs. Evan Runner. The present volume covers the events in the Old Testament from the Judges through the return from the exile. The stories of the Old Testament in this volume center upon the covenant of God with His people. The centrality of Jesus Christ is made the theme on every page in a beautiful way.

The stories of David are especially important for the teacher and parent. They are presented here in such a way as to remove all moralism from the accounts, and to constantly point the reader to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. How important this emphasis is today for Sunday School teachers and Christian School teachers who tell these stories to their children. In every story, the emphasis is on Christ as the fulfillment of God's grace, rather than on the strength of David, or the deception of Saul, or the treachery of Absalom. The account of David and Absalom is recounted to show David's failure to put the grace of God over his love for Absalom, but at the same time to show how

wonderfully gracious God is in uniting David with the covenant people again.

This book is a must for Sunday School teachers, for Christian school teachers, for parents, but especially for preachers. It places the Old Testament in the correct perspective of the centrality of Jesus Christ as the head of the covenant of God's grace.

GALATIANS: A DIGEST OF REFORMED COMMENT and 2 CORINTHIANS: A DIGEST OF REFORMED COMMENT by Geoffrey B. Wilson; Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1973, 127 pages and 173 pages, 35p each. Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien, pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa.

Here are two short but to the point little books which are to serve as commentaries on two New Testament books. The author has carefully culled out of works of Reformed writers thoughts which will help the Bible student in his study and in his devotions.

Obviously I do not wish to say that I endorse every view taken — with a commentary this can seldom, if ever, be said. However, I do want to encourage the use of these books — along with the three that appeared earlier on Romans, I Corinthians, and Hebrews. They will be especially helpful for that society member who wants clear insights into the New Testament book he may be studying.

TRUTHS THAT TRANSFORM by Dr. D. James Kennedy; published by Fleming H. Revell Co., Tappan, N.J. Reviewed by Rev. Jack Zandstra, emeritus, Boca Raton, Florida.

It is most interesting to know that Dr. Kennedy who wrote *Evangelism Explosion* also wrote this book. The *Foreword* states it quite clearly. "D. James Kennedy's *Evangelism Explosion* was a book on spreading the gospel, the central concern of every Christian. It becomes a best seller because in it he showed how every Christian can be an effective witness. The present book, *Truths that Transform*, is for those who have yearned for a deeper understanding of Christian truth and what it can mean in their lives."

In *Evangelism Explosion* Dr. Kennedy makes evangelism a practical application of the commands and doctrine of the Bible. And it works. In fact, it worked amazingly well in his own church, the Coral Ridge Presbyterian, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Now he writes a book on doctrine. And we logical Calvinists with a Reformed heritage, are about to object and say he has put the horse before the proverbial cart. Should we not know the doctrines before we are fit witness-bearers of the truth? Isn't it scriptural that "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free"? Isn't knowledge of the doctrines necessary to conversion and surely necessary for witnessing? And churches who claim orthodoxy — and there are many — have stunted and shunted the great evangelistic

program just because the doctrinal knowledge was not complete.

The real solution to this problem is demonstrated in these two books which hold that some knowledge is necessary to conversion and witnessing, but more knowledge, yes much more is necessary "to bless lives, transform men, and build His church." To be a sound, growing, evangelical church, she must be a studious church grounded upon the eternal verities of the Scriptures.

The chapter headings remind one of a book of systematic theology. Kennedy has no truck with "soda fizz" theology. Let me name a few. (1) The Sovereignty of God; (2) Does man have a free will?; (3) Predestination; (4) Effectual calling. The chapter on *Assurance of Salvation* is lucid and sustaining. Chapter 10 on *Adoption* is a study that is reassuring. Though slighted by many of the Reformed fathers, adoption to Dr. Kennedy is a clearly biblical subject and full of comfort. No doctrine is treated in a detached way. There is always the refreshing personal appeal. "Is your name in that book? — Have you by faith laid hold on Jesus Christ and invited Him into your heart?" (page 125).

The two chapters 8 and 9 on Justification and Sanctification are delightful studies. They fit together perfectly: Justification is one act and Sanctification is a continuous process. Kennedy's Scripture references are many. He quotes John Calvin, Gerhardus Vos, H. Bavinck, A. Kuyper, John Murray, and other Reformed theologians freely.

One gets the message that the evangelistic thrust of the church does not begin with something less than the gospel truth. Rather, evangelism grows upon the full doctrinal truth of Scripture. "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" is a repeated refrain. The mission program is vibrant if built on the verities of the Bible.

