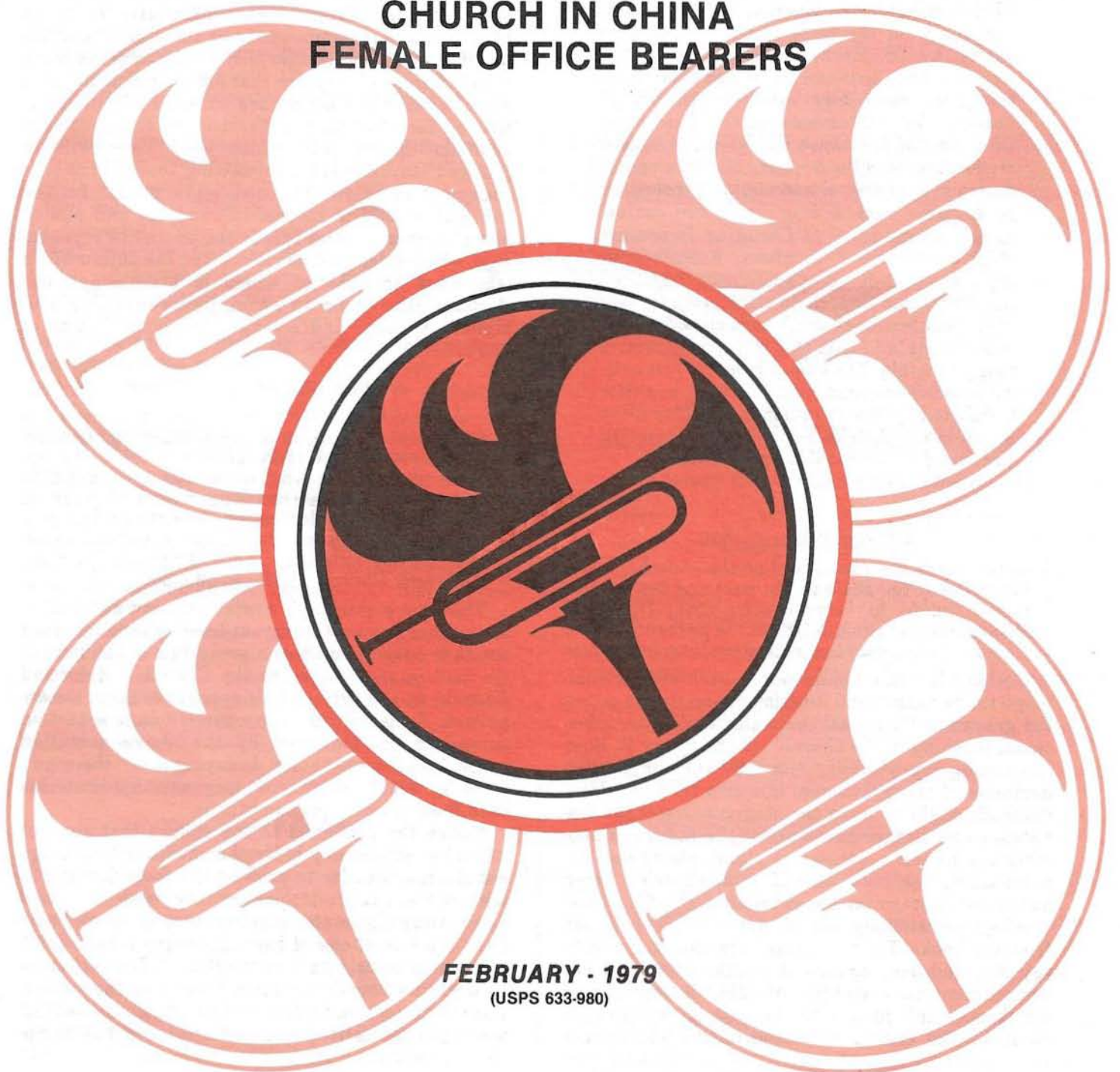


The Outlook

**CREED IN CRISIS
CHURCH IN CHINA
FEMALE OFFICE BEARERS**



FEBRUARY - 1979
(USPS 633-980)

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

CREED IN CRISIS

NELSON D. KLOOSTERMAN

Editorial Note: In this contribution the Rev. Mr. Kloosterman, pastor of Immanuel Christian Reformed Church, Sheldon, Iowa, comments on the petition (gravamen) presented by Dr. Harry R. Boer to the 1977 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church. In this gravamen Boer asks the church to declare that statements in the Canons of Dort, one of the three Christian Reformed creeds, teaching the doctrine of divine reprobation are unbiblical and ought therefore to be declared non-binding, upon the confessional commitment of Christian Reformed office-bearers and members. Kloosterman argues that Boer's gravamen asks the Christian Reformed Church, in effect, to jump out of its "confessional skin" as it considers his contentions, and that this is not desirable, if really possible. The basic format of this article is a series of comments following key citations from the Boer gravamen which appears in full in the Acts of Synod of the Christian Reformed Church, 1977, pp. 665, 666.)

A Creed Under Attack

"The creeds are the record of the church's interpretation of the Bible in the past and the authoritative guide to hermeneutics (the science of Bible interpretation, NDK) in the present." From Creeds of the Churches, edited by John Leith, p. 9.

Nothing has put before our church such a challenge to the nature and function of her creeds as has the gravamen ("a formal complaint against a confessional teaching in the church") of Dr. Harry R. Boer concerning *reprobation*.^{*} Not only the substantive demands of the gravamen, but also its *procedural* demands ought to warn the church to quiet the dissension and disagreement about the nature of subscription to the confessional standards of our denomination. For, black on white, the church is being asked by Boer to do non-creedal, non-confessional theology in striking the doctrine of reprobation from the books. To this demand the church ought to say *No!*, and over against it ought to reassert her commitment to a method of Bible interpretation which does full justice to the oath-bound commitment to the creeds as authoritative statements

which "do fully agree with the Word of God." Of course creeds may be tested by the Scriptures (we are not confessionalists), and of course we may ask by way of a gravamen for the church to declare its biblical basis for its confessional pronouncements. Of course the church "could be wrong" in its doctrinal requirements of its members. But admitting this is not the same as saying that it is possible or proper to act as if one is looking at the Bible for the first time, and that out of such a view one might well discover that things once solemnly and sacrificially confessed by the church are really pure heresy!

In my opinion, the danger of the Boer gravamen is that it moves along such lines as it challenges the church's teaching about divine reprobation.

Forget: The Doctrine of Reprobation

The Canons of Dort devote an entire Article to this doctrine, saying, "What peculiarly tends to illustrate and recommends to us the eternal and unmerited grace of election (sic!) is the express testimony of sacred Scripture that not all, but some only, are elected, while others are passed by in the eternal decree; whom God . . . has decreed to leave in the common misery into which they have wilfully plunged themselves . . . permitting them in His just judgment to follow their own ways, at last, for the declaration of His justice, to condemn and punish them forever . . . And this is the decree of reprobation, which by no means makes God the author of sin (the very thought of which is blasphemy), but declares Him to be an awful, irreprehensible, and righteous Judge and Avenger thereof." Canons of Dort, I,15

Setting Bible Against Creed

A gravamen in its very nature challenges the *Scriptural validity* of a given teaching. It overleaps creedal and theological authority and appeals directly to the Bible itself. Gravamina should therefore neither depend on nor be refuted by creedal or theological considerations. In a proper gravamen procedure neither creed nor theology has any authority. Acts of Synod, Christian Reformed Church, 1977, pp. 665, 666.

The term *gravamen* is a relatively new acquisition to the church's vocabulary, at least so far as current usage is concerned. Boer's gravamen is the first of its kind in the history of the Christian Reformed Church! At the outset of his appeal Dr. Boer, the appellant, demands that the church follow a certain procedure, as indicated by the above quotation taken from his gravamen. In laying down the conditions by which she may or may not adjudicate his case Boer appears presumptuous.

Notice the command to the church that she put down her supposedly blurred confessional, theological glasses in order to gaze at the Holy Scriptures with naked eyes, and, presumably, with unformed mind. Once again the plaintive cry is heard, now from the lips of one of her missionary scholars, for the church to "get back to the Bible." The invitation to unclasp herself, to strip herself of the "accretions" of creedal perspective and theological assumptions, as it were, and approach the Scrip-

tures in that innocent nakedness reminds one of earlier naive invitations to return to the supposedly pristine beauty and simplicity of the early church, as found recorded in the Acts of the Apostles.

An Impossible Procedure

This procedural question requires an answer: Is it possible to do what Boer wants us to do?

Without judging the correctness of his claims regarding the doctrine of reprobation at this moment, will the church be able to answer him without referring to theological assumptions or confessional declarations?

Can we leave the creeds in the attic while we gather on synod's floor in 1979 to behold the beauty of purely "Scriptural" testimony, and really do justice to the Bible and to Dr. Boer?

I think that procedure is impossible in the life of the church.

It is possible, of course, for the purposes of analysis and theorizing about the path to confessional declaration to *distinguish* the two strands of Bible and confession. But after such analysis, when the practice of teaching, preaching, believing, evangelizing, etc. is undertaken, such distinctions have no functional significance.

But notice, Dr. Boer isn't even asking the church to *distinguish* Scripture from the church's confessional understanding and declaration of Scriptural truth. He demands that we *separate the two*. We claim that it is impossible to do that.

How can one rightly interpret even the familiar John 3:16 without drawing upon our confessional commitment and reflection as to God's love for the world, or about Jesus, God's Son? Or how is it possible to isolate the interpretation of Phil. 1:6, "... he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ," from the confessional atmosphere in which we have experienced the comfort of believing that salvation, from beginning to end, is a work of God?

On these grounds then it is doubtful that Boer's procedural demand is acceptable or his definition of a gravamen defensible. Though the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* ("Scripture only") holds, and though we deplore with everyone else any confessionalistic exaggeration of anything extra-biblical, though we say readily that Scripture stands above the creeds even in the regulation of the faith and life of the church, these things were never intended to separate Scripture from confessions in the *process* of understanding what it is that the Bible demands for belief and life.

Destructive Results

It is important to note the possible results in the life of the church from here on if Boer's gravamen and its suggestions are accepted. His strident demand for "the express testimony of Scripture" will, no doubt, be repeated in the years to come by those seeking indubitable prooftexts which command the practice of infant baptism, seeking incontrovertible biblical evidence for the doctrine of the tri-personality of God, and asking for unquestionable proof for the correctness of the Heidelberg Catechism's inter-

THE

OUTLOOK



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

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February 1979 — Volume XXIX, No. 2

Contents:

CREED IN CRISIS.....	2
Nelson D. Kloosterman	
MEDITATION — ELECTED UNTO HOLINESS.....	5
John Blankespoor	
FAITH UNDER PRESSURE.....	6
Jonathan Chao; Joel Belz	
WHERE IS BERKHOUWER LEADING?.....	9
Peter DeJong	
REFORMED WOMEN SPEAK — CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY.....	11
Betty Teitsma	
LESSONS FROM I PETER.....	12
Henry VanderKam	
SHOULD WE HAVE FEMALE OFFICE BEARERS? I.....	16
Louis Praamsma	
LETTER TO THE EDITOR.....	20
A LOOK AT BOOKS.....	21

pretation of the necessity of Christ's burial ("To prove thereby that he was really dead," Q. 41). And on and on . . .

You see, if the terms of the debate are set so narrowly, in fundamentalist, biblicist style, calling for explicit biblical proof of that sort, we are bound to flounder about in a kind of confessional abyss 'til the Lord returns. And that because the high-sounding expressions, "just the Bible," or "just tell me what the Bible says," are not as simple or as innocent as they might seem.

The Spirit's Guidance in the Church's History

We have always confessed something else than just some kind of objective, impersonal "express testimony of Scripture." We have confessed also, and indispensably, the truth of the real guidance of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 17, 26; 16:13, 14). This keeps us from all arbitrariness in biblical interpretation. It demands of all of us a respect for the ongoing biblical doctrinal tradition which keeps us from that which American evangelical Christianity too often demonstrates, a rash presumption by an individual that he, over against everyone else in the history of the church, is the first one who understands Scripture.

A Misplaced Charge

The expressed motivation for Boer's gravamen is a certain "concern for the church." He alleges that the doctrine of election has been silenced and that the silencing of the doctrine of election in the pulpit and life of the church must and can be corrected only by removing the *muzzle*, namely, the doctrine of reprobation. In Boer's words, "To save it (the doctrine of election) from the disregard in which it is increasingly being held in the Christian Reformed Church is no small part of my motivation in submitting this gravamen."

In the first place, as a descriptive assertion, this is certainly open to challenge. As a pastor who has preached the doctrine of election faithfully and I trust, biblically, as one whose ministerial colleagues attest to doing the same, and as one who has attended small group seminars designed to help preachers preach where such a biblical emphasis was often held up for emulation, I must conclude that Boer's concern doesn't ring true. Election is held in high regard in many pulpits and in many a believing heart as a doctrine of greatest assurance and comfort, a doctrine which implies the greatest challenges and responsibilities for God's people. One wonders how Boer came to this conclusion. And this uncertainty brings then some question as to the degree of his familiarity with and even the nature of his concern for the church.

Secondly, the procedure of "saving" one doctrine by eliminating another is a questionable methodology. If we grant for a moment that the doctrine of election does need revitalization in the church, to blame the doctrine of reprobation for the alleged disregard of election and press for its excision from the creeds is to begin at the wrong end. It could be that if election is held in disregard today that this neglect is not at all due to a strong belief in repro-

bation but to a misunderstanding of election. In which case proper education is needed rather than radical elimination.

This brings us, thirdly, to the crux of Boer's intention. If I read him rightly, he is saying that proper understanding of election is *impossible* if one holds to a divine decree of reprobation. In laying accusation for the alleged disregard of election, the lot of the accused is made by Boer to fall not on the obvious *cultural individualism* which infests popular, North American Christianity in our day, nor upon the rationalistic *manifest destiny* notion that vigorously equates "the people of God's choice" with ourselves as a nation of unparalleled prosperity and success. Strangely, the lot falls on the doctrine of reprobation! It is charged that because of its supposed deductionism and rationalism, this doctrine obscures the biblical testimony regarding election.

