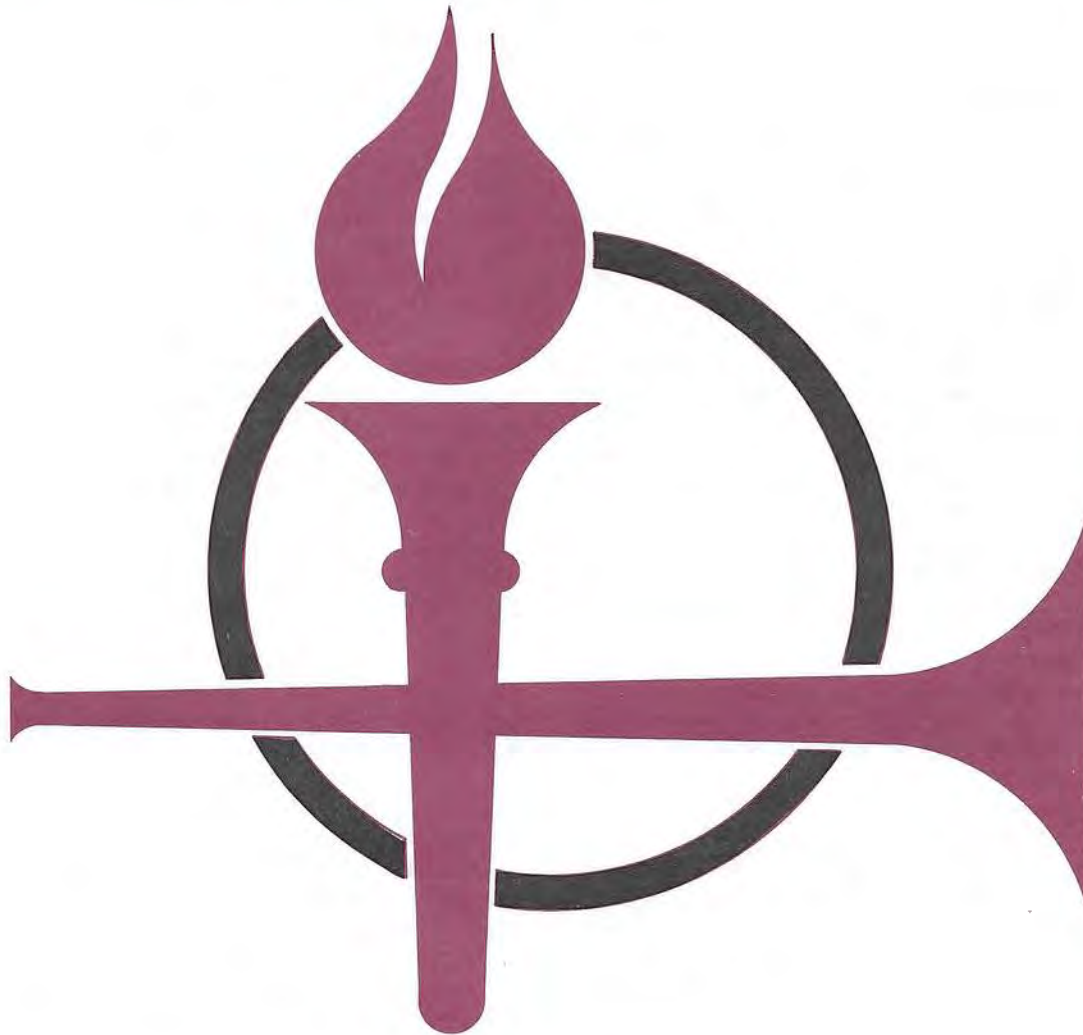


THE OUTLOOK

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

NOVEMBER 1980



TOWARD THE NEXT SYNOD
EDUCATIONAL DOUBLE-MINDEDNESS
E. H. PALMER

THANKSGIVING ZEALOTS

John Blankespoor

Israel is a luxuriant vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself; according to the multitude of his fruit he hath increased the altars; according to the goodness of his land they have good pillars. Their heart is divided; how they shall be found faulty; he shall break down their altars, he shall spoil their images. Hosea 10: 1, 2.

Abundant Prosperity

Israel is a luxuriant vine! A growing testimony to God's goodness to His people!