This is not a three-volume book on Reformed Theology. It wasn't meant to be. But its 160 pages are informative and challenging. Buy it. It may be a great stimulant to engage the church in a renewed mission program.

Subscribe now to THE OUTLOOK

4855 Starr St., S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49506

Please send THE OUTLOOK for:

<input type="checkbox"/> 1 year	U.S. \$ 6.50	Canada \$ 8.00
<input type="checkbox"/> 2 years	11.50	13.50
<input type="checkbox"/> Check/Money Order enclosed		

Name _____

Street _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Attractive gift cards for ministers or others to present a year's subscription to THE OUTLOOK are available by writing to the above address.

Gift Subscriptions — U.S. \$5.50 ea.
Canada \$7.00 ea.

For information about becoming a member of Reformed Fellowship or how to organize a chapter in your area, write:

REFORMED FELLOWSHIP, INC.

4855 Starr St., S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49506

Send for our list of catechism books, Bible study materials, etc.

COMMENTARY ON FIRST CORINTHIANS by Frederic Louis Godet. **Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977, 920 pp., \$14.95.** Reviewed by Jerome M. Julien, pastor of the First CRC of Pella, Iowa.

First published in 1886 in French and soon thereafter in English, this work by a Swiss Reformed scholar is now a part of the Kregel Reprint Library series. The author, F. L. Godet (1812-1900) was known for his orthodox faith and firm stand against the theological liberalism of the day. For many years he was professor of exegesis first in the Theological School of the National Swiss Church and later in the Free Evangelical Theological School.

Godet's work is particularly helpful for those who are familiar with Greek, although any serious student of Scripture will benefit from its use. Lengthy discussions on the various verses indicate the right and wrong ways of viewing the text. The student who does not want to read such involved discussions would most likely draw more help from Charles Hodge's commentary. The preacher should have Godet, however, to use along with Calvin, Hodge, and Grosheide.

EERDMANS' HANDBOOK TO THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY, Dr. Tim Dowley, organizing editor; William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1977; 656+xxiv pp., \$19.95. Reviewed by Rev. Jerome J. Julien, pastor of the First CRC of Pella, Iowa.

Many contributors including Canon James Atkinson, Dr. W. Ward Gasque, Dr. James I. Packer, Dr. H. R. Rookmaaker, Dr. A. Skevington Wood and our own Dr. James A. De Jong of Dordt College make this volume a valuable introduction to Church History. The stream of the development of the Christian Church from its New Testament beginnings is laid out. In addition to the historical material there are many short articles designed to introduce the reader to various people who have made outstanding contributions to the historical development of the Church. Also, there are short articles on important movements, events, and ideas. Above 450 beautiful pictures make the history live.

Reading from this book will certainly help the Church gain an appreciation for the development of the Church through the centuries — a knowledge badly needed today.

STUDIES IN ROMANS, EPHESIANS, AND PHILIPPIANS by H. C. G. Moule; **Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1977.** Reviewed by Rev. Henry Vanden Heuvel.

These three brief commentaries by Bishop Moule are reprints by Kregel of original works printed in the latter part of the last century. They are all carefully done, basing the comments on the English text of the various epistles. Each commentary also is introduced by several chapters dealing with the life of the apostle Paul and the peculiar situation existing in each of

the three places where the epistles are addressed.

Of particular interest is Moule's discussion in his interpretation of Romans 7. He discusses the suggestion that Paul is writing out of an unbelieving mind, and dismisses this interpretation as being incorrect in the light of other passages from Paul's epistles. His interpretation of the passages that are often disputed such as Romans 9-11, and Philippians 2:5-11 is especially good. The commentaries are strongly recommended.

PIONEER PREACHER by Gordon Spykman, Grand Rapids, Heritage Hall Publications; 142 pp.; \$3.95. Reviewed by Rev. Jacob Hasper.

It is my conviction that everyone, and especially teachers of men, profit by reading widely concerning their roots. Whatever is published concerning our heritage is worth reading. I found special delight in the discovery of Gordon Spykman's book concerning Van Raalte, the *Pioneer Preacher*. Here was some new source material to provide inspiration and motivation from the survey of our roots.

Spykman renders a thorough, scholarly, critical analysis of the sermon notes which were available to him. He touches on a wide range of subjects including the structure of the sermons, the choice of texts, hermeneutics, doctrine, and polemics. Spykman's analysis is, I am sure, honest but it is limited to scant, incomplete notes. Spykman himself alerts us to his own uneasiness concerning this. The nature of the material to be examined leaves much to be desired for real understanding of the man. Sermon notes and speech notes are never adequate for a conclusive evaluation of a man.