I find Boer's accusations against the church hard to believe. In reality, surrounded as we are by the forces mentioned above, "saving" the doctrine of election could better be done by setting it off sharply from the prevailing syncretistic combining of God and country, of Americanism and Christianity.

Boer Misreads the Canons

Another quote from Boer's gravamen deals with the heart of the problem which he feels required to pose:

The question with respect to reprobation is rather this: may God's response to the sin and unbelief of men . . . have imputed to it an eternal cause for which no warrant is to be found in Scripture? Sin and unbelief are exceedingly dark mysteries on the origin and cause of which Scripture sheds no light. Acts of Synod, 1977, p. 671

In the interest of clarity, perhaps the reader might wish to read this quotation in its context in the 1977 *Acts of Synod*. Its abbreviation here, however, contains the seed of Boer's thinking about reprobation. Notice what it is, in each of the sentences quoted above, that is being *caused*. In the first sentence Boer contends that the Bible offers no proof that God's *response* to sin is caused in eternity. In the second sentence Boer contends that Scripture offers no light on the cause of *sin and unbelief*. A crucial shift of focus occurs here! The shift from God's *response* being caused from eternity to *sin* being caused from eternity may have been unintentional; it is nonetheless confusing. In any case, Boer's assertions about both objects of causation — God's *response* to sin and *sin itself* — are grossly inaccurate reflections on the teachings of the *Canons of Dort*.

Regarding his first question, whether God's response to sin may be said to have an eternal cause, the *Canons* never say that! The definition or explanation of the eternal decree of reprobation excludes calling it a "response" of God in history to human sin.

Regarding his follow-up statement about the cause of sin being a dark mystery, the *Canons* declare forcefully that the doctrine of reprobation may not be construed to say that God is the cause of sin.

The fact that adherents to that creed do not always succeed in avoiding such a misconstrual is no ground for an attack on the creed, however.

Dr. Boer pays scant attention in a mere ten lines to the Conclusion of the Canons. That Conclusion is a very important statement (somehow lost on us, we admit!) which provides interpretative guidelines for the body of the Canons. It is this Conclusion which shatters those commonly held misunderstandings with which Boer argues.

The central question facing the Christian Reformed Church lies at this point: Is Dr. Boer's understanding of the Canons accurate? Is what he claims the Canons say really what they say? Or is his accusation against the church a caricature, reflecting some commonly held misunderstandings of the Canons?

I assert that it is the latter. In which case church education is the necessary corrective, not surgery on the creeds.

Maybe you feel that the word *accusation* is the wrong word, too strong, perhaps. But in reality, Boer accuses the Christian Reformed Church of holding a wrong belief, an unbiblical faith. Boer in effect charges the church with *heresy!* A serious charge, indeed, for if it is valid we are a manifestation of the false church.

Throughout his gravamen Boer slings around terms like *deductionistic* and *rationalistic*, equating them with "unChristian" and "unReformed." It seems, however, that Boer's argument is with L. Berkhof's *Systematic Theology* rather than with the Canons of Dort. If that is so, a book review would have done the job. There was no need to agitate the church by way of such an appeal to synod.

But maybe Boer has much, much more on his mind than he had told in the gravamen.

If that is so, we've only seen the beginning!

**For some a definition of reprobation might be helpful. L. Berkhof defines it as "that eternal decree of God whereby He has determined to pass some men by with the operations of His special grace, and to punish them for their sins, to the manifestation of His justice." Systematic Theology, p. 116.*

Corrections: In the article, "God's Men and Doctrines, Athanasius and the Deity of Christ" in the January OUT-LOOK, these corrections of typographical errors should be noted: The first full sentence on the second column of page seven should read, "... this confession of Christ's *Deity* was accepted and *Arius and his* staunch supporters were excluded, deposed and banished. (Printed without these italicized words the sentence is completely confusing.) At the bottom of page eight in the first column the critical words in the parentheses are both misspelled. That should read "(changing the 'homo-ousios' or 'same substance' to 'homoi-ousios' or 'like substance')." Notice that the big change in meaning takes place through adding the letter "i."

Also the name of the famous historian Edward Gibbon is repeatedly (although not always) misspelled "Gibson."

Meditation



Elected Unto Holiness

REV. JOHN BLANKESPOOR

According as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.

Ephesians 1:4

How elated Paul is! He seems to be overwhelmed with some special, happy thought and experience. Listen, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Let Him be praised. But why? Because we as Christians have been blessed with heavenly blessings, by God changing our darkness into light, our sorrow into joy, and by bringing life out of death. Through these blessings we are restored as sinners to that exalted level of heavenly glory with the Father.

And then Paul comes to the point he wants to make in the next thought. All this is according to the election of His people. In other words, God's people may be the recipients of such marvelous blessings only because they were chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world.

Notice that Paul reasons by way of deduction. We now are Christians, we may now believe and receive these spiritual blessings because behind it all, and the source of it all, is God's election. This means of course that all Christians were elected. All our faith, confidence and love for the Lord is the fruit of election. No child of God may therefore seriously doubt his election.

The truth of election surely should make us humble Christians. If some were elected it simply means, as also taught in Scripture, that others were not elected. It implies that others were not "picked out." And Paul says in another place that this is God's good pleasure. God did not choose certain conditions which, if people would meet them, would entitle them to be elected; neither did God choose the best of the human race. No, he chose people, individuals, sinners. Others, no more sinful often, or less worthy, He did not choose. Why some and not others? The final answer is that it so pleased the sovereign Lord.

He chose us before the foundation of the world, i.e. from eternity. Where were you and I when all this took place? We simply weren't there, the world had not yet been made. But already then He knew us in love, knew us by name, and chose us forever to be

His — all in and through Christ. We had absolutely nothing to do with it.

How then can we know if we are elect? In time God first of all comes to men with the Gospel, with the call and offer to believe. All men respond, either by believing or rejecting that Word. "He that is not for me is against me." But when some sinners do believe and then ask themselves for the deepest reason for their faith, the answer is and has to be, that it was by the Holy Spirit according to Divine election.

But why?

That's the big question in this verse. What may be the purpose of it all? Do you believe in election? Wonderful, if you do. Do you believe that God has chosen you in love in Christ, in the eons of eternity? What a blessed mortal you are! But did you ever ask yourself why He did it? That question Paul answers here.

Did God do this "merely" to save you? Are election and resulting faith a ticket to heaven? This would mean that you don't have to worry about the time you're going to die because you have a reserved seat over there. That's how some people conceive of it. And isn't it strange that such people often speak so little of holiness, love, and godliness! The big question for them is, if only we know that we are elect.

Notice the beautiful but also very significant language of Paul here.

We are elected that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. This is really tremendous! And so beautiful. He loved us with elective love so that we would in turn love Him above everything else. The Bible so often speaks of godliness in connection with election. Notice, for example, Romans 8:28. "All things work together for good." For whom? Paul characterizes these people with two statements. They are those who love God (holiness), but also they are the ones who are the called according to His purpose (election).

Notice also John 15:16: "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go and *bring forth fruit* . . ." Peter also uses these two concepts when he tells the people of Asia Minor that they are elect according to the foreknowledge of God *unto obedience*.

In the text before us Paul says that we are elected to be holy and without blame before Him in love. The expression "without blame" no doubt is borrowed from the Old Testament customs and laws. The Levites had to be sanctified and without blemish. One with a physical defect simply could not serve in the temple. God would use only the best, the perfect. All the animals sacrifices also had to be without blemish; no cripples, blind or defective animals might be brought for offerings. God wanted the best.

So the Lord wants His people to be holy, without blemish before Him in love. What overwhelming thoughts! First of all, Paul speaks of us being before God. This means that we must stand before Him, He must see us and will scrutinize us with His all-knowing and all-seeing eye. In that kind of setting God

wants to see us as holy, consecrated to Him. In our conduct we must be without blemish. All must be in His service, *in love*. In love for God and love for the neighbor. He wants wholehearted love, self-sacrificing love, the love of complete self-denial. After all spiritual love is that kind of action in which we lose ourselves in the fear of God, in trying to keep His commandments. And we can be sure that only those who are new creatures in Christ, and who daily try to live such lives with their old sinful and hateful natures begin to understand all the implications of such a life of love.

We are elected in Christ unto holiness and love.

Do you believe in election? Also that God has chosen you? Thank God for such marvelous grace. But always remember that that is not the end of the matter. It surely is not a ticket assuring you of heaven. No, it's a means unto an end, namely, that as His people who will be saved we are to be holy and godly people.

Christian people who know these truths surely should be good Christians. In the past and present there surely are and were people who are saved but knew little or nothing of election. I don't think that the Ethiopian eunuch knew much or anything about election, or the Philippian jailor. At least not at first. But surely they were elected from eternity. In other words it is possible to be saved, as elect, without knowing much or anything about it.

But for the church in general, for those who have been raised "with the Bible" it is different. Such people, like most of us, knowing more of the why's and wherefore's, surely should be better Christians. We know why we are children of God, we know more of that infinite, indescribable and marvelous love of God, as the source of salvation. What godly people we should be! How we should live in love! With that He is pleased, and His name is glorified.

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

FAITH UNDER PRESSURE:

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN CHINA TODAY

JONATHAN CHAO
JOEL BELZ

JOURNAL: How many individuals have you talked with?

CHAO: I have had extended interviews with five people, and I have about a dozen more scheduled.

JOURNAL: Just who are these people?

CHAO: My interviews are primarily with residents of China who have emigrated lawfully, and with a few visitors who have been able to live there for periods longer than is possible for a normal tourist.

JOURNAL: What are those people telling you?

CHAO: They are all saying that the Church in China is very much alive. Not as an institution or an organization. But very much alive in small groups throughout the countryside, and especially in the eastern coastal areas.

JOURNAL: But if it isn't known as an institution, how can the Church even be identified?

CHAO: Testimonies coming from these people — and all of them had once worshiped in these small groups — reveal at least three ways in which their witness is being extended:

First, Christians are known to their neighbors by their very exemplary lives. They stand out.

Second, the Gospel is being communicated faithfully among very close relatives — especially from parents to children.

Third, Christians are known for their power in prayer. Even non-Christians are experiencing the power of God when Christians pray for their sick ones or exorcise demons from those possessed.

So there is the Christian Church in China — a praying community, a witnessing community, a worshipping community. It is also a disciplined community. It abides by the Word. What else can you ask for a Church?

JOURNAL: In what way is an unorganized Church disciplined?

CHAO: In the sense that members really look after each other. If you're a person in need, the community makes sure this need is met through voluntary sharing. The other side of this is that if you behave wrongly, another person in the community will reprimand you.

JOURNAL: We have understood for a couple of decades that being a Christian in China was risky business — maybe even to the point of losing your life. Can you now be a Christian in China with no fear of reprisal?

CHAO: No. It's just that they are less persecuted than in the past. It was the worst during the cultural revolution. Severe persecution has mostly ceased now, but the Communists still don't welcome Christianity. In fact, in some areas, Christians do still live in fear. But the government's priorities have shifted from ideological purity to science, technology, defense, industry and agriculture. Still your point is fair: Christians can't yet proclaim their faith openly without fear.

JOURNAL: What's your guess about the size of the Church you've just described?

CHAO: About a million or more. Maybe up to five million.

JOURNAL: Out of a population of one billion?

CHAO: More like 940 million. About one tenth of one per cent. But really, there's no way to estimate. Some places, the Christians are very much in the background.

JOURNAL: Would such a Church ever have developed if missionaries had not been forced out of China in the late 1940's?

CHAO: I don't think the Church would have developed in such a vital way. Even before 1949 there were groups of Christians like those we see now,

household churches, with emphasis on spiritual gifts rather than on organization. But these weren't the churches brought into being by the missionaries, for the most part. They were indigenous.

The fact that the noninstitutional churches and Christian communities survive and even thrive in the coastal areas today is, in my opinion, an outgrowth of the earlier movements, some of which began in the 1920's.

JOURNAL: That's the good side — "God working all things for good" — of what many saw as a tragedy for the missionaries. What aspects of the expulsion of western missionaries do you regret?

CHAO: I would not regret anything about the disestablishment of missions except in the field of theological education, which is not allowed now at all, and the field of Christian literature, where production and distribution are not allowed.

Yet, even in those areas, if the Church itself had been allowed to develop freely, it would have found ways of carrying on those tasks without missionary help. The indigenous trend had already been established when the missionaries had to leave.

JOURNAL: Are you really claiming that the expulsion of the missionaries was a good thing?

CHAO: Yes. You see, Communism was used by the Lord to purge His Church. It was purged of the nonvital parts, of the wrong aspects of its missionary domination, and of what we call "rice Christians" — those who make professions just for the material gain they get from it.

JOURNAL: Do you believe that God is using Communism as part of His whole redemptive process? Was Chairman Mao one of God's servants?

CHAO: No, we should make a distinction. Some liberal Church leaders make the mistake of identifying social movements like Maoism in China with God's special redemptive acts. That view was reflected at the PCUS mission consultation at Montreal when they said that our mission is to discern what God is doing in the world and to join Him in that work.

Liberal missiologists and theologians tend to interpret God's redemption in terms of human activities and events. In doing this, they confuse God's special grace with His common grace.

God is in control of human history. But that control, or permissiveness, of what goes on in history is not the same as the saving work of Jesus Christ.

JOURNAL: Was Mao good or bad for China?

CHAO: I would interpret some of the good things that have come from Mao's revolution as common grace. But common grace is only that positive side of history. There's also the destructive side of history — like the way Mao killed those who opposed him and persecuted the Christians.

The Church has suffered much under Communism in China; there is no doubt about that. But the by-product of suffering is purging and sanctification.

JOURNAL: Was the Church in China eradicated all at once in the Communist takeover?

CHAO: Not at all. It was a process that stretched over three decades.

During the first decade (1949-1958) the Chinese Communists started by actually involving the religious groups in an overall strategy for Chinese independence. But at the time there was an obvious effort to discredit the religious leaders.

In the second period (1958-62), sometimes called the "great leap forward," rural churches became targets of oppression. But then the great drought led to widespread confusion, and there was a resurgence of Christian activity. But hard-liners gained control, and by 1963 there were new frontal attacks on Christian ideology.