So the prophet Hosea speaks to the people of the ten tribes, likely at some harvest time. Also in the preceding chapter we read of the winepress, corn-floor and wine offerings. It was during the prosperous time of king Jeroboam II, one of the most flourishing times the kingdom of Israel ever enjoyed. The crops had been big. They were prosperous. And so Hosea compares Israel with a luxuriant vine, with many branches and much fruit.

The metaphor naturally refers to what God has given Israel materially, during these prosperous years. The fig tree did blossom, there were lots of cattle in the stalls, the olive trees did not fail and the fields produced more than the people needed or could use. In all this the goodness of God is shown to the people. The good God gave them so much.

Isn't this also true in our own country, even in times of recession and inflation? Didn't the Lord give us abundance again during the past year? This abundance is revealed in the kinds of homes we live in, in our cars and use of them, even with high priced gas, our abundance of food and the hundreds of extra things we receive, often in an overwhelming measure. Compared with the concept of mere "daily" bread we really still receive an abundance of material gifts. These facts are all the more staggering when we compare ourselves with most people of the Third World and remember that there is more poverty in the world today than there ever has been. The black horse, the horse of want, of Revelation 6, is still galloping throughout the earth.

In all this our abundance God does not leave Himself without witness. Also of our prosperity it can be said (Isaiah 5:4) "What more could have been done for my vineyard, than I have done for it?" Essentially and basically, all these things reveal to us the overflowing love and goodness of God in Christ Jesus.

Extravagant Thanksgiving

But what do we do with these gifts of God? How do we celebrate Thanksgiving Day? How thankful

are we from the *heart* and in our *daily* lives? How did the ancient Israelites respond to God's gifts?

We read of two things that they did. They built altars for the Lord, which was a form of their worship, and they set up memorials.

On the altars they naturally brought sacrifices of sheep and cattle. And even though the two main altars for the ten tribes were found in Dan and Bethel, they set up extra altars for their worship. According to the text they apparently did this according to the goodness of the land. The more material gifts they received the more altars they built and the more sacrifices were offered. In fact, it appears that the land was full of altars, with smoke of the sacrifices being seen daily in many parts of the countryside, especially on the hills.

What's wrong with this? Why does the Lord rebuke them? Isn't this better than what many other people do, not bringing any sacrifices? The more material gifts they received, the more altars were built. Why does Hosea criticize this? If there would not have been any altars, he would have rebuked them, but now when there are lots of them, he also criticizes them.

The text also speaks of good pillars. These were some kind of memorials. Something like Samuel set up with the name "Ebenezer." Jacob also set up such a pillar or stone at Bethel, where he had the dream of the ladder to heaven. Moses did so when he ascended Mt. Sinai the second time. They were lasting and visible reminders of the special hand of Divine providence and grace. Hosea tells us here that Israel set up many such memorials, remember, according to the goodness of the land. Apparently there were memorials everywhere. They also beautified the older ones. After all, they were a people of culture, and such important things of the Lord could not be neglected. Also, in this way the tradition of the fathers was continued.

They no doubt spent a lot of money for these memorials. Again, what's wrong with this? Surely they could have spent their money for many other causes, foolish and worthless in themselves! Isn't Hosea, perhaps, a born critic? He condemns them so severely. "Their glory will depart, the curse is upon these altars" he says.

Before we look for the answer to these questions let us observe that people don't change. Let us see that the fundamental error of Israel's Thanksgiving celebration is still with us today. In general it must be said today that many or nearly all Kingdom causes have prospered materially, "according to the goodness of the land." Surely in the last decades here in North America we have many more beautiful church properties and many more "up-to-date"

Christian schools. There was a day when our Christian day school buildings were inferior to the public school buildings, but they are not inferior now. This is good. Thank God for these advancements. We also have many more "memorials" today. We have them literally in one form or another, but also figuratively. We are very "religious", with religious cards for every occasion, for birthdays, sympathy expressions, Christmas Day, Easter and many others. One can buy all kinds of beautiful "memorials" in the form of Christian plaques to hang on the living room wall, Christian calendars, even Christian napkins to clean dirty hands. And we have all kinds of Christian societies, clubs and organizations. Why do we have so many more of these things than thirty years ago? The biggest reason, no doubt, is because people have more money; God is giving us more material things. And the more we receive, the more of these products are found on the markets, and the more better church and school buildings are erected. And there is no comparison of the church budgets and Thanksgiving Day offerings of today with those of 20 or 30 years ago. Shouldn't we be thankful for all this? By all means, if there is the right motivation. But God wasn't pleased with Israel and its memorials at all. Why not?