Spykman's conclusions are more negative than positive. He finds in Van Raalte an accent on pietism and a neglect of practical application of life. He discovers in Van Raalte doctrinal orthodoxy but no creative application of the teachings of the Word to the world in which we live. According to Spykman, Van Raalte seems to display more of human weakness and failure than the triumph of grace in the life of one so wonderfully used in the planting of our roots. After reading *Pioneer Preacher* I was not left with the feeling that Van Raalte was truly a "Dienstknecht des Heeren Krachtig in Woorden en Werken."

The book, *Pioneer Preacher* is provocative. It stimulates both agreement and disagreement. For this alone it is worth reading. Of great interest also is the last half which includes the appendix of select sermon notes and speech notes from the pen of Van Raalte, the pioneer preacher. In viewing the lingering evidences of Van Raalte's ministry as they are manifest in the community around Holland, I am quite certain that we have not yet captured the whole truth concerning the genius of the *Pioneer Preacher*. This is not to be determined by a study of scant sermon notes as much as by simply viewing the evidence which still lingers in the community which was established under his influence and guidance.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

REV. JOHAN D. TANGELDER

This introduction to a proposed book on the Belgic Confession was sent in by our Christian Reformed missionary to the Philippines, Rev. J. Tangelder, for publication in the *Outlook*. The article seems especially appropriate and helpful in meeting current attacks on the creeds and questions in many minds about their rightful place. On this subject the reader is also referred to the new series on Christian doctrines by Rev. J. Julien beginning elsewhere in this issue.

(A Commentary on the Belgic Confession)

A. An apology for the confession.

1. Study a confession?

I believe that an apology for the writing of this short commentary is necessary as even within Reformed circles the validity of the confessions is called into question.

Why do we need to study the historic Belgic Confession in our post-Christian and rapidly secularizing society? Isn't the confession time-bound, conditioned by the historic movements of the 16th century Reformation in Europe? Why has it been adopted as one of the confessions of the Christian Reformed Church in North America as well as the Christian Reformed Church of the Philippines and many other Reformed denominations in many different nations? Isn't there a revival of dialogue between the Church of Rome and the churches of the Reformation? Aren't there great changes taking place in the Roman Catholic Church?

Of course, we must be careful when we discuss Catholicism. The current situation makes everything complex. The old illusion of a solid, unified church has been shattered. There is now a great variety of thought and practice. Today, the Roman Catholic Church appears to be as divided and pluriform as Protestantism. *Time Magazine* (May 24, 1974) had as cover story — The Roman Catholic

Church "A Church Divided." We are faced with the questions: What does it really believe? What must we think about the Roman Catholic charismatics, the traditionalists, the liberation theologians? Has the Church of Rome really changed, or is its old boast of changelessness and irreformability true? We live in "global village," and the winds of change blow everywhere. Yes! But we must bear in mind that the Roman Catholic Church has never rejected its pronouncements and anathema of the Council of Trent (1545-63). The second Vatican Council (1962-65) has frequently reiterated the endorsements of both Vatican I (1870) and the Council of Trent. It came down firmly on the side of the traditional doctrine of the mass. The virgin Mary even received a new title — "mother of the church." And Vatican II called for "a generous encouragement to the cult of the Blessed Virgin, especially to the liturgical cult." (1)

The winds of change are also blowing within Protestantism. Mainline denominations are declining in influence and membership. One of today's key issues is the inerrancy of Scriptures. Dr. Francis Schaeffer commented: "Holding to a strong view of Scripture or not holding to it is the watershed of the evangelical world." (2) The former editor of *Christianity Today*, Dr. Harold Lindsell, has furthered the cause of orthodoxy through highlighting the problem in his book "The Battle For The Bible."

2. Abstract Doctrine?

Who needs an exposition of the Belgic Confession? We need a practical handbook on living. But Biblical doctrine is never abstract. Doctrine and life are intertwined and inseparable. Doctrine and life are not opposites. We must be orthodox not only in doctrine but also in practice. We are called to live our confession (Tit. 2:7, 10:2; John 9-11; Rom. 16:17, 18).