During the cultural revolution (1966-69), Christians were attacked as remnants of an old ideology. So were Buddhists, Taoists, Confucianists, and liberal intellectuals. Bibles and hymnals were hunted out and burned. Believers were sometimes beaten and humiliated. The few remaining state-approved Churches were closed during this time, and even some home meetings were temporarily suspended.

JOURNAL: So the Church became almost extinct?

CHAO: Almost. But the sting of anti-Christian attacks under the cultural revolution has been removed. There has been a gradual shift from the ultraleft toward the center.

The new constitution of 1975 asserts both the legality and freedom of all religious beliefs and at the same time the freedom to oppose religions. With that small opening, institutionless Christian communities began holding house meetings again in a semi-clandestine manner. I see them as a modern counterpart to the early Christian Church.

JOURNAL: So do you expect China to open up to Western Christians?

CHAO: No. In light of past patterns of Communist control of religion, it is safe to predict that China will not permit professional missionaries or even Chinese evangelists.

JOURNAL: What about informal contacts?

CHAO: Christian contacts with China through visits by overseas Christians, tourist groups, or even possibly future technical assistance programs might improve. But this would amount to no more than personal contacts as citizens of good will.

JOURNAL: If China should ever open up to missionaries again what would you think of mass evangelism efforts such as have been used in other places in the world?

CHAO: I would not be happy with that.

But even more damaging than any particular form of evangelism would be the likely onrush by multiple denominations and organizations, all eager to reach the millions of people in China. A fragmented approach would not be a healthy thing.

Pluralism, denominations, division — all that is one thing in America. But when you take it to a foreign country it produces problems among Christians and in the churches.

JOURNAL: What specifically should be the role of Western missionaries if China ever does open up?

CHAO: Working side by side with Chinese Christians in evangelism and other tasks. In every land — and especially in China if that day comes — we need

missionaries. But we need missionaries who are humble enough to listen to their Christian brothers, in this case their Chinese Christian brothers, and to work together with them in developing methodologies and strategies — and even the lifestyle the missionaries should lead.

JOURNAL: What role does the China Graduate School of Theology plan to have in that educational task?

CHAO: Besides training Chinese for the ministry, we have four specific goals, especially in our new research center.

First, we want to inform ourselves and then others about the realities of China. We want to discover how Chinese on the mainland might respond to various forms of evangelism, so that when our day comes we will be ready. We want to know their culture and everything we can learn about how they think.

Second, we want to explore how to reach people who have been so totally influenced by Marxism for so many years. Some of them have lived their entire lives under that ideology. How do we approach them?

Third, we will not ignore Chinese scattered around the world. While those on the mainland have been conditioned by Marxism, those in Taiwan are conditioned by Confucianism. How should we approach them?

Fourth, we want to inculcate a missions consciousness among Chinese believers around the world, so that their churches will reach out as well.

JOURNAL: Tell us about your school's beginnings.

CHAO: Twelve years ago when I was a student at Westminster Seminary, I went to Taiwan for a year of short-term missionary work. I came back with a strong burden to help develop evangelical Chinese theological education, to build up Chinese Biblical scholarship, and to train university graduates for the ministry.

Until then, most Chinese training schools were receiving only high school graduates. The society around them was changing, becoming better educated, but the ministry was falling behind.

I came back and shared this vision with other Chinese theological scholars, and then four of us in 1967 committed ourselves to the task. Not long after, we recruited seven more, and then there were 11 of us. We called ourselves a "faculty in preparation," and set about completing our doctorates in various fields.

JOURNAL: That's a good example of Chinese patience.

CHAO: Perhaps so. We allowed ourselves eight years just to get ready.

During that time, we shared our vision with Chinese churches around the world, and now they carry most of the support for the school. In fact, 95 per cent of the support comes from Chinese.

Our budget is about \$16,000 per month. We have 50 students pursuing master of divinity degrees, and an evening extension program with from 250 to 350 students each quarter. They are lay leaders —

elders, deacons, Sunday school teachers. We also offer theological education by extension.

JOURNAL: In terms of ultimate outreach, you obviously see your new research center as very important. What is it costing?

CHAO: About \$48,000 for this first year, because we have to buy some equipment. Next year the budget should be about \$35,000.

We have always used a four-step approach. First, we center what we do in prayer. Then we look for a good team. Next, we plan the details carefully. Last, we seek the funds that we will need.

God has really prospered our efforts.

Editor's Note: As much attention is being given to China especially since the official decision by President Carter to recognize its Communist government, this article about the persecuted Christian church in that vast land may be of more than ordinary interest to many of our readers. Jonathan Chao is the son of Rev. Charles Chao who worked briefly for our Christian Reformed mission as an evangelist before the work in mainland China had to be broken off. As Christians we must not thoughtlessly echo the political and economic concerns that motivate our politicians and dominate our news. God's Word instructs us in Christian sympathy to "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity" (Heb. 13:3). Let us pray and hope that the Lord who governs the course of nations will make also the present world developments turn to the advancement of His gospel and Church.

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## WHERE IS BERKOUWER LEADING?

PETER DE JONG

A HOLE IN THE DIKE, *Critical Aspects of Berkouwer's Theology*, by Carl Bogue. Mack Publishing Co., Cherry Hill, N.J., 27 pp., 1977, paper, \$ .95.

A HALF CENTURY OF THEOLOGY, by G.C. Berkouwer, William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 268 pp., 1977, paper, \$9.95.

THE NEW SYNTHESIS THEOLOGY OF THE NETHERLANDS, by Cornelius Van Til, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Nutley, N.J., 100 pp., 1975, paper, \$4.50.

### Dean of Reformed Theologians

Within Reformed church circles no scholar has come to be more widely known and highly regarded than Professor Berkouwer. His fourteen large *Studies in Dogmatics* in English translations defy comparison with any other writings of Reformed scholars in our time. He is a historian, perhaps the historian of Christian doctrine. One has only to read a few of his chapters to observe that he seems to have read almost everything available by writers past or present dealing with his area of study. For many years he taught at the prestigious Free University of Amsterdam founded by Abraham Kuyper, and his word came to be widely regarded in Reformed churches and far beyond them as the standard treatment of Reformed doctrines. What Berkouwer said came to be accepted by many as the last

word; an appeal to him was enough to silence question or opposition. Especially in recent years big changes have come in the thinking of that long-time scholarly standard of the Reformed faith which everyone concerned about that Biblical faith ought to know. These three books in an unusually clear way show what those changes are.

### A Presbyterian's Observations

A good introduction to the subject, especially helpful to the average reader, is the little 25-page pamphlet of Carl Bogue, now a minister in the Presbyterian Church in America at Akron, Ohio. It contains a talk which he gave to some friends after having done his graduate work in the Netherlands under Professor Berkouwer. Somewhat reluctantly because of his personally friendly relations with the Professor, he was persuaded to print it because of the importance of the subject. Dr. Bogue sees Professor Berkouwer standing "with one foot in a confessional heritage he refuses to abandon and another foot in the world of ecumenical ventures which frequently conflicts with his heritage" (p. 5). After paying tribute to the Professor's "almost encyclopedic" knowledge of church history and doctrine, he deals "with a few . . . areas wherein Berkouwer has moved away from classical Reformed Theology."

1. While Berkouwer "seeks to be in subjection to the Word of God" he is adverse to drawing "good and necessary consequences" from its teachings and increasingly relativizes creeds as historically conditioned (pp. 6, 7). Berkouwer likes to distinguish the "intent" of the creeds from the changing "form" in which it is expressed. Stressing this distinction enables him in his "reinterpretation of the Canons of Dordt" to throw out "the 'causal' framework as an unfortunate historical form which tried to say too much and to restrict the context (the Synod's real intent) to a doxological reference to the sovereignty of God's grace." Bogue sees this as really "sneaking in of a new content under the guise of a new form for the old content" (p. 8).

2. Berkouwer "radiates excitement and enthusiasm" over the way in which Roman Catholics are relativizing their doctrines in the same way so that "via the form-content distinction Berkouwer is, with qualification, becoming a part of a new ecumenical alliance within and without the Roman Church where neo-orthodox theology tends to be the common denominator" (pp. 9, 10). In other words he has joined with the Roman Catholics and the Barthians whom he once vigorously opposed.

3. Berkouwer has taken over the "anti-systematic attitude" and subjectivism of much modern theology, assuming that faith must be opposed to logic and system (pp. 10-14).

4. Berkouwer rejects the notion of "cause" as attributable to God and in this connection while he wants to talk of election denies reprobation. "One gets the impression," says Bogue, "that Berkouwer tends to be a Calvinist in election and an Arminian in rejection. But if God's election is not something 'which cannot be changed' (i.e., election can be changed?), even his doctrine of election as Calvinistic is suspect" (although he admits that "Berkouwer

would reject such conclusions and say we are not looking in the way of faith") (p. 19).

5. "One of the most significant developments of all" is Berkouwer's changed view of Scripture. While in 1938 he opposed all forms of subjectivism and insisted that "the loss of Scripture inevitably brings with it a loss of the Christian faith," in 1966 and 1967 he has reversed his emphasis, stressing the "human factor," directing "attention away from a book to the Christ it proclaims," appealing to the Holy Spirit and defending "subjectivism" as "a proper way to see scriptural authority." Bogue cites a neo-orthodox study which traces Berkouwer's movement from (1) "the absolute authority of Scripture" to (2) "the salvation content of Scripture," to (3) "the existential direction of Scripture" (pp. 20-25).

Although Bogue observes that "Berkouwer is sometimes orthodox on a given point in spite of his method, not because of it" he suggests that the famous Professor "may well be the hole in the dike through which a flood is coming that will leave its mark in a way the frequent floods in the history of the Netherlands have never done. And it will be a flood whose damage will be far more difficult to repair" (pp. 25, 26).

#### A Fascinating Tour

Berkouwer's own book, *A Half Century of Theology* is like a tour guided by an incomparable expert through the movements in the area of Christian doctrine from the early 1920s to the present. It has received high praise for its variety of fascinating material. Beginning with a sketch of the doctrinal climate in his student days the guide leads us through the "era of apologetics" in which leaders were concerned about defending a system of Christian truth, through the revolution brought about by Karl Barth and his associates, through discussions about the doctrine of God's election, through the debates about the authority of the Bible, discussions about faith and reason, and, finally, the consideration of the future. It is a journey full of interesting observations especially to those who are somewhat familiar with the men and movements that are encountered.

#### Self-Acknowledged Changes

But to the readers whose interest goes deeper than an Athenian (Acts 17:21) concern for academic novelties, who are apprehensive about what is happening to the Reformed faith, Berkouwer's guided tour becomes increasingly disturbing. At point after point the criticisms we have seen in Bogue's little talk are corroborated by the Professor himself as he shows how his thinking has indeed changed over the years. His increasing sympathy with Karl Barth, his shifting, subjectivist views of scripture and concessions to higher criticism, his support of modern criticisms of authority (p. 158f.), his denial of reprobation, and for that matter of a real election are detailed by the Professor. On the last point, for example, he states, "the Bible does not present us with two classes of people, but only one, the sinners who are called to salvation" (p. 95), a patently false claim when made with respect to the Bible's doctrine of

election as many a text demonstrates (Matt. 20:16; 22:14; Mark 4:11; Romans 9:11ff.). Whereas the great scholar once took the lead in seeking to set off the Reformed faith against opposing views, notably those of the Roman Catholic Church and of Karl Barth, he now shows in page after page that he has become so sympathetic with and enamoured with their views that he quotes them at every turn as his authorities as he joins them on an ecumenical course that is heading to an unknown future.

#### Van Til's Critique

Dr. Cornelius Van Til's little 100-page book on *The New Synthesis Theology of the Netherlands* calls attention more extensively to these same changes in the views of Dr. Berkouwer and his followers and colleagues. In an October, 1975 *OUTLOOK* review of Dr. Van Til's earlier book, *The New Hermeneutic* I observed that while he explained in detail what the new liberal views of the Bible were, his treatment of the Dutch leaders who were promoting it was very brief.

This newer volume traces much more extensively the way in which these Dutch Reformed men, pre-eminently Dr. Berkouwer, have been turning away from the traditional Reformed faith and toward "reinterpretation" of it along the neo-orthodox lines of Karl Barth. In this book Van Til outlines the way in which Berkouwer in 1938 maintained and defended the orthodox view of the Bible against its critics (pp. 44-62) and even warned against the constant temptation to compromise it to make room for man's desire to be his own boss. Then he shows how in Berkouwer's 1966 and 1967 writings on the subject "there is no longer, for Berkouwer, such a thing as a distinctively Reformed view" of the Bible (p. 62), but he has accepted "what he calls a 'personalist', rather than 'determinist', view of God's revelation to man." This change is destructive of both the old idea of God's election and the old idea of the Bible. This rejection of the old idea of the Bible's authority for the sake of the modern idea of man's freedom or "autonomy" is also traced in the thinking of many of Berkouwer's younger followers.

Much more could be cited from these as well as other books to show how Berkouwer, the long-time "dean" of Reformed theologians has reversed his views at a number of critical points regarding the Christian faith and life.

#### Devastating Results

The consequences of this change, amounting essentially to a betrayal of the Reformed faith at fundamental points by its most respected leader, have been devastating, especially within the various Reformed churches. Many of the multiplying problems within our own Christian Reformed churches are to a significant degree traceable to Berkouwer and his colleagues at the Free University where many of our ministers and professors have done graduate work. Multiplying attacks on the Bible's authority and inerrancy, the attacks on the binding character of the churches' creeds, the surrender to evolutionary views, the rejection of the doctrine of reprobation — really of the Biblical doctrine of elec-



tion and even God's sovereignty (Eph. 1:11) — can find support in the later work of Berkouwer.

### Biblical Precedents

A dozen years ago in the February, 1967 *Torch and Trumpet*, I noted the radical changes which were taking place in the constitution of the Free University of Amsterdam, observing that they reminded one of the changes that came over the wise King Solomon. Over the years "his wisdom, wealth, power and prestige brought temptations which overcame him." "With the adulation that came to him from every quarter as his reputation grew . . . alliances with people of many cultures placed him under increasing pressure to show his wisdom by exercising the virtue of 'understanding' or 'tolerance', to rise above the petty discriminations of nationality, color and creed and show the magnanimity of his mind by indulging the opinions . . . of his friends." And so it came about that he who had begun his career by building a temple to Israel's God, the only God of the whole earth was, in an increasingly "ecumenical" policy building and worshiping also at idol temples before that career was finished. If that comparison was applicable to the Free University, it seems increasingly to apply also to the changing views of its leading and most famous theologian.