Divided Hearts

These people were, what the Bible calls, Zealots. They were "Pharisees"! Notice the important statement of verse 2, "Their heart is divided." This is a common expression in Scripture. Elijah speaks of the Israelites "halting between two opinions." Jesus speaks of people trying to serve God and mammon. Isaiah speaks of people honoring God with their mouths and lips (with song, confession and prayer) but who have removed their hearts far from Him.

A divided heart? How can that be? Actually you can't divide your heart. Jesus says that the heart can have only one object of worship, in this case either God or mammon. No man, for example, can possibly love two women equally. Our hearts are not made that way. Actually the heart can have only one object of worship. But people try to divide it. Israel did so and we do the same.

And so they had a "form" worship. Israel had it with all their altars and memorials. Many people throughout the ages do the same with an external religion. Even to this extent that the more prosperous they are, the more they give to the "Lord". They soothe their consciences. Accordingly, they usually are complacent in "the comfortable pew", lethargic and satisfied with their religion.

The Lord Sees the Hearts

But the Lord sees the heart. And He knows that these people actually are living for themselves, while they are so religious and give so much or do so much for the "church". They are not worshipping from the heart. They are not sincere and therefore really not alive, spiritually. Jesus spoke of people giving from their abundance and not from the heart. All this does not mean that God condemns all forms

THE OUTLOOK

(USPS 633-980)



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

JOURNAL OF REFORMED FELLOWSHIP, INC.

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

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

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

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

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of worship. By no means. But all forms must express the love of the heart, and not be substitutes for it. And history proves that the less Christian life there is in the hearts of people, the more forms they may have, the more organizations, memorials and externalities to "push" the "thing" along.

Isn't it important to have sizeable Thanksgiving offerings? Isn't it important to have memorials, forms, beautiful buildings for our churches and schools? Of course it is. But we are not faced by the alternative of sincere hearts *or* altars and memorials. God wants both. He wants these gifts and sacrifices to come from the heart, expressing

sincerity, dedication and gratitude.

The Lord wants hearts that are sincere, that worship Him only. He wants hearts that are aware of being delivered from the horrible slavery of sin through Jesus Christ. He wants hearts that worship Him in various forms, but out of love. He wants hearts that daily repent and are converted.

May it be said of us that according to the goodness of the land and the prosperity we receive we are brought to greater repentance and confession of sins in Christ, and to know more what it really means to present ourselves to Him as living sacrifices of thankfulness. ●



LOOKING FORWARD TO THE NEXT SYNOD: WILL THE PEACE AND GOODWILL OF 1980 PREVAIL?

John H. Piersma

1980's Short, Efficient Synod

From all reports the spirit and the efficiency of Synod 1980 was exemplary. There was little rancor, we are told, and the whole business was brought to the earliest conclusion (Wednesday of the second week) in my memory. Praise the Lord!

For some this proves that the wrong people have been going to synod. We need people who are "positive," not "negative," who have "faith in the decision-making process of the Christian Reformed Church," and so forth.

The great illustration of the good that synods can do is said to be its decision on the H. Boer gravamen against the doctrinal statements on double predestination or reprobation in the Canons of Dort. Look, these people say, how the synod easily reached agreement on the recommendations of the Study Committee, asking that this gravamen be rejected.

Again, praise the Lord! To whatever extent the Boer position was denied by the Christian Reformed Church and the regular, historic position of the Reformed Faith affirmed, we say, great! May the church ever show herself unwilling to compromise with error or deviate from the Truth.

1981's Threatening Storm

There is, however, a significant difference between the way the most important issue of 1980 (the Boer gravamen on reprobation) came to the floor of synod and the way that the most important issue of 1981 (the admission of women to the office of deacon) will most likely get there.

To put it quickly and simply: It is one thing to decide a matter which comes as the recommendation of all or more of a Study Committee; it is quite another to resist and reject such a recommendation.