3. What is a Confession?

The word "confess" means "to say together." A confession is not the response of an individual believer to God's revelation in the Bible, but the church's response. You always believe together. Therefore, a confession is a communal expression of faith. In a confession the church doesn't only express her communal faith, but also sets herself against error. In crisis times the church has always felt the need to speak in articulate language about God, creation, revelation, fall, redemption and things to come.

The Scripture is our only rule for faith and practice. Of course, the inscripturated Word of God alone is the "power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16), and it alone can bring reformation to a deformed church. The confession is a repetition of God's Word, a summary of its great doctrines. Through her confession the church expresses her hope, and receives con-

solation and encouragement, but she also knows that wolves in sheep's clothing are ready to devour her (Matt. 7:15; 24:4, 5).

4. Theologians vs. Confessions?

As I have shown, the drawing up of a confession is a communal activity. It is not the work of a few theological experts. Yet the articles of the Belgic Confession are the fruit of theological reflection. We cannot divorce theological activity from the formulation of confessions. Helpful use was made of the theological expertness of Calvin, Beza, Ursinus and many others. Dr. C. VanTil remarks about the making of confession and the work of systematic theologians: "The creeds of the Church are, as far as their content is concerned, no more than a systematic statement of the truth of Scripture. They are distinguished from the systematic statement of Scripture given by systematic theology (a) by their brevity, limiting themselves as they do to the most essential matters, and (b) by their authoritative character, since they have been officially accepted as standards by the councils of the Church. Once these standards of dogmas of the Church have been accepted, it goes without saying that a theologian who writes a work on systematics will write in accordance with the interpretation given in these standards. To say that this hampers his freedom is to say that he has not himself freely adopted these creeds as a member of the Church." (3)

5. Scripture or Creed?

The nature of the confession itself demonstrates that the choice is never between Scripture or creed! Since earliest times, the church had a confession in the objective sense of the term, in which she stated in speech or writing the precious doctrines of salvation.

A confession is not above or beside but under the Word of God. It has authority because it agrees with the Word of God and repeats and transmits it. So, the churches of the Reformation in the 16th century were convinced that the Belgic Confession confessed the Bible. The Westminster Confession says about this subordinate role of the confessions: "All synods or councils since the apostles' times whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred; therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice, but to be used as a help in both." (3) Dr. L. Berkhof remarked about the relationship of Scripture and creed: "Since the reflection of the Church is often determined and deepened by doctrinal controversies, the formulations to which Church Councils or Synods are finally led under the guidance of the Holy Spirit often bear the earmarks of past struggles. They are not infallible but yet have a high degree of stability. And they are authoritative, not merely because they are proposed by the Church, but FORMALLY as defined by

the Church and MATERIALLY as based on the Word of God." (4)

6. Does the Bible Teach Doctrine?

This is an important question in our experience-orientated age. The apostle Paul speaks about "sound doctrine" (literally, "healthful doctrine" (Titus 2:1). This very expression presupposed a body of teaching. There is a "deposit of faith" (1 Tim. 6:10; 2 Tim. 1:13, 14). Dr. A. Kuyper points to Heb. 6:1ff. where it is written: "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go unto perfection." And then the writer of the letter to the Hebrews sums up the doctrine of Christ: 1. Repentance from dead works; 2. Faith towards God; 3. Doctrine of baptism; 4. Laying on of hands; 5. The resurrection of the dead; 6. Eternal judgment of God. (5)

Elders must admonish regarding the maintenance of "sound doctrine" (Rom. 16:17; 2 John 9, 10). False doctrine is like a "sore that eats away the flesh" (1 John 2:26). False teachers are like seducers (1 John 2:26). The Puritan Thomas Watson called these seducers "the devil's factors; they are of all others the greatest felons that would rob you of the truth. Seducers have silver tongues, that can put off bad wares; they have a sleight to deceive." (6)

7. Are Creeds Binding?

The authority of the creeds is easily discredited in our day. But the church is not a debating club. It is a confessing community. The New Testament does not know a congregation without a binding creed (cf. Rev. 2:14, 15, 20). Office bearers sign the form of subscription because the confessions and creeds are in agreement with the Word of God. When truth is denied, the unity of the church is broken.

A confession is binding unless it is shown that it is in disagreement with the Word of God. Believers in the Reformed churches have the right to expect that the teaching of the church be honoured.

8. Revision of the Creeds?

Do we need new confessions and creeds for our time? How can 16th century document articulate the Christian faith for modern man? Isn't the Belgic Confession a dead weight around the neck of the church? Isn't the confession an imperfect and temporal way of expressing the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Although we could perhaps add to the confession by giving a more detailed exposition on the nature and authority of Scripture to meet the heresies of our day, I believe that the Reformed churches are in no position today to do so because of their lack of theological clarity and unity.