One of the participants in the recent Council on Inerrancy meeting in Chicago observed that the devil in seeking to do the maximum amount of damage to the Lord's gospel and cause, may be expected to devote special effort to subverting the churches' leadership and the schools in which they are trained. The Bible already shows that principle at work in his partially successful efforts to mislead Simon Peter (Matthew 16:21-24; Luke 22:31-34; Galatians

2:11-18). The Lord preserved His gospel and people, but He did it not only by inspiring and using the teachings and labors of such leaders, but also by sternly warning us against following their stumbling and errors. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (I Cor. 10:12).

It is disturbing and saddening to see the havoc that is being wrought both within and among the various Reformed churches by these compromises and changes in some of their formerly most respected leaders. Those churches, including our own, are increasingly confused and of two minds about every question of doctrine or life which they confront, an attitude which the Lord warns us He will never bless (James 1:7, 8).

In a time when there is around us a new appreciation of and receptivity to the Bible-believing effort of the Reformed tradition to bring "the whole council of God," churches like our own which are supposed to be promoting it find their policies in confusion and their efforts regarded with mixed appreciation and justified suspicion. See this happening among the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches cooperating in NAPARC, for example.

The student or preacher may profit greatly by study of the massive volumes of Berkouwer on the various areas of Christian doctrine, but he is compelled to be just as cautious against accepting many of Berkouwer's conclusions as he has to be against accepting the errors of other liberal leaders whose views Berkouwer now accommodates. The Lord has preserved and will preserve His gospel and church, but He reminds us that He does it by warning against and delivering from not only the errors of those outside of the church but also from the sometimes more subtle temptations that come through its own erring leaders (Matt. 16:23; Acts 20:30-32).

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reformed women speak

## CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY

BETTY TEITSMAS

The subject of hospitality is often discussed when ministers and their wives get together. A deep concern is expressed by many of them that hospitality is not being practiced by many members of our Christian communities and thus an urgent need is not being met. Lonely people are everywhere — singles, sick and shut-ins, and newcomers to our neighborhoods and churches. They need love, caring, kindness, attention; they often feel "left out."

Before I proceed further, I wish to make it clear that I am not speaking of the congregation which we are presently serving. My observations are based on my experiences as a minister's daughter and as a minister's wife for twenty-seven years, plus the comments of numerous other people.

Hospitality is defined as a warm reception of guests, the practice of entertaining visitors with

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kindness and courtesy. The Bible commands us to practice hospitality (Romans 12:13 & I Timothy 3:2) and to use hospitality one to another without grudging (I Peter 4:9). Some people think this refers only to ministers and elders because of the context of I Timothy. Even though I feel that they should be good examples of hospitality, the responsibility does not stop with them. The contexts of the other two verses show that this virtue is to be found amongst *all* of God's children. Paul and Peter are both talking to churches, giving instructions for Christian living. Even though the manner of hospitality has changed since the days of the early church, the basic principle still holds. It is another "fruit" of the Christian life.

Excuses abound in this area of life. Females say: "My house is not clean enough" — "My furniture is not very nice" — "I never know what to serve" — "It's too much work." The male members state that they don't feel like it or they don't have time. But as is the case with so much of our Christianity, priorities are the problem. So much of our time is given to sports and recreation; a lot of time is spent in front of the T.V. A little of this time could be given each week to hospitality. I don't think our homes and food are valid excuses either. Most people that are in-

vited to your home will not criticize your house or food. (If they do, that's *their* problem!) I like to have my home adequately clean and neat and I enjoy setting a pretty table with attractive and tasty food. But that should not become a god! Perhaps we feel too competitive in this area and we need to simplify our menus. Besides, we have so many convenient appliances in this modern age with which to do our work plus numerous food items that make for easy preparation. Not all entertaining has to be meals either; sometimes a coffee time is sufficient. And, of course, the shut-ins need us to come to them. We can still bring the meal or lunch while showing love and caring.

"I do entertain often" — "I have a lot of company." These are comments often made. But who are the people being entertained? They are usually relatives, special friends and "cliques," and those who meet our standards of acceptability. Who gives us the right to set standards? Is this following the example of Christ? We really don't have an "open door" policy toward everyone in our church or neighborhood.

We also become extremely age conscious. This is not necessary at all. Various ages can mix well and are stimulating to one another. Many of my good friends are not in my age bracket and I find it delightful.

People are often afraid to invite some new person or family or someone they hardly know. They fear that it will be difficult to talk and visit but in most cases it will not be a difficult task. It is interesting to find out where people were born and grew up, their hobbies, occupations, etc. In the case of Christians we have a common bond in our faith and love for the Lord. New friendships often develop from these

deeds of hospitality. People feel loved and happy — they leave our homes with a glow!

Another aspect of hospitality is that we learn to know one another and can therefore understand each other in a more helpful way. We share our joys, sorrows, and problems; we pray for one another more intelligently. It also keeps us from becoming too judgmental. And we often discover some hidden talent in a person which can be most useful in the church or community. Thus blessings of many types come from new friendships.

Church growth is aided greatly by a Christian community which is strong in showing hospitality. Our society is very mobile and families often move far away from their relatives and friends. The church really becomes their family and they need to feel wanted and accepted. This is an extremely crucial time for people and we many times fail as Christians in this area of life. To make new converts welcome is always part of evangelism. This means we love them and accept them *as they are* with their own national backgrounds, social customs and cultures. To speak and act friendly at the church is not enough; these people must be incorporated into our activities and daily living. Some of these people set wonderful examples of Christian hospitality, putting us to shame.

I am not recommending a big scale plan of hospitality, with dates set weeks and months ahead. But I do feel that our time should be budgeted to include this in our daily living. God's Word commands it; it is another way of showing our love for God and for others. We should do it without grudging or patronizing; love, kindness and courtesy are the guidelines. Remember, you might entertain angels unawares! (Heb. 13:2)

## LESSONS FROM I PETER



REV. HENRY VANDER KAM

Lessons 13 and 14 on I Peter, by Rev. Henry Vander Kam, pastor of the Christian Reformed Church, Lake Worth, Florida, appear in this issue. Two lessons are presented each month. This series is intended for church societies, other Bible study groups, and any others interested in knowing more about God's Word.

### LESSON 13

I Peter 4:7-11

## *How to live in the end-time*

A Christian must live a life which is in keeping with his union to Jesus Christ. Christ lives in him,

and all of his life must be a reflection of the life of Christ. He must live according to the principles laid down in the law of God. He must live a life which attracts others to the Christ. He must live his whole life as in the presence of God. These things he must do consistently. Yet, there are times in his life when the urgency to live such a life is even greater than at other times. The Apostle now speaks of one of those times.

**Be aware of the time** — Peter reminds his readers that the end of all things is at hand. He does not mean that the return of Christ is expected in his lifetime or in the very near future, but that he and his readers are living in the final dispensation. The former times (Old Testament) served to prepare the way for the coming of Christ. These former times taught the people their need of a suffering servant of Jehovah and God had revealed His love and grace to them by promising salvation.

When Jesus came, He took our nature, brought the sacrifice for sin, rose as Victor over death and the grave, ascended into the heavens to sit at God's right hand as Ruler over all things and sent His Spirit to make His work effective. The time of preparation had come to an end. We are now living in the end-time — during the whole gospel period —



awaiting His return on the clouds of heaven. His return is the only event which still awaits.

**Be of sound mind and pray** — How long this period of time, called the end-time, will be, no one knows. They must, however, realize that the times are speeding to their conclusion. They will need guidance during this period of time. Many of those to whom Peter is writing will live to see the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. Many thoughts will go through their minds at such a time. There will be the danger that many will be led astray. Jesus had warned the people of His day concerning these things. The people living during the gospel age must always be on the watch and ready, but they must not allow any "happening" during their lifetime to move them from the calling with which Christ has called them.

They are to be of sound mind and sober. The eye of faith must always be directed toward the return of Christ. This will influence their whole manner of life. Strange views concerning the time of His return or the manner of that return must not lead them astray. They may not allow their judgments to be darkened. They must be sane and sober. So only will they be able to continue in their prayers for the coming of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. If their prayers are hindered by wrong views concerning their Savior's return, their lives will not conform to the standards given in the word of God. Wrong views concerning the nature of the end-time will influence all of life. Your prayers must continue as you have been taught!

**Be fervent in love** — The life of the church is to be characterized by a fervent love which the members of that church have one for another. This was the commandment which had been given them by their Lord and reiterated by everyone of the Apostles. This belongs to the nature of their union with Christ. This love will be tested time and again during the long span of time between the first and second coming of Christ. This requirement is "above all." This relationship is of vital importance because otherwise they would like the "world" which has not tasted of the love relationship to the Christ.

The love which they are to show to each other "covers a multitude of sins." This is indeed a strange statement. No matter how much love we have — it doesn't cover sins! Even the love of God doesn't cover sins! Only the blood of Jesus Christ is able to do that. What, then, does the Apostle mean by this statement?

Perhaps the statement can be clarified best by considering the opposite of the statement the author makes. Hatred exposes the sins of others. It does this because it delights in these sins. Men speak of these sins and bare them before others. Love does the opposite. It does not seek to expose sins but rather seeks to cover them! He is speaking of the life of Christians during the gospel age. They are to love one another. They will show that love for their fellow believers by not parading the sins of others but by being silent about them. This does not mean that love closes the eyes to the sins of self or others,

but: "Love suffereth long and is kind; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, endureth all things" (I Cor. 13:4-7). This is the way in which love covers a multitude of sin. But, then love must be strong and the very heart of a believer's life.

**Be hospitable** — The love which they are to have for each other is not satisfied by the mere statement that they indeed love one another. It must show itself practically. It is indeed significant how often the New Testament commands the people to be hospitable. Jesus spoke of it; Paul referred to it many times; and Peter now commands it as an indication of real love for each other.

It was so important that the homes of believers would be open to give food and lodging to those who were persecuted for the faith and had to flee from one place to the other. It was also important for the messengers of the gospel as they sought to reach as many places as possible. This hospitality is to be given without murmuring. To afford hospitality to those in need was indeed a sacrifice for many. Many of the people were very poor themselves. Extra mouths to feed became a financial burden. Most of the homes were small. To invite a "guest" into the home of a sizable family was often a hardship. Yet, if you have a true love for the Christ, for His gospel, and for the people who share a common salvation with you, you will show hospitality without murmuring, but gladly.

Christ lays claim on us and all that we have. It is all to be at His service! This will also prove to all that the love of which we speak is genuine! Such hospitality will bring its own rich rewards. "Thereby some have entertained angels unawares," says the writer to the Hebrews. God's people always experience that His commands are not grievous. God always rewards richly; and, as His people show their love for each other, their God reveals His love to them in ever greater measure.

**Be good stewards of God's grace** — Love for the Christ and love for His people has been given to everyone who confesses the name of Jesus Christ. True, it must be practiced more and more, but love belongs to the nature of the believer's life. Now Peter speaks of other gifts. These gifts are many and varied.

Each believer has received gifts! If we say that we have no gifts, we do not honor the incalculable wealth of our Father. Each believer must recognize the gift or gifts which he has received and must use these for the benefit of all. Each believer has been made rich for the church! Only when these gifts are used for the benefit of all will the individual be enriched himself. The relationship between the believer and the entire church is so close that the one is not able to exist without the other.

They are to use their gifts for the profit of all so that they will be "good stewards of the manifold grace of God." This is a beautiful statement. It shows us that the grace of God is so varied, so rich,

so many-faceted. No one has ever been able to picture the grace of God in its full depth. By that grace He has given gifts to His people. They are gifts of *grace*.

The multitude of the gifts give us just a small picture of the riches of His grace. His people are called upon to be good stewards of that grace! No one may then keep the gifts he has received for himself as though he is the owner of these gifts. He is but a steward, and a steward has to be faithful in the things entrusted to him. Gifts have been given to enrich the body of Jesus Christ, and the steward must see to it that they are so used. What strength the church will display in this end-time when she is enriched by the gifts supplied to each one of her members!

**Be ministers for God's glory** — In the concluding verse of this paragraph the writer speaks of some of the gifts which have been given to the members of the church. The gospel must be proclaimed. Men will be used to proclaim it. Not only those in office, charged with this specific task, but even many in the church will have opportunity to speak with those not of the household of faith. Let them speak the oracles of God.

This is not the time for vain talk. Let those who minister to the other needs of men do so by the strength which God supplies. Let God's people make known the way of salvation and let them also show benevolence to others. Let it not be done as a "do-gooder" but in the name of the God who appointed you to His service. Rejoice in being in His employ! Let others not only hear of God by your speaking but let them also see Him in your service to them.

In everything God is to be glorified through Jesus Christ. The life of every believer must be lived to show forth the praises of the one true God! That is the life which receives His approval, and only then are we attaining our purpose in this life. Selfishness has no place in the life of the believer. He will taste of the true joy of life only when he lives for his God. This was the goal placed before every man at the beginning, and only the true believer has recaptured this purpose.

The believer's purpose in life is thus attained. This is the purpose of all that God has made. Glory and dominion belong to Him. As in the Lord's Prayer, we are to pray for the coming of His Kingdom — and conclude that His is the Kingdom! It is His and nobody can rob Him of it. The description of the life of believers in the end-time ends in a doxology!

#### Questions for discussion:

1. What are the benefits and what are the difficulties of living in the end-time?
2. Is there good reason to urge people to be sane and sober about the time and manner of the return of Christ in our day? Explain.
3. Does the love of God save from sin? What does Isaiah 1:27 mean? What does the love of God accomplish?
4. Is hospitality toward others still quite important?
5. Does every believer have gifts? Explain.
6. What is meant by the manifold grace of God?