"Stacked" Committees

The smart people in the church have known this for a long time. They are careful, therefore, to see that the "right people" get on these important and very influential committees. These are not usually people coming "from the right" in the church, except in a minority of instances. They are also a rather restricted group. I think it was a California consistory which brought to synod's attention not many years ago that the personnel on synodical study committees appointed in recent decades was dominated by a relatively small group of people.

That is why — to bring up a painful subject — there was such a fuss about the study committee appointed in 1979 "to review without prejudice the 1978 report on 'Hermeneutical Principles Concerning Women in Ecclesiastical Office' and the decisions of the Synod of 1978 regarding the ordination of women as deacons." That committee as originally appointed consisted of the following: Dr. Richard De Ridder and Dr. Andrew Bandstra (both of Calvin Seminary), John De Haan (executive director of the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee), Dr. James De Jong (Dordt College), Dr. Henrietta Ten Harmsel (Calvin College), Rev. Edward Van Baak (Area Secretary, Board of World Missions), Rev. Henry Vander Kam (Doon, Iowa), Mrs. Mary Vander Vennen and Rev. Jacob B. Vos (both of Toronto).

In the Acts of Synod 1980 this committee appears as follows (note the change): Dr. De Ridder, Mr. De Haan, Dr. De Jong, Rev. Van Baak, Rev. Vander Kam, Mrs. Vander Vennen, Ms. Nola Opperwall (graduate of Calvin Seminary, employed, I understand, by a Grand Rapids publishing house), Rev. Peter Jonker of Richmond, B.C., Dr. Carl Kromminga of Calvin Seminary.

Those of us who think that we know a few people in the Christian Reformed Church were never very hopeful that this "review without prejudice" would turn out in favor of the position that Scripture refuses the admission of women to office in the church.

Our suspicions appear now to be well-founded. A rather substantial rumor going about these days has it that the committee recently took a poll of its members. The result:

Only one was willing to declare himself opposed to the opening of the office of deacon in the church (one other wasn't sure, and is said to be a possible member of what looks like the smallest possible minority).

This means that for the fourth time synod will face a recommendation allowing such a change in our church polity.

The Important Issue: Rightly Reading the Bible

May I offer a few observations in this connection?

1) Please be sure that this is not an unimportant matter! The issue of women in ecclesiastical office has been and is being fought out most everywhere in Christian churches, both Roman Catholic and Protestant. Only a few of the most conservative of Reformed denominations have escaped this controversy. Even more important is the fact that this issue has often brought dissention, disagreement and great disturbance to God's people. Even such well-managed and sophisticated groups as the greater Anglican communion was unable to avoid a split on this issue. Let us pray for the true peace of Zion!

2) There are two big words in the mandate of the Study Committee which require careful attention. The one is *hermeneutical*, the other is *office*. * If you read THE BANNER, look in back issues for Dr. Lester De Koster's editorializing on "herman-eutic" (I think the spelling is correct). The whole matter of *office* is discussed in what has been described by a very competent person as "the most dangerous report ever to appear before a Christian Reformed synod," the 1973 report entitled "Guidelines for Understanding the Nature of Ecclesiastical Office and Ordination." I hope and trust that THE OUTLOOK will devote lots of space to this Report during the next months. All of us need very much to be enlightened on precisely what this Report says. Believe me, it says a great deal, and it calls for a radical reinterpretation of everything we have done as church.

3) Read and re-read 1 Timothy 2, 3! I recommend this not only because these chapters are part of the inspired and authoritative Word of God, but because it will then become plain that there is a very serious issue at stake in all of this. The following has been

*The Committee was instructed "to study and define the office of deacon in the light of Scripture, the Confessions, its historical development, especially within the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition, and the 1973 'Guidelines for Understanding the Nature of Ecclesiastical Office and Ordination' (Acts of Synod 1973, pp. 62-64). Acts of Synod 1979, p. 122.

said before, I know, but it needs to be said very often if we are to know what we are doing and where we are. People who can read this part of Scripture to mean deacons do not have to be male members of the church must have a different method of reading the Bible than many of us own. (For that reason we of The Testimony — write to THE OUTLOOK for a copy if you have never seen it — are called "fundamentalists" by those who disagree with our position on this matter. And they are absolutely correct, if reading the Bible literally makes one a fundamentalist.) My point here is only this: There simply has to be an *incredibly great difference of opinion* to allow one person to say, "The Bible allows women to hold office in the church," and another that "The Bible does not allow that." That does require a different "hermeneutic." Such profound differences are very dangerous, of course.