My conviction is: We do not need renovation. We have enough to do when we study what the Reformation and especially what the early church has said. Furthermore, the truth

of the Scriptures remains unchanged. The great facts of creation, the fall, redemption, and the sacraments remain the same. Why change the confession if it only repeats the Word of God?

Have the enemies of the church so greatly changed that a new revised creed is needed? The enemies have remained the same. Old heresies have new names. For example, Arianism and Socinianism found a modern home in the sect of the Jehovah Witnesses. I agree with Dr. C. VanTil's observation: "What the Church needs is a more exact formulation of its doctrines against heresies as they appear in every new and changing form, and a fuller statement of a Biblical truth." (7)

B. Historical Background.

Guido deBres (1522-67).

The Belgic Confession was formulated in the 16th century Reformation period. There was a return to the study of the Word of God. Reformation churches were founded. And martyrs laid down their lives "for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

The man responsible for the confession was Guido deBres. Little is known of his early youth. He was born in a Roman Catholic home in about 1522, studied the Bible and prior to 1547 he broke away from his church. He fled to England in about 1548 where he joined a refugee congregation in London. During 1522-56 he was a traveling pastor. He was a hunted man, preaching illegally as the Netherlands neared revolt against the Spanish oppressor. He studied at Geneva and Lausanne, Switzerland and became pastor in Doornik. He drew up a statement of faith, which is now called the Belgic Confession and he threw it over the wall of Doornik's castle during the night of Nov. 1-2, 1561.

Why was the Belgic Confession written? Guido deBres wanted to show Philip II of Spain that Protestants were not heretics but Christ-believers who only wanted to remain true to the Bible. He wanted to defend "the churches under the cross" in the Southern Netherlands.

Was Guido deBres the sole author of the confession — his individual, private response to God's Word? No! He was assisted by Adrian Saravia, H. Modetus, and Godfrey van Wingen. He also drew heavily on the 1559

Gallic Confession, written for the Huguenot churches by John Calvin.

The confession was published in Rouen in 1561, and in 1563 it appeared in German and in Dutch. In 1566 it was published again in a slightly shorter form in Dutch and French. It was received with great enthusiasm by the Calvinist churches of the Netherlands. It was adopted as a confession in Antwerp (1566), Wesel (1568), Dort (1574) and Middelburg (1581). The text of the confession went through various alterations until the final form was adopted by the Synod of Dort (1618-19).

The story of the confession shows that it was not written in isolation. It was a communal effort. It was the result of interaction with other theologians and confessions. The confession was carefully considered by the churches and accepted by the churches.

Bibliography:

- (1) Pp. 1012f. The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church. J.D. Douglas, General Editor. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1974.
- (2) P. 13. Dr. Francis Schaeffer. No Final Conflict. The Bible Without Error in all that it affirms. Intervarsity Press. Downers Grove, Ill. Second Printing, 1976.
- (3) P. 4. C. VanTil. An Introduction to Theology. Syllabus. Westminster Theological Seminary, 1947.
- (4) The Westminster Confession, XXXI, IV.
- (5) P. 17. L. Berkhof. The History of Christian Doctrines. Baker Book House, pb. ed. 1975. Grand Rapids, Mich.
- (6) P. 46. Dr. A. Kuyper. Uit Het Woord. Stichtelyke Bybelstudien. Praktyk der Godzaligheid. Tweede Serie. Derde bundel, (VI). Amsterdam.
- (7) P. 3. Thomas Watson. A Body of Divinity. Contained in Sermons upon the Westminster Assembly's Catechism. First ed. 1692. Reprinted 1970. Guildford & London, England.
- (8) P. 5. Dr. C. VanTil.
- (9) A.D.R. Polman. Onze Nederlandsche Geloofsbelydens. Verklaard nit het Verleden gecon fron teerd Nethetheden. Eerste deel. T. Wever, Franeker.

1978 "ANNUAL MEETING LECTURES" TAPES

There are a few tapes left of the speakers at our last annual meeting at \$3.00 per tape. Each tape has both of the following inspirational lectures:

"Our Needed Reformed Manifesto"

Rev. John Piersma

"Necessary Ingredients of Biblical Revival"

Rev. Iain Murray

REFORMED FELLOWSHIP, Inc.
4855 Starr Street, S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49506