## LESSON 14

I Peter 4:12-19

### *Suffering for Christ's sake*

There are indeed many facets to the life of a believer. There are so many seeming contradictions in his life. Jesus spoke of this many times and taught the people that those who would lose their lives would find life. They lose everything and are rich; they die to themselves and so are made alive. They have a happiness greater than any other and suffer the most. Many more such so-called contradictions are found in the Scriptures to characterize the life of His people. This makes the Christian life understandable to the unbeliever and often even fills the mind of the believer with questions.

The people to whom Peter is writing this epistle were greatly disturbed to find that they had to endure all manner of suffering for the faith they professed. They believed on the Christ, they loved Him and they sought to serve Him faithfully. He is on the throne and is in control over all things. Then, why must His people suffer so in this present world? They have experienced that it is not all joy and ease of life when one follows Jesus Christ. But, had that been promised?

**Not strange but normal** — Peter addresses this problem in this paragraph and shows them that the readers should not think it strange at all that they have to suffer in this present time because of their faith in Jesus Christ. It seems as though the persecution has become more intense in the days in which he is writing. He speaks of "fiery" trials which have come upon them. Persecution has become more heated.

Christ had foretold these sufferings of His people. In the world they would have tribulation. Still, they can be of good cheer because He has overcome the world (John 16:33). He has not overcome the world with the intention of *preventing* sufferings, but to reveal to them that the world will not be victorious.

But, why are they called to suffer all this in their lives? Peter says that it is to *prove* them! The sufferings of the present time will be used to *refine* them as precious metals are refined by fire. Therefore they must not think it strange or that a strange thing, something out of the hands of Christ, has come upon them. No, one who knows the Scriptures and has listened closely to the teaching of Christ will realize that this situation is normal. Despite the suffering which they now endure, they are still the beloved of God.

**A cause to rejoice** — Instead of wondering or murmuring at the ways of God whereby they are caused to suffer, the readers should rejoice! No one can rejoice in suffering except the Christian. He is sharing in the sufferings of Christ! Christ has indeed suffered more than any of His followers will ever be called to do. His church is still on the earth and all the forces of evil are directed against Him — but He is "out of reach" — and consequently the hatred of the world is now directed against His people. Neither must they think that suffering will be the



endless lot of those who have confessed Jesus Christ as their Savior. They will also be partakers of His glory. This brings a very strong sense of joy even in the present day while they are enduring the contempt and suffering at the hands of men. Surely, there is no comparison between the suffering of the present and the glory which they shall receive!

The Apostle uses even stronger words in verse 14 to show the readers that they need not be surprised, nor feel forsaken when they are reproached. Of course, it must be a reproach for the sake of Christ, and not because of something in them. If they are so reproached, they are *blessed!* Jesus had said the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:11). That blessedness consists in this that the Spirit of glory and of God then rests on them. The Spirit of God then speaks through you. There is a glory which then radiates from you. When men reproach you in this way it will become evident to them that they are not only dealing with you, but that they are dealing with the Spirit of God!

**A time of proving and refining** — It is conceivable that the readers of this epistle could be reproached for two different reasons. He has spoken of the reproach which comes upon them for the sake of Christ. Then they are blessed. If they would be reproached because they do not live a law-abiding life, there would be no blessedness in such reproach. If they would suffer as murderers, or thieves, or wrongdoers in any way, or as those who busy themselves with such things as do not concern them, they would deserve to suffer for it. However, they realize that such a manner of life is forbidden.

But, their suffering as Christians is the subject wherewith the Apostle is dealing. It is interesting to note that only here and twice in the book of Acts is the term "Christian" used in the New Testament. They are the followers of Christ and are united to Him. They must not be ashamed of this kind of suffering which comes upon them but in and through this suffering they are to glorify God.

Is the suffering of believers for the sake of Christ merely an arbitrary act of God which He could just as well have prevented? Does the purpose of this suffering belong to the hidden or secret will of God so that we will never be able to understand the reason for it? Such questions filled the minds of the first readers of this epistle and still bother many believers today. Peter says that the sufferings and reproaches which fall on them are a part of the program of God which He has revealed to us.

**No cause to be ashamed** — This is the time, i.e., the gospel age, for judgment to begin with the household of God. There will be no judgment on them when this age has come to a close. There will then be no condemnation at that time for those who love God. Nor does a judgment of condemnation come upon them in this present time.

The judgment which now begins with the household of God is a judgment of proving and of refining. The church of Jesus Christ is being cleansed. The sin which surrounds them and still has its effect in their lives is being purged. It is a judgment which has sanctification or the holiness of His people as its

goal. His people are His concern. He uses the fiery trials to purify His people. Should they then not glorify the God who is sending these things upon them? Their difficult experiences are for their welfare! So does the Kingdom of God come ever more fully within them.

**Not to be compared to the judgment of the ungodly** — If the life of the child of God is characterized by all manner of suffering in this present time would it not be better to belong to that group which causes the suffering rather than that which receives it? Is it profitable to belong to the children of God? Such questions might not be put into words but they could enter into the hearts of his readers.

Peter therefore speaks concerning the end of those who do not obey the gospel. The "judgment" which falls on His people in the present age cannot be compared to the end judgment which will fall on the disobedient. They will not be covered by the work and blood of Christ and will stand naked before the judgment of God. His people can even rejoice in the judgment which begins at the house of God, but the judgment which falls on the disobedient can only lead to final despair.

Verse 18 shows us how important it is to take every word of the Scriptures in the context in which it is written. When the author speaks of the righteous being scarcely saved, the conclusion might be drawn that this will occur in such a way as to leave the outcome in doubt till the very last moment. But, Jesus Christ has come to give a full and abundant salvation to His people. No one shall snatch them out of His hand. No one will thwart His work. The believer also knows that heaven's door stands wide open for those who have confessed Jesus as Lord. How can the Apostle then speak of the righteous as being scarcely saved?

This statement becomes meaningful only in the light of the preceding words. His people suffer here and it is the kind of suffering which cannot be avoided. It is a part of the work of sanctification which goes on throughout this dispensation. *That* is what Peter means by being scarcely saved. They are not saved except through the refining process which goes on in their lives — not apart from it. It is a difficult process for the child of God. That's where the emphasis lies.

Now, in contrast, if the righteous is scarcely saved, where shall then the ungodly and sinner appear? Such a one does not fear or serve or honor Him. He tramples upon all His commandments. He lives unto himself and gives no thought to the future. He does not consider that he will have to give an account of all that he has done because he does not believe that God will finally stand as Judge. Where shall such a person appear? To ask the question is to answer it.

**In the hands of a faithful Creator** — Many questions filled the minds of the readers when they tried to understand the reason for all the afflictions which they had to endure. Peter has given them answers to their basic questions.

They must now see to it that they live according to the way he has shown them. Let their lives be

beyond reproach. This is their duty and their calling. When the Lord then allows suffering to come to them, they are to entrust their souls, their lives, into the hand of a faithful Creator. Even though they may not be able to understand the reason for all these things, they must leave it with Him. He is in control and He has all power. He will, therefore, also give them the strength to bear all the afflictions which may come. If they would take matters into their own hands they might seek to wreak vengeance. If they would seek to understand all the trials which they have to bear, they would run stuck. No, leave it in the hands of the faithful Creator where they amid all the things which may happen to them are safe.

#### Questions for discussion:

1. Do the ways of God often seem strange and unjust today?
2. What should our answer be to those who say: If God is a God of love how can He allow tragedies to happen?
3. How can we glory in suffering? Is this more than being patient?
4. Do all God's people have times of suffering? Why do some have so much more suffering in their lives than others?
5. How can we leave the various problems of life in the hands of God? Is there much comfort in this?

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## SHOULD WE HAVE FEMALE OFFICE-BEARERS? I

LOUIS PRAAMSMA

Dr. Louis Praamsma is a retired Christian Reformed minister living in Hamilton, Ontario, after having served a number of pastorates both in the Netherlands and in Canada. He is the author of a life of John Calvin and more recently of a multi-volume Church History (covering a subject which he also taught for a time at Calvin Seminary).

In this article he brings both his impressive historical scholarship and his thorough knowledge of the Bible to bear on the practical question increasingly agitating the churches about whether special church offices should be opened to women.

One of the most fascinating characteristics observable in the works of the great reformers Luther and Calvin is the spontaneous reverence which they show for Scripture.

They ask no questions about its authority; without any doubt it was and it is the Word of God.

All efforts to find in their works beginnings of a negative-critical attitude toward the Bible have

failed; to them the expression "It is written" was the end of all contradiction.

In the same way we are struck by their spontaneous repudiation of the ministry of women in the church, that is *that* ministry while rules the church in the name and with the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### Luther's Convictions

What did *Luther* say about it? — he was confronted by this problem by Anabaptists and enthusiasts who claimed a charismatic calling for women. He responded to them in his "Von Schleichern und Winkelpredigern" (1532)<sup>1</sup> and mentioned in the work several prophetesses from the Bible, but he added that these women in special circumstances had received a special calling from the Lord. The *rule* for the life of the church was, however, to be found in the commandment of Paul to keep silent which was clearly inspired by the Holy Spirit. This command, declares Paul, is the command of the Lord. As for the rest, women can and should "pray, sing, praise and say Amen, and read and teach one another in the household, admonishing, comforting, and also expounding the Holy Scriptures" as well as they possibly can.<sup>2</sup>

He repeated the same in 1539: "The Holy Spirit has excluded women, children and incapable people from the office of preaching."

#### Calvin's View

What did *Calvin* say about it? — he wrote about this topic in detail in his commentaries. But almost in passing he did the same in his Institutes, as if he took it for granted that everyone would agree.

Writing about the so-called emergency-baptism as it was practiced also by women in the Roman Catholic church he expressed himself in the following way: "Even in the smallest things, as in food and drink, whatever we undertake with a doubtful conscience, Paul openly pronounces to be sin (Rom. 14:23). Therefore in baptism by women there is much graver sin where it is plain that a rule given by Christ is violated, inasmuch as we know that it is unlawful to put asunder what God has joined together (Matt. 19:6; Mark 10:9)."

The meaning of the words of Calvin is clear from the context. He had just explained that Christ had ordained that the preachers of the gospel should also be "ministers of baptism" (Matt. 28:19), and that evidently men were appointed to do so; as soon as women began to baptize they put asunder that *one* office.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, Calvin referred to the unanimous consensus of the ancient church in this matter; only heretics had allowed women to baptize.

This was the way in which the Reformers read their Bible and understood the history of the Christian church; in more recent times the situation has considerably changed, as well in the world in general as in different churches.

#### Changes in Today's World

As far as the world in general is concerned, the Dutch Professor J. van Bruggen mentions a three-fold *emancipation*.



According to him the emancipation of women in the beginning of the 20th century was *social* and *cultural* in character; what was being stressed was the women's suffrage and their right to study.

In the sixties a *sexual* emancipation was launched which has also been called a sexual revolution; chastity and virginity were no longer considered to be virtues; in the Dutch language it was said that women wanted to be "bosses of their own belly"; pill and abortion were applied in an increasing measure.

In the seventies we were witnesses of a *structural* emancipation; all structures of human society must be liberated from any male authority; total equality in everything, that was the slogan.<sup>4</sup>

### Changing Views of Churches

As far as the several churches are concerned, this was the time in which women gradually were admitted to the respective offices of deacon, elder and minister.

In the Reformed churches of the Netherlands<sup>5</sup> one can listen to female ministers in several places, and female elders and deacons are present in many places. The same is true in different Lutheran and Presbyterian churches, although not in the Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic churches. A person who protests this course of affairs is often considered to be hopelessly old-fashioned; although he is in the company of the church of 19 centuries, he no longer seems to fit in that of the 20th century.

### Arguments Cited for Ordaining Women

1. The great argument in favor of the holding of church-offices by women is that of natural equality; if anyone disagrees he is immediately accused of discrimination.

2. The second argument is that of what is considered to be the revolutionary character of the Christian faith; the central history of the Bible is the Exodus which was (according to this view) the great liberation of slaves from a reign of suppression; liberation of slaves, of poor and neglected people, also of women, should be preached from all pulpits.

There are also some other arguments.

3. It is said that during the Second World War so many pastors had to serve in the army, that at any rate in Germany it was a must for women to conduct worship services and to lead congregations; in the same way the decision of the Presbyterian Church in Canada to ordain women (1966) has been defended; "some of the observers felt that the many vacant pulpits in the home mission field tipped the scales in favor of the action."<sup>6</sup> Many Dutchmen tell you a similar story: because men (for whatever reason) were no longer available, women had to take their places.

4. Finally the argument is often repeated that in our time we understand Scripture in a new and better manner than in former days.

Already in 1877 the Dutch-Reformed minister Manssen declared in a study about "Christianity and the woman" that Paul had been preoccupied too much with Jewish ideas; in our century the honorable Miss G.M. Asch van Wijk wrote in her "Joined together by God" (1936) that this apostle contra-

dicted himself in his opinions about women, and she added in another work on the same topic in 1950 that we are liberated from the rigid literalism of Scripture.

Prof. Kuitert declared in 1970: "We act today differently from the rules of the Bible, and in the Bible men acted differently from what we consider to be the rules of our time."<sup>7</sup>

Here we meet the well-known notion of the "time-boundness" of the Bible; Paul had got his first lessons from the rabbi's and he could never forget them; those rabbi's had told him their stories about the creation of man and the subordination of women; Paul echoed their viewpoint. In our own church Prof. Willis P. DeBoer approaches this point of view.<sup>8</sup>

### The Bible Is Not Time-Bound

Is the Bible indeed "time-bound"? Has our scientific knowledge so widely expanded, have our psychological insights so much deepened, have our sociological interests so much broadened, that we may say every now and then: we know better? — are we allowed to declare (as a Dutch theological professor did) that Paul indeed condemned homosexuality, but that we in our time know more than he did? — are we allowed to adapt the Bible to our 20th century lifestyle and thinking?

The answer to these questions should be given without any hesitation: If we place only one step on this slippery road, we are prone to fall with the following; in that case the one scholar comes today with his constructions and the other comes tomorrow with his brand new insights and the poor congregation travels through the mist.

The Bible is not time-bound; it speaks with authority for all times.

### The Bible Is Time-Related

This does not mean, however, that the books of the Bible are not *time-related*; it would be foolish to deny this.