4) The attack upon the historic position of the Christian church will come not only from "liberals" who care little for the literal, obvious teaching of Scripture, but also from some who profess to have gained this "new light" by careful and consistent interpretation of a Bible they claim to believe and appreciate as God's Word. For example: a new book by Paul K. Jewett is being announced in the Fall 1980 "Theologian Catalog," a Wm. B. Eerdmans listing of recent and forthcoming publications in the fields of Religion, Theology, and Biblical Studies. The book is entitled, *The Ordination of Women*.

This is the way it is introduced by this publisher:

Now, in *The Ordination of Women*, Jewett argues that on the basis of the Christian ideal of the partnership of the sexes, women ought to share fully with men the privileges and responsibilities of church ministry. He does so by reviewing and then refuting three main arguments for excluding women from the ministry and other positions of leadership in the church.

For those who don't know who Paul K. Jewett is, let me say that he is Professor of Systematic Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, Cal. Fuller has altered some of its attitudes and opinions since the day of its founding under the sponsorship of Charles E. Fuller, the very conservative, fundamentalist, dispensationalist radio preacher. But it still isn't considered to be radically liberal, in fact, it would lay claim to being a Bible-believing theological seminary. Out of it comes such a book!

This means that it is going to be a very hard fight for those who will not yield to the pressures strong and impressive advocates of the new position present.

I hope that we are up to the task! ●

As we are being compelled to face this issue of women in office we urge our readers to get, study and promote the circulation of the new, carefully prepared booklet of Paul Ingeneri, "A Decade of Unrest" *The Issue of Women in Church Office in the CRC*. It is published by and may be ordered at \$1.50 per copy (postpaid) from the Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 4855 Starr St., SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49506, phone (616) 949-5421. It is designed both for individual reading and for group study.

EDUCATIONAL DOUBLE-MINDEDNESS

Peter De Jong

An Alumnus' Indictment

One of the most perceptive analyses of our basic educational problems I have ever seen was made last spring by a Calvin College alumnus, Stephen Krosschell (now in law school), in the March 21, 1980 issue of Calvin's student newspaper, *Chimes*. The writer found and called attention to a basic contradiction in the school's published statement of philosophy (*Christian Liberal Arts Education*, Calvin College and W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Mich. 1970) as well as in the teaching he experienced as a student. On one hand, he observed that the college officially claims to be "disinterested," and believes that it should engage in education "simply in order to discover how things are and why they are" (p. 48). "Knowledge should . . . be acquired impartially". On the other hand he found the statement of the school's philosophy also holding, as we read in the last page of the introduction, that its aim is "to equip the student for living a Christian life in contemporary society or, in other words, to equip the student to become a vital citizen of the kingdom of God as it is manifested in the contemporary world" and that "no education is neutral" but "that education is always of necessity based on some sort of philosophical perspective or religious outlook, and that this basis is reflected in the whole structure and orientation of education." This religious orientation and goal as well as concern for practical benefits he found is reaffirmed later in the book (pp. 66, 67). He saw in this a certain "incoherence" or, as we might say, "contradiction". The school's practices "both are and are not intended to cause particular benefits." They "are biased toward the interest of preparing students for life in the world and at the same time are not biased toward any interest."

The student found this contradiction in the school's professed aims coming to expression in the teaching of the various departments. "Some professors and departments rightly prefer CLAE's (the book's) subordinate theme of preparing students for life in the world. Most professors and departments, however stress CLAE's dominant theme of disinterest; their classes are taught accordingly." In the department of philosophy he found an emphasis on philosophical terms and methods with little or no concern for the implications of what was being studied for life and society. "Most Calvin philosophers subscribe to the philosophy of disinterest. They are not interested in

causing the benefit of preparing students for Christian life in the world." Turning to the history department, he found "most historians like most philosophers . . . not biased toward the interest of preparing students for Christian life in the world. They intend instead to investigate disinterestedly the discipline of history." The same complaint follows against teaching in the English department in which he found an interest in literary works while "the meaning which the whole work has for life in the world is usually unconsidered." Similarly, in the economics department he found that beginning "students are taught the jargon and methods of the discipline", but "little effort is made to acquaint students . . . with the modern economic problems", their bearing on himself or what he ought to do about them. Students in the physics department he found faring no better. They were not being prepared for Christian life in the world, but "the physicists instead disinterestedly focus their students' attention on the laboratories, techniques, and results of their scholarly discipline."