"Time-bound" means: as a human book the Bible has only a relative, limited authority.

"Time-related" means: as the inspired Word of God the Bible has absolute authority, expressed in the language and in the situation of the time of the author.

We have only to think of the ox and the ass of the tenth commandment in order to find out what is meant by the term "time-related"; we can also consider the fact that the Bible contains a history of salvation, that e.g. all the sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed to the great sacrifice of Calvary, which they foreshadowed and by which they were abolished; in the same way the Holy Supper took the place of Passover and Baptism came in the place of circumcision.

Time-related! — Also the way in which one dresses himself (herself) or expresses his/her feelings already depends in the Bible itself on times and places.

What the Christians in Paul's time expressed by the "holy kiss" (Rom. 16:16, I Thess. 5:26) is conveyed by us by a firm handshake<sup>9</sup>; and the same

principle applies to the much-discussed question of the veiling of the women (I Cor. 11:4-10).

Evidently in the church of Corinth some women appeared in the meetings of the congregations who "abused their liberty in their desire to put man and woman on the same level." They did this when in ecstasy by laying aside their veils. In that time immoral women acted in the same way. "Probably prostitutes used to or were compelled to cut their hair and to keep it very short. Paul's argument may be summed up as follows: if immoral women were shaven and if they behaved like men, then honorable women should cover their heads and distinguish themselves in all things from men or else they placed themselves on a level with immoral women."<sup>10</sup> The point in question is not the veil, no more than the point in question in the tenth commandment is the ox and the ass; the point in question is that of women behaving like men in the worship services; and *this* is the point which calls for our obedient attention in the context of the whole Bible.

### The Bible on the Role of Women

How does the Word of God speak on women in general and on the office of women in particular?

#### Women in the Old Testament

Let us first take a brief look at the teaching of the Old Testament. The first woman was created by God out of Adam, after Adam had been created as *as a help for Adam*; she got two names: Isha ("spouse"<sup>11</sup>) and Eve ("mother").

By these two names she was characterized: a help for her husband and a mother for her children; and in that way she is honored throughout the Old Testament, in which we read the beautiful hymn of the virtuous housewife in Prov. 31; in which we also find the repeated expression concerning the kings of Judah; "the name of his mother was so and so"; evidently those mothers meant much to their children.

On the other hand we find in the first pages of the Bible the story of the fall; the devil knocked first at the door of Eve's heart and Eve led Adam astray. We can try to explain this course of events on psychological grounds — the devil is a great psychologist — at any rate we don't find an excuse here for Adam's sin. However, the result was pronounced in the word of God: "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing . . . yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Gen. 3:16).

In many ways the shadows of these words accompany the life of women in the Old Testament; in most cases they had to stay at the background; polygamy and divorce, caused by hardness of heart, were allowed. There was a well-known synagogical prayer: "Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast not made me a woman."<sup>12</sup>

We should also notice the fact that we don't find female priests or Levites in the Old Testament; among other peoples there were priestesses and female temple-servants a plenty; this was not the case in Israel.

#### Women in the New Testament

Turning to the New Testament we discover that the time of female humiliation is over; rightly it has

been said that the woman has been made free by the Son of Man.

Jesus honored marriage by His presence at the wedding in Cana; He prohibited adultery as well as arbitrary divorce, He required monogamy; the high place of a marriage in the Lord is evidenced by the comparison with the relation between Christ and His church.

With great honor many individual women are mentioned; in the first place the mother of the Lord, Mary; then Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna and many others who provided for the disciples out of their means (Luke 8:3); also the women who on Easter morning went to the tomb with their spices. They all served the Lord, and the same is true of Dorcas who made coats and garments, of Lydia who received Paul and his companions in her house, of Priscilla who with her husband hosted a congregation in her house, and of many others whose names we find in the letters of Paul.

We may conclude that by Christ the woman has been completely restored in the office of all believers; believing in Him, she is a prophetess, a priestess and a queen.

She confesses the name of her Lord and she can do so in a special manner in the education of her children, in the general work of education, in evangelism and in missions.

She offers her life to Him and can do so in a special sense in the care for sick and weak persons, for widows and orphans, for persons in social misery.

She fights against sin and the devil, and can do so by pleading for purity and chastity, for "all that is pure and lovely and gracious" (Phil. 4:8), by "her reverent and chaste behavior" (I Peter 3:2).

This is all very wonderful, but in view of all this we are struck the more by the fact that we find *no female office-bearers* in the New Testament, no female ministers, elders or deacons.

#### Women Were Not Called to the Church Offices

It has become customary to point to Phoebe, who is called in the R.S.V. "a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae" (Rom. 16:1). But according to both Prof. H. Ridderbos and Prof. J. Murray it is very dubious whether Phoebe was really a deaconess in the technical sense of the word. Writes Murray: "If Phoebe ministered to the saints, as is evident from verse 2, then she would be a servant of the church and there is neither need nor warrant to suppose that she occupied or exercised what amounted to an ecclesiastical office comparable to that of the diaconate."<sup>13</sup>

The same is true concerning the women mentioned in I Tim. 3:11; in the Dutch translation of the Bible we find inserted the word (their) women, the translators have thought of a reference to the wives of the deacons; and Dr. C. Bouma finds here information about a special assistance rendered by women to the deacons.

The point is that we find in the church of Christ, as pictured in the New Testament, only male office-bearers.

#### The Lord's Call to Special Offices

Only male office-bearers in the New Testament!



The twelve apostles called by Jesus were men, and also the seventy sent out through Israel (Luke 10); seven men were chosen to serve the tables (Acts 6), the elders who were appointed in every church (Acts 14:23) were men and Paul unquestionably speaks about men when he writes: "His gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11).

The Bible is very clear in this matter, and anyone who tries to escape from these sober facts by saying that Jesus and His apostles accommodated themselves to the customs of their time parades an old warhorse which was once used by the 18th century rationalists but since lost all its power; Jesus who came "for judgment into this world" (John 9:39) certainly did not accommodate Himself, and the apostles were constantly accused of changing the Jewish and Roman customs (Acts 6:14; 16:21).

The real issue here is that of *the character of the office* in the church of Jesus Christ, by which we mean that office which is defined in art. 30 of the Belgic Confession: "We believe that the true Church must be governed by that spiritual polity which our Lord has taught us in His Word; namely, that there must be ministers or pastors to preach the Word of God and to administer the sacraments; also elders and deacons who, together with the pastors, form the council of the Church."<sup>14</sup>

Originally these three offices were entrusted by Christ, the Anointed of the Lord, to His apostles; from this inclusive office of the apostles developed the special offices mentioned in our confession, but we should never forget that the office-bearers are always representing Christ as Prophet, Priest and King of His Church.

### **The Officers' Service Includes Ruling**

Therefore, speaking about the character of the special office, we want to stress in the first place that it is an office of *service*, "even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve" (Matt. 20:28); all the office-bearers are servants and they are each other's fellow-servants; haughty eyes, also of office-bearers, are an abomination to the Lord (Prov. 6:17). But we should stress no less the *ruling* character of the office; the office-bearers speak and act with authority (Acts 20:28; I Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:5; Heb. 13:17), in the name of the King of the Church; this becomes most evident in the use of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, consisting in the preaching of the holy gospel and the maintaining of church discipline, by which the kingdom of heaven is opened to believers and shut against unbelievers (Heid. Cat. Lord's Day 31).

### **This Rule Is Not Assigned to Women**

The administration of these keys is not in keeping with real womanhood; that is the reason why the apostle straightforwardly forbids them to administer them. He orders that "the women should keep silence in the churches" (I Cor. 14:34) and he permits "no woman to teach or to have authority over men"

(I Tim. 2:12). It is clear from the context that Paul refers in these places to the behavior of women in the public worship services of the congregation, not only in that particular time and not only in a special church, but "as a command of the Lord," and "in all the churches of the saints," and he adds: "if any one does not recognize this, he is not recognized." Why do we find this apostolic teaching in the Bible?

Because also in the church a woman should be a woman and a man a man; Jesus did not deliver us from our creation-position but from sin; He did not reverse the creation-order, He did restore it.

That creation-order is as a mirror of the Divine Being itself. Paul tells us that God the Father is the Head of Christ; that Christ is the Head of every man; and that so the husband is the head of the woman (I Cor. 11:3).

These words are not only related to marriage, but in I Cor. 11 and 14 and in I Tim. 2 they are applied to the worship services of the assembled congregation in which even the angels are present (I Cor. 11:10), and also among the angels are rulers and ruled ones.

Paul makes it very clear that this being ruled, this subordination, has nothing to do with inferiority; Christ obeys the Father because He wants to do His will joyfully; and the congregation obeys Jesus in love. Men and women should both be liberated from sin, but they should be liberated to be real men and women; their conduct in the congregation should not be in conflict with this basic position.

### **Women's Important Role**

Must we conclude now that a woman should not be allowed to do any church-work, or that she should be excluded from all ruling functions in society? Not at all!

Many women in the New Testament have functioned in the church, providing for the needs of the saints, and as helpers in the work of the spread of the gospel. That work was not identical with the government of the church, yet it was very important and as long and as soon as the term "deaconess" has no other meaning than "helper of the deacons," let us have deaconesses; it should be applauded that in our days Christian women help more than before in evangelism and missionary work, in education and in all kinds of social activities; in many milieus they can reach out better than men can and in many respects their gifts are unique.

The same is true of all social life. If it is true that God has entrusted special talents to women (and it is true), they should use them; this goes without saying as far as nurses are concerned, but also female doctors can function in a meaningful way; it goes without saying as far as teachers are concerned but also female counselors can be a great help. With respect we mention the names of Florence Nightingale and of Golda Meier, of the Dutch queens Wilhelmina and Juliana.

We conclude with a word of John Calvin; he was accused of having opposed the reigning of Queen Elisabeth I, because a woman should not be invested with such a governing office; he answered in a letter to the English secretary of state Robert Cecil, in

which he wrote on "the natural order of things," which made the male heirs to the throne the natural successors. "But," he added, "here and there appeared such gifted and excellent women that it seemed to be so that they were brought by God on the scene of the world by a special blessing, either in order to put to shame the cowardice of men, or to give a sign of His power which is made perfect in weakness."

1. About prowlers and quack-preachers.
2. P. Brunner. *The Ministry and the Ministry of Women*. 1971, p. 9.
3. Inst. IV, 15, 22.
4. J. van Bruggen, *Emancipatie en de bijbel*. 1974, blz. 7.

5. Both the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk en de Gereformeerde Kerken.
6. Christianity Today, July 8, 1966.
7. H. Kuitert. *Anders Gezegd*. 1970, pp. 68, 69.
8. W.P. De Boer. "The Role of Women." (In: *The Heritage of Calvin*. 1976, pp. 236-272.)
9. Prof. John Murray deplored this situation writing: "It betrays an unnecessary reserve, if not a loss of the ardour of the church's first love, when the holy kiss is conspicuous by its absence in the Western Church." (Comm. Romans II, p. 232.)
10. F.W. Grosheide, Comm. I Cor., p. 254.
11. "Because she was taken out of man"; the Dutch translation is "mannin."
12. Quoted by C.C. Ryrie. *The Place of Women in the Church*, 1968, p. 8.
13. J. Murray. Comm. Romans II, p. 226.
14. If in our churches female office-bearers would be chosen, not only the Church-Order, but also this article of the confession must be changed, speaking of the "choosing of faithful men."



### WHICH BIBLE VERSION?

In recent years the Revised Standard Version of the Bible has become increasingly popular in Reformed circles. The earlier stigma of a "liberal bias" largely disappeared, and it is quite likely the version most used on our pulpits today.

I don't regret this, nor do I question it. In the congregation I now serve and in my previous congregation, the RSV is and was used. It is a rather good translation, and has many advantages over the King James Version. Not only is it much more readable language-wise, but in several places it is also more accurate. It also reads much better than the accurate American Standard Version.

All this is not to say, however, that this is the ideal translation; nor that it does not contain some rather serious flaws. In some cases unwarranted freedom was taken with the text, and verses are omitted for less than valid reasons.

Let me give a few examples of what I consider to be rather serious mistakes.

In Gen. 12:3 the RSV has "and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves." I do not believe there is good reason for departing from the rendering "and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Seen from a historic-redemptive perspective also, the latter is much more plausible and meaningful.

From the same perspective, the rendering of the RSV in Gen. 21:9 as "Sarah saw the son of Hagar . . . playing with her son Isaac" is untenable, cf. Gal. 4:29. It was more than mere playing, and the translation of the original word should make this

clear. The Septuagint uses the word "laughing" in this connection.

I also consider the RSV rendering of Ps. 2:11 ("kiss his feet" instead of "kiss the Son") as questionable. I also question the translation of Ps. 139:14. I believe the Psalmist is talking about himself in this case (I am fearfully and wonderfully made) and not about God. Cf. e.g. the monograph on Ps. 139 by the late Dr. E.J. Young.

Coming to the New Testament, I see the omission of Luke 22:20 as unwarranted. I am aware that the NEB follows the RSV in this and the previous case, but I believe there is not sufficient textual warrant for this omission.

An extremely bad translation we find of Rom. 3:30 in the RSV: "and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of their faith." Taken at face value, this says exactly the opposite of what we confess in Q. & A. 61 (L.D. 23) of the Heid. Catechism. This translation plainly says that faith is our good work on the basis of which God justifies us. Why the translators rendered the little Greek preposition "ek" that way, is beyond me. For in chap. 5:1 where the same preposition is used again, the RSV properly translates "since we are justified by faith." The RSV version of Rom. 3:30 is heresy with absolutely no textual warrant.

Finally, one wonders why the RSV retained that misleading comma in Eph. 4:12: "The ascended Lord gave gifts to his church for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." How much better and more accurate is the rendering of the NIV: "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up."

It would seem to me that from now on churches needing new pew Bibles would do well to consider the New International Version.

Just a note on the NIV: I was disappointed to see it render Luke 17:21 "the kingdom is within you." Here the NASB's "is in our midst" is more accurate (cf. Ridderbos, *Komst de Koninkrijk*, pp. 398-400).

J. TUINGA  
Lethbridge, Alberta

#### Editor's Note:

While we appreciate the warm reception being given to the New International Version, it may also be noted that it does not yet have the official approval of our CR Synod, although it is being sold by the denominational publishing house.

## An Undesirable Candidate\*

Esteemed brethren,

Having heard that your congregation is vacant, I take the freedom to apply for the open place. I have several qualities which, I expect, you will appreciate. I have always preached powerfully. I also had some success as an author. Some say that I am good in organizing. In most places where I served, I fulfilled a leading role.

But there are people who have some objections against me. First, I am past the age of fifty. Then, I never preached in any church longer than three, or at the most, four years. I was forced to leave some places because my work had caused disunity, even riots. I must also admit that I have been in jail three or four times, but that was not my fault.

My health is not too good, but I can still do quite a load of work. I had to work at my old job (before I became a preacher) in order to make ends meet. The Churches I served were usually very small, though they were located in big cities.

I could not cooperate very well with other church leaders in various places. Some have threatened me, even brought me before the court, and have injured me physically pretty badly.

I am not too good in administration. They say that I cannot even remember whom I baptized. Yet, I hope that you can use me. I will do my utmost, even — if you can't pay a full salary — make some money on the side.

PAUL (APOSTLE)

\*Free translation of an article in the Dutch magazine, *De Kruisbanier*, vD. — appearing in and reprinted from *Clarion*, The Canadian Reformed Magazine, June 3, 1978.



# A LOOK AT BOOKS

**THE GOSPEL OF LUKE** by William Hendriksen; 1122 pages; Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Mich.; \$13.98. Reviewed by John Vander Ploeg.

A commentator of the caliber of William Hendriksen comes along not once in a generation but more likely only once in a century. Just scanning, and here and there dipping into, *The Gospel of Luke*, whereby Hendriksen completes his series on Commentaries on the four Gospels, readily leads to hyperbole in the devout, conservative Bible student's reception of it. Once again, Hendriksen presents us with nothing less than a stupendous achievement. Together with his other commentaries, this volume entitles the author to a place on the honor roll of those few and precious writers able to communicate the faith of the fathers, as revealed in Scripture, with both scholarly precision as well as the clarity and simplicity to which so many teachers have never attained.

Supplying his own translation from the Greek, Hendriksen gives a verse-by-verse commentary on Luke's Gospel. However, while doing so, his treatment of the material is not atomistic but always part of a unified whole under the general theme, *The Work Thou Gavest Him to Do* with the following subdivisions: I. Its Beginning or Inauguration 1:1-4:13; II. Its Progress or Continuation 4:14-19:27; III. Its Climax or Culmination 19:28-24:53.

Replying to the significant question as to what light this Gospel sheds on today's problems, Hendriksen gives this fourfold reply: "A. This Gospel is a Book of Doctrine Showing Us What to Believe; B. It is a Book of Ethics Telling Us How to Live; C. It is a Book of Comfort Teaching Us Why to Rejoice; D. It is a Book of Prophecy Informing Us What To Expect."

Anyone familiar with Hendriksen's writing knows that he does not circumvent difficult passages but that, having come to grips with them, he gives insights for which other writers so often leave the reader groping. Hendriksen is a master of the material on which he writes because it is so obvious that he himself has first been mastered by it. With a contagious enthusiasm, the keen mind of an exegete, and also with guidance gleaned from extensive study and experience, he leads his readers into an ever increasing knowledge of the living Word. With gratifying clarity he sets forth, for example, the meaning of "the kingdom of God," our Lord's teaching on divorce, and the proper method of interpreting parables.

Does the above strike you as being a rave review? The book is deserving of nothing less. It is to be deplored that also among us at times a prophet is not without honor save in his own land. What a tragedy it is to fail to see the acres of diamonds to be found at times right at our own doorstep.

Hendriksen wants nothing of the so-called *new hermeneutic* for which some are so ready to sell their birthright for the proverbial mess of pottage. When asked by those who feel the need of guidance to recommend Bible commentaries, it is a joy to this reviewer to wholeheartedly recommend those by Hendriksen as being second to none. It is good to be able now to add to the list *The Gospel of Luke*. May our Lord be gracious to spare Dr. Hendriksen further and also prolong his dedication and remarkable vigor to the end that more of his writings may still be forthcoming.

As a commentator, William Hendriksen always "contends earnestly for the faith of the fathers once delivered." As such his books are a monument to his honor; and, above all, as he would have it to be, for the glory of his Lord.

## HENDRIKSEN'S COMMENTARIES by Edwin H. Palmer.

If I were a layman or a preacher marooned on an island and allowed only one New Testament commentary, as quick as a pebble drops I would pick Dr. William Hendriksen's commentaries and thank God for them. I find it incomprehensible that any preacher is without all of his commentaries.

Another in his series has just appeared — Luke. This is the thirteenth New Testament book that he has exegeted.

Here are the reasons I would choose his commentary if I were shipwrecked:

1. *Absolute fidelity to the Word of God*  
Every page breathes a reverent submission to the Bible as God's infallible Word. When reading some commentaries, the reader has to be on his guard against liberalizing tendencies. Typical of Hendriksen, however, is one sentence in his discussion of supposed "contradictions": "Here again the 'contradiction' is in the mind of those looking for contradictions" (p. 26). Hendriksen believes that when the autographs of the Bible are correctly understood, the Bible is unquestionably true, even though we may not have the answers to all questions.

2. *Thoroughness*  
Too many commentaries are superficial — frothy. But here is meat. 1122 pages of it!

And, laymen, do not be scared. You do not have to read it all. You can select and choose what suits your needs. For each chapter is broken down into several parts and most of it you can understand.

This is the way each section is divided:  
a. First of all, there is a brief outline of the chapter. It is always helpful to get a bird's-eye view of the material before you plunge into the detail.

b. Then the author offers his own individual translation of the Greek in up-to-date, clear, dignified English.

c. Then comes the main body of the commentary. This can be understood by the average person with a high school education. No Greek is introduced here, yet the

whole comment depends on Dr. Hendriksen's superb, thorough understanding of the Greek. Hard problems are faced and discussed, but not in the language of theological gobbledegook.

d. Next comes a section entitled "Practical Lessons." Here are tidbits for both layman and preacher, practical applications of the Bible text.

e. Following the Practical Lessons comes a section on "Greek words, phrases and construction." The layman can skip over this, but the preacher will find this helpful in understanding the meaning of the text.

f. Finally, at the end of every chapter is a summary of the entire chapter. This is helpful, for the reader can see the whole sweep of the chapter without digressions and interruptions.

### 3. *Clarity*

Some commentators write thoroughly but obtusely. Others write clearly but with very little substance. Dr. Hendriksen, however, writes with thoroughness and clarity at the same time. One secret is that he continually breaks down a long discussion into separate points and paragraphs and enumerates them. The average person should be able to follow this commentary with understanding and profit.

### 4. *Pastoral concern*

It is remarkable to have a commentary that is as learned as this one is and yet one that comes from a warm, emotional, pastoral heart. This is revealed, of course, in the section on Practical Lessons, but also in the main body of the commentary. The main section is not all academic; rather bursts of pastoral concern come right out of the explanation itself. This is the way it should be, for the purpose of a commentary is not to satisfy our intellectual curiosity, but to teach us to praise God with thoughts, words and deeds.

### 5. *Theological*

The first thing a commentary should do is to explain thoroughly and clearly the meaning of the text. But this should not and cannot be done in isolation from the rest of Scripture. Again and again, Dr. Hendriksen relates the text at hand to all of Scripture on a particular subject. As a result, the reader not only gets to know Luke very well, but he also gets a thorough theological education.

So, if you know a pastor that does not have Dr. Hendriksen's commentaries, take some of your tithe money and run — don't walk — to buy one or more for him. Many pastors are marooned in a sea of worthless commentaries. And be sure to get one for yourself while you are at it.

**ECONOMICS, MONEY AND BANKING (Christian Principles)** by E.L. Hebden Taylor; The Craig Press, Nutley, N.J., 1978; 340 pp. Reviewed by Rev. John H. Piersma, Sioux Center, Iowa.

One of the goals envisioned when our fathers sacrificed to establish Christian institutions for higher learning was the production of worthy books on important subjects *from the Christian perspective* (which, for them, meant the viewpoint of the Reformed Faith). Looking back over the years one must confess that this goal has not been realized to the extent that the Kuyperian oratory of a half-century ago demanded. It is still a relatively rare event

when our Calvin, Trinity or Dordt scholars publish a significant work. (Some of the fault for this lies, no doubt, in the fact that the "market" for such publications is very limited. Or, to put it in different language, when much more money is invested in television sets than in good books.)

An exception to this rather gloomy picture is this most recent of Prof. Taylor's publications. Taylor is well-known among us as a teacher of sociology at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa.

The subject of this book is quite technical, of course. *But it can be read and understood by anyone willing to take the time and invest the effort!* (I did it!) And the things discussed are of the most practical concern imaginable. Nothing less than our money and possessions in terms of current economic policies and conditions is under discussion by Prof. Taylor. One reviewer summarized the contents as follows:

This well-written book of 14 chapters grew out of a series of lectures Professor Taylor delivered in 1974 for the Christian Studies Center of Memphis, Tennessee. It deals with many pertinent issues of our day: (1) monetary inflation and the resultant rise in price levels, (2) the growth of big government run by fascistic-minded controllers, (3) fractional commercial banking built upon central banks and the fluctuations in economic activity brought about by the arbitrary creation and destruction of money and credit in fractional reserve banking systems, and (4) international trade and international banking.

In our schools the problem of Christian education is always the matter of the relationship of biblical principles to the various disciplines of study. On this score we have often been disappointed when we witnessed the reduction of "Christian education" to nothing more than a professing Christian teaching the same things anyone else would teach, with, at best, some pious reference to the providence of God. The actual relevance of the Bible as Word of God to such fields as economics was scarcely recognized, and sometimes denied.

Taylor shows that such anemic and unsatisfactory procedures can be replaced by a bold examination of crucial issues — even in such a field as economics! — from a Christian viewpoint. He shows us how biblical principles apply to such questions as the place of personal indebtedness in our society with acceptance of the interest costs involved, savings and capital investment, the nature and desirability of sound money, the matter of world poverty and hunger, and the place of civil government in the marketplace.

Modern "social science" is often characterized by the desire to establish and enforce pseudo-omniscient control over society. There is a seemingly incurable optimism around that any of society's problems can really be handled by the vaunted intelligence of modern man. Taylor's attitude toward all this is reflected in this short quote:

They (modern bureaucrats and control-minded politicians, JHP) rejoice over wage boosts, but dislike the parallel price rises and the hardships caused to those with fixed incomes. They like one set of inflationary effects but decry the inevitable twin set. And, the "reformers"

are always most anxious to do something about those undesired effects of their own financial policies. In order to "fight" inflation they want to curb our economic actions with a series of fascistic controls. They want credit controls, price controls, wage controls and all kinds of other government controls over our lives. Thus, the acceleration of the present long-range credit expansion cannot but lead America into exactly the fully controlled economy the "reformers" and planners want.

Successful, efficient businessmen are not scarce in the Reformed community! To them, and to any other interested reader, we recommend this book.

**THE RELIGION OF PRESIDENT CARTER** by Niels C. Nielsen, Jr.; 160 pages; 1977; Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers, Nashville, Tennessee; \$2.95. Reviewed by John Vander Ploeg.

Niels C. Nielsen, Jr., is head of the Department of Religious Studies at Rice University in Houston, Texas. He is the author also of *Solzhenitsyn's Religion*. Now he serves us well in giving us this insightful coverage of President Carter's religion. This is a matter of vital concern to us because the President of the United States is regarded as the most powerful man in the world and all his actions can be expected to affect us, either for better or for worse.

As men of good will, whether Republicans or Democrats, we want to be assured that the President is what he professes to be — born again, a truly Christian believer. Nielsen poses the question: "Is Carter a 'phony'?" and then quotes the reply Richard Reeves gave in the *New York* magazine prior to Carter's nomination: "Of course, he is. He is a politician, an actor, a salesman. What I like is that the product he's peddling is one of the most interesting I've ever seen in a long time."

Stating that "the majority of news people have not charged that Carter is a phony," Nielsen affirms that "President Carter is by background a conservative Christian who takes seriously repentance and faith as well as the need for humility."

Critical though we may be of Carter at times, it should be recognized that he, at least, is no Johnny-come-lately in his religious profession. For about twenty years he has been teaching Sunday School at Plains, Georgia. Nielsen adds: "Jimmy accepted a pioneer mission assignment as the partner of Milo Pennington, a peanut farmer from Texas. In the late spring of 1967, they went door to door, witnessing to a hundred different families of non-believers, explaining their own faith and seeking conversions . . ." And after his widely acclaimed Camp David meeting with Begin and Sadat, appearing on television September 18, 1978, Carter professed himself to be a Christian for the whole world to hear.

Nielsen also calls attention to what Carter says in his book, *Why Not the Best?* "I'm a father and I'm a Christian; I'm a businessman and I'm a Christian; I'm a farmer and I'm a Christian; I'm a politician and I'm a Christian. The most important thing in my life beyond all else is Jesus Christ." One has reason to conclude that

Jimmy Carter is an evangelical who believes that his religion must cover and make a real difference in every area of his life. Although apparently Arminian in his theology, Carter should be gratefully recognized for his unabashed and outspoken espousal of Christ as his Lord and Savior.

On the other side of the ledger there are disturbing items to which Nielsen also does not close his eyes. Attention is called to the fact that "during the election campaign, he [Carter] . . . attended mass while campaigning among Poles in Chicago."

According to Dr. M. H. Reynolds, Jr., in *F. E. A. News & Views* (May-June 1978), "When President Carter met with Prime Minister Begin of Israel, he later reported his respect for this man because 'he worships the same God I do and you do.' When he met with President Sadat, he said he felt 'an instant friendship with this man who reminded him that the Egyptians and the Jews were sons of Abraham, worship the same God, share a common heritage and a common faith' . . . Neither Prime Minister Begin nor President Sadat accept Jesus Christ as God. . . . When President and Mrs. Carter visited India, they publicly received the heathen Hindu mark (called a tilak) on their foreheads — an insult to true believers in India who refuse these heathen marks of identification and worship."