Krosschell was convinced that this whole emphasis was wrong. The school's usual choice for disinterested academic study and teaching meant that it was neither seeking to reach its own avowed aim nor to meet the students' most important need of preparing them for responsible Christian living. This basic problem of trying to reach two contradictory objectives calls for more than a bit of tinkering with curriculum if it is to be solved. The school will have to choose one of the two contradictory objectives and repudiate the other. If the school "wants to study knowledge disinterestedly, then it "should not claim" that it "intends to prepare students for life in the world"; if it decides that "an education should be biased toward that knowledge which is most relevant to Christian life in the world", then it "should not espouse disinterested learning." The writer was strongly convinced that the school should choose the latter course.

To what extent the teaching in the various departments of the school deserve this rather harsh judgment, it might be impossible for an outsider to determine. Students might be in a better position to make such an evaluation. Perhaps some might be disposed to dismiss Mr. Krosschell's indictment as just another student complaint that he could see no immediate practical value in the necessary deep and broad introduction which any serious acquaintance

with a particular area of learning requires — a demand for “vocational” instead of academic study, in other words. I believe, however, that his criticism, not merely of teaching, but of the school’s basic statement of its philosophy, has exposed what is possibly its most important and fundamental problem, the contradiction in what it is trying to do.

The Problem in the Seminary

Mr. Krosschell’s criticism of the educational philosophy of the college is paralleled quite closely by a similar observation made about a year ago concerning what is happening to the educational philosophy of the seminary. According to Article 19 of our (Christian Reformed) Church Order, “The churches shall maintain a theological seminary at which men are trained for the ministry of the Word.” Accordingly, the purpose for which our churches established and maintain a theological school is to train men for their official ministry. As that school has developed, however, it has come under increasing pressure and shows an increasing inclination to become an academic institution to train students in the widely recognized specialized field of theology. Across the country such schools are organized to establish certain common standards and achieve recognition and accreditation by other specialists in this academic field. Out of this situation two contradictory aims emerge. One of them is the original purpose to prepare men to believe, preach and teach the gospel of Christ; the other is the contrary aim to engage in impartial and uncommitted study of the various beliefs and movements that are found in the area of religion and philosophy. The greater the pressure and lure to engage in disinterested, non-judgmental study, the less room there is for developing Christian convictions. Accordingly, it is an old complaint that seminary training often undermines loyalty to the Christian faith instead of encouraging men to believe and preach it.

The Problem in Other Schools

These critical observations can be made not only about present developments in our own college and seminary. What we see and hear happening in our schools is paralleled by the same kind of development in many others. CHALCEDON¹ called attention to Wilson L. Thompson’s important doctoral dissertation, *Small Colleges and Goal Displacement* (268 pp; \$9.50; available from the author, 423 N. Moffet, Joplin, MO 64801) which deals with this subject. “Bible-believing groups establish new churches and then new Bible schools, colleges, and seminaries, and, before long, are feeding the forces of liberalism.” “Thompson traces the reason for this fact, the goal displacement whereby institutions created to strengthen one cause, fundamentalism, feed instead another, liberal or modernist religion.” He finds, according to the Chalcedon review, that, “A first and primary factor in the goal displacement of Christian colleges and seminaries is the desire for

academic dignity and standing, *accreditation*. Accreditation places the institution in a community very different from that which created it, and the college or school now responds to standards other than the faith which created it. Accreditation leads the school to train its students for a very different market or constituency, so that the school now responds to a different standard, while professing to be Bible-centered. Sadder still, resistance to this process of accommodation to the world of unbelief, i.e. accreditation, is exceptional, and yet these very churches and colleges were started on the principle of separation from false faith or from unbelief! Indeed, many of these separating groups boast when they are given accreditation.” “Such institutions,” Thompson points out, “begin by proclaiming their freedom . . . and their total submission to the faith, and then very soon submit readily and joyfully to the enemy’s slave collar of accreditation.”

The Triumph of Secularism

We may see this in a still broader framework as just part of the movement of secularization (or irreligious worldliness) that has taken over our modern civilization and captured our culture. Harry Blamires in his fascinating little book, *The Christian Mind*, focused attention on this fact. “By allowing the Christian mind to be destroyed, we have imposed an intolerable burden upon ourselves as individual Christians.” “We have accepted secularism’s challenge to fight on secularist ground, with secularist weapons and secularist umpire, before a secularist audience and according to the secularist book of rules. Having done so, we look around in dismay at the discovery that our followers are few, our predicament misunderstood, our cause misrepresented”. He called for “reconstituting the Christian mind”, beginning by “taking for granted the authoritative, God-given nature of the Christian Faith, and re-establishing in ourselves an unfaltering sense of the objectivity of Christian truth” (p. 117).

At a meeting of an organization of Christian teachers and scholars in the sciences some years ago in Seattle I recall one speaker remarking that although he was a Christian, in the laboratory he operated as an atheist. This prompted the excited rejoinder of another participant in the discussion that he feared that that was the trouble with most of us.

The Lord’s Sovereign Claim

The long career of Dr. Cornelius Van Til (as well as the beginning emphasis of the Dutch philosopher Dooyeweerd²) has been directed to showing that one cannot graft the Christian faith on the prevailing secular, really atheistic way of thinking and living and thereby produce a Christian philosophy — and a Christian education.

²Dr. Van Til’s essay in response to Dooyeweerd in the book, *Jerusalem and Athens* pp. 89ff calls attention to the apparent shift in the latter’s thinking, away from his earlier approach to these matters.

¹Chalcedon, P.O. Box 158, Vallejo, CA 95251.

Dr. Van Til was really only trying to remind us of what the Bible has always been saying. Elijah had to summon a people that was being overrun by and was surrendering to a naturalistic pagan culture in the days of Ahab and Jezebel, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). Our Lord warned "No man can serve two masters" (Matt. 6:24).

The Christian faith confronts us with an anti-thesis between it and the "secular" mind of unbelief which cannot be compromised. The attempted compromises always tend to end as surrenders of the Christian faith because they are already that from the beginning since they are in principle a denial of the claim of Christ to be Sovereign over *all* of our lives. James had to warn Christians against "double-mindedness". "A double minded man is unstable in all his ways." His "wavering", James sees as reveal-

ing his lack of faith, and he warns, "Let not that man think that he shall receive anything from the Lord" (James 1:5-8). And he was talking about the man's lack of "wisdom" and the need to look to the Lord to supply it. Later in his letter he had to summon his readers to decisive change and renewed commitment: "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded" (4:7, 8). As we in our churches and schools as well as in our individual lives are being overrun by an all-encompassing secularism, we more urgently than ever need to listen and respond again to the Lord's sovereign claim which will settle for nothing less than "casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). ●

THE INERRANCY ISSUE

John Vander Ploeg

"Thy word is truth."

So said our Lord (John 17:17) — and, in saying this, He confronted us with an issue, *the issue of the ages*. And also, the issue for the 80s.

This is the issue with which the Bible begins and with which it also ends.

This was the issue also in Paradise at the beginning when the serpent, with devilish cunning, called the matter into question by asking: "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of any tree of the garden?" That was the first instance of the so-called "new hermeneutic".

And that is the issue also as the Lord brings His Word to its awesome conclusion when He says of the Scriptures with utmost finality: "If any man shall add unto them, God shall add unto him the plagues which are written in this book; and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book" (Rev. 22:19).

"Thy word is truth".

This is the lodestar to guide life's mariner to the only haven of safety; the touchstone for him who seeks to know what is the true, the good, and the beautiful; the secret of those who give up the pleasures of sin that are but for a season; and who, with Moses, look unto "the recompense of reward" (Heb. 11:26).

Of those who presume to sit in judgment on the Word, Sir Walter Scott once said so well:

"And better had they ne'er been born,
Who read to doubt or read to scorn."

The issue is whether *Thus saith the Lord!* is for us to be or not to be. And part and parcel of this crucial

issue is the question: Is our Bible *inerrant*, yes or no?

A live issue — No, we are not now about to whip a dead horse, or to belabor a question that no one is asking. The *yes* or *no* of the inerrancy of Scripture is a live and a current issue. It is such notwithstanding the contempt of the liberals who may judge the discussion