President Carter's 1978 Thanksgiving Day Proclamation was a keen disappointment in that it made no mention at all of God or Jesus Christ but only of "Providence." Moreover, Carter's recent action normalizing relations with Red China and terminating the U.S. treaty with Taiwan shakes one's assurance as to his Christian profession.

However, notwithstanding these and other apparent inconsistencies, due allowance should be made for the crushing and unrelenting pressure under which the President lives and labors day after day. The presidency is an awesome burden. It ought to be every Christian's fervent prayer that the U.S. chief executive may be true to his profession not only in word but also in deed. No one is as much in need of our constant intercession as he.

**CONTEMPORARY WORLD THEOLOGY, A LAYMAN'S GUIDEBOOK** by Harvie M. Conn; published by Presbyterian and Reformed Publ. Co., Box 185, Nutley, N.J. 07110; 155 pages; \$2.95. Reviewed by John Geels, Emeritus pastor, Pella, Ia.

The author of this informative volume is Associate Professor of Missions and Apologetics at Westminster Seminary prior to which he served twelve years as missionary in Korea. In this volume he makes the trustworthiness of the Bible the touchstone of his appraisal of contemporary theology and criticizes the liberal or naturalistic theology from the perspective of the Reformed, Calvinistic position.

True to its sub-title, this is a guidebook that deals with the principal movements in contemporary theology and their chief exponents. Acknowledging the contributions these various theologies make, he exposes their basic fallacies resulting from their failure to hold to the inerrancy of the holy Scriptures.



Beginning with Barth, the father of neo-orthodoxy and tracing the roots of his theology to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and the Enlightenment, he goes on to treat Bultmann's Form Criticism and Demythologization; Cullmann's Heilgeschichte concept; the theology of Secularization popularized by Robinson's *Honest to God* and Cox's *The Secular City*; Situation Ethics espoused by Joseph Fletcher, et al; Moltmann's theology of Hope; Pannenberg's theology of History; Teilhard's theology of Revolution; Hartshorne and Whitehead's Process theology; and Tillich's theology of Being. He then treats Mysticism, pietism, Dispensationalism, Fundamentalism, Neo-fundamentalism and Neo-evangelicalism. Finally, he deals briefly with the Reformed faith called Calvinism.

This volume serves admirably as a guidebook to the proper understanding of Contemporary World Theology. It is a brief, candid and lucid appraisal of these various movements in the theological world of the twentieth century in the light of Scripture from the vantage point of the Reformed Calvinistic faith. We heartily recommend this volume to the perceptive reader.

**THE COUNTRY OF THE RISEN KING**, Merle Meeter, Compiler; published by Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan; 446 pp.; \$12.95. Reviewed by Arthur DeJong, Sheboygan, Wisconsin.

This is a chance to slip away from our network dominated mass culture into the *Country of the Risen King*. The reader of this anthology of Christian poetry catches vivid glimpses of the countryside through the eyes of one hundred thirty Christian poets. The effect of this variety is that of a pointillistic painting, with its specks of vivid color forming a coherent picture in the mind of the viewer.

Merle Meeter devotes the first two-thirds of the book to one hundred contemporary poets. He not only places poems by giants like Eliot and Auden side by side with those of such established poets as Luci Shaw and Chad Walsh, but audaciously includes a broad selection of poems by lesser known writers — teachers, students, administrators, housewives — many with familiar Dutch names.

Using "Christian content," based upon the "normative teachings of Scripture," as his final criteria for inclusion, Merle Meeter focuses on the incarnation, the work of redemption, and their implications for the lives of Christians. This stress upon a clear Christian statement, sometimes at the cost of allusion and metaphor, makes this a readable collection of contemporary poetry not only for the poetic priesthood but for laymen who may not be inspired by the convoluted poetic algebra of the academic journals or the narcissistic lyrics of teen magazines.

This collection, however, is not to be mined for moralistic synthetic gems, nor will the reader find a helpful topical index featuring "poems for weddings and wakes." Rather these poems are to be read when we forget "what people look like from outside of the oyster" or when we need to be reminded that we often speak with the "nails of denial in our mouth."

Some poems evoke empathy, usually without sentimentality, for a "Girl who Limp" or for those who "slumped into the arches and curves of age" with "old faces like embroidered linen / Folded in upon themselves." We are made to feel that "It is no easy thing / to bless the Lord in Buffalo / where you lie / stroke still and dumb." These poems warn us that we minimize the work of Christ when "Christmas card madonnas / Smirk all thoughts of pain away" and that often we read the "heavy books" of 20th Century technicians and "in our faithless times / we sleep in fear." Poems like those of Chad Walsh remind us, as we indulge in self-pity and pessimism, that when we say, "My God my God, why hast thou forsaken me? / From his perfect darkness a voice says, I have not."

In the second part of the anthology Merle Meeter lists alphabetically thirty "Historic American and English Poets" whose poems are usually anthologized as representative works of some quaint or enlightened period of a nation's history or as illustrations of technical or aesthetic achievement. Meeter's dispassionate structure promotes fresh appreciation for many fine poems that should be a part of every Christian's library, poems like Dickinson's "Upon the Burning of Our House," Donne's "Batter My Heart," Milton's "When I Consider," Hopkin's "Pied Beauty." . . . This section, containing only thirty "historic" Christian poets, may draw some fire about sins of commission and omission in response to the editor's modest comment that he "may have missed one or two."

The final section, "Medieval Poems, Renaissance Madrigals, Spirituals," is too slight to merit attention and, one would think, inclusion. The volume closes with useful thumbnail biographic sketches of each poet, in addition to the standard indices.

This carefully focused anthology provides genuine pleasure and a wide variety of insights into the Christian experience. More importantly it helps the reader realize that the country of the risen King is not a pale abstraction but a real place inhabited by real people, people who suffer and doubt as well as praise and pray.

*Prayer of John Calvin* after his lecture on Daniel 11:27-32.

"Grant, Almighty God, that as we are instructed by thy Spirit and armed by thy sacred teaching, we may carry on the war bravely with open enemies and with all who boldly oppose true religion. May we also constantly despise all domestic foes and apostates, and resist them manfully. May we never be disturbed, even if various tumults should arise in thy Church. May we fix our eyes upon thee, and always expect a happier issue than appears possible at the time, until at length thou shalt fulfil thy promises. And may all events which now seem contrary to us, issue in our salvation, when thy Son our Redeemer shall appear.—Amen."

The "Dedictory Epistle" in the introduction to the first volume of Calvin's Commentary on Daniel also contains a passing observation that "God by his wonderful skill has carried forward the restoration of his Church further than I had dared to hope for" (p. lxx).

(Books received from the publishers for mention and/or review — John Vander Ploeg)

**BEYOND DEATH'S DOOR** by Maurice Rawlings, M.D.; 173 pages; intended as "new evidence for the existence of heaven and hell"; Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers, 407 Seventh Avenue, South, Nashville, Tennessee 37203; \$5.95.

**LORD HAVE MURPHY!** by Joseph L. Felix; 152 pages; "Felix uses humor to reveal God's hand at work in the complications we confront in everyday life"; Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers; \$3.95.

**APPROACHING THE DECADE OF SHOCK** by Clifford Wilson and John Weldon. Dr. Tim La Haye states in the Foreword: "Their research convincingly demonstrates that we are rapidly approaching the time when the only solution to the world's problems is a one world dictator — just as the Bible predicts"; 194 pages; Master Books, a Division of CLP, San Diego, California.

**JOURNEY THROUGH THE NIGHT** by Anne DeVries. Four volumes (1) Into the Darkness (2) The Darkness Deepens (3) Dawn's Early Light (4) A New Day; hard cover — each \$4.95; for ages 14 and older. "After the Second World War, Anne DeVries was commissioned to capture the spirit and agony of those five harrowing years of Nazi occupation. The result was *Journey through the Night*, a four volume runaway best seller that has gone through more than 30 printings in the Netherlands"; Paideia Press, P.O. Box 1450, St. Catherines, Ontario, Canada L23 7J8.

**FAITH AND VICTORY IN DACHAU** by J. Overduin; first published in Dutch as *Hel en Hemel van Dachau*; 252 pages; Paideia Press, St. Catherines, Ontario; hard cover \$6.95.

**PIERRE AND HIS FRIENDS** by W. G. Vande Hulst; for ages 10 and older; 175 pages; hard cover \$3.95; Paideia Press, St. Catherines, Ontario.

**THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM** by Herman Ridderbos; first published in 1962; now published by Paideia Press, St. Catherines, Ontario; 556 pages; paper cover \$7.50.

**STORY BIBLE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN** by Anne DeVries; translated into English by Baukje Gray and David Rudston from the Dutch original; for children 4 to 8 years old; ". . . the most read children's story Bible in the world. It has appeared in ten different languages"; 254 pages; hard cover \$9.95; Paideia Press, St. Catherines, Ontario.

**STORY BIBLE FOR OLDER CHILDREN** by Anne DeVries, Old Testament; first published in Dutch; translated by Theodore Plantinga; 346 pages; for ages 8 to 14; hard cover; Paideia Press, St. Catherines, Ontario; \$12.95.

**WAITING FOR CHRIST'S RETURN** (on Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians) by Herman Veldkamp; translated from the Dutch by Theodore Plantinga; 127 pages; Paideia Press, St. Catherines, Ontario; \$2.95.

SECOND CLASS  
POSTAGE PAID AT  
GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.

**DREAMS AND DICTATORS** (on the book of Daniel) by Herman Veldkamp; 251 pages; translated by Theodore Plantinga; Paideia Press, St. Catharines, Ontario; \$4.95.

**REFORMED DOGMATICS** by Heinrich Heppé; revised and edited by Ernst Bizer; translated by G. T. Thomson; Foreword by Karl Barth; 721 pages; Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Mich.; paper cover \$7.95.

**THE BOOK OF REVELATION** — a Simplified Commentary, by Harry Buis. Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Nutley, N.J., 1974. Reviewed by Rev. S. Voortman.

Harry Buis is pastor of the Hudsonville Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan. Though also a member of the faculty of Hope College, it is no doubt his pastoral interest in the average lay-reader which motivated him to write a simplified, devotional commentary on Revelation.

The style of the author is a short, simple verse by verse exposition which is both concise and clear. The brevity is in large part found in the fact that he is not led astray by incidental details. However, this does not prevent him from dealing with the main thrust and the major problems of each verse.

Author Buis identifies himself with the preterist school of interpretation, and gives some reasons for doing so. Proponents of this school contend that, with but few exceptions, the book of Revelation is prophetic of the period of the early church during which she underwent severe persecutions at the hand of the Roman Empire. The basic message then of Revelation, according to this view, is that as God cared for and preserved His church during those dire years, so He will always, through all ages, be directing and overruling events on her behalf.

Buis takes up the cudgels for the amillennial as versus the premillennial and postmillennial views of the future and gives his reasons for doing so by means of a general appeal to Scripture, creeds, Christian scholars, and the creeds of Christendom.

Though this reviewer subscribes to the parallelistic method of interpretation, which holds that this book contains

seven parallel sections, each of which covers generally the entire dispensation from the first to the second final coming of Christ, he does find much that is commendable in this book. The author's avowed purpose in writing a simple devotional commentary for the average layman is admirably accomplished. The book reflects sound scholarship while maintaining simplicity of expression. Buis seems to reverence the Scriptures as the inspired Word of God. His appeal to the creeds implies their having been formulated under the leading influence of the Holy Spirit. Simple, sound principles of interpretation have served as safeguards against the fantastic interpretations that abound.

This reviewer has no problem in recommending this book as an earnest and reasonably successful attempt at presenting the teachings embedded in the symbolism and prophecies of Revelation in a form understandable to the average layman.

**WHO'S WHO IN CHURCH HISTORY** by William P. Barker; 319 pages; Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Mich.; \$2.95. Reviewed by John Vander Ploeg.

First published as a hardcover in 1969, this is another in Baker's list of inexpensive reference books. Biographical data (alphabetically arranged from Abdon of Fleury to Ulrich Zwingli) on "more than 1500 men and women . . . all of whom left an imprint on the history of the church" is readily available in this little volume. The author is Director of Continuing Education at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. A handbook of this kind can be put to good use.

While appreciative of Barker's article on John Calvin, we do demur in being told that "Arminius was the author of reformed[?] theology known as Arminianism as a reaction against the sternness of Calvinism." Unfortunately, Barker's *Who's Who in Church History* makes no mention of such outstanding figures as Herman Bavinck, Abraham Kuyper, Geerhardus Vos, Charles Hodge — all of whom do rate an entry, for example, in Elgin S. Moyer's more extensive *Who Was Who in Church History* (Moody Press). Allowing for these strictures, Barker does, however, make a wealth of information available for handy reference.

**WHY JOHNNY CAN'T LEARN** by Opal Moore; published by Mott Media, Milford, Michigan; 1975; 164 pages; \$2.95. Reviewed by John Wm. Borst.

There is today an increasing public outcry against educational institutions for their failure to do the job of maintaining a literate society. "Back to the Basics" has become a popular slogan, as parents and employers see a dearth of fundamental skills amongst a large segment of school age children.

The author of this little book agrees, but points out that the problems in schools are significantly deeper and more sinister.

What parents should really be concerned about is the secular humanism being foisted on their children, as shown in the denial of absolutes, the failure to transmit a cultural heritage, classroom procedures based on the innate goodness of man, failure to exercise the memory, etc. These and many other philosophical problems have made a virtual wasteland out of schools that are essentially anti-Christian in their approach.

The book is intended to bring into sharp focus the conflict of Christianity and secular humanism, clearly showing how this all-pervasive view has a strangle hold on the minds of children.

A host of significant questions are raised which deserve answers — answers which are best supplied by Christian principles.

Although the author has some good, workable solutions to the problems raised, a word of caution should be noted regarding some generalizations. For example, "common sense dictates," says the author, "that desks should be placed in straight rows all facing one direction. . . ." Other classroom arrangements could be beneficial to the learning process. Innovation and creative ventures should be encouraged.

In this well-documented volume, the author builds a case that should stir the heart of every Christian parent to action, the kind of action that will hopefully salvage the public schools of our land or lead to the establishment of a Christian School when possible.

This book is of particular interest to parents and educators who are concerned about Christian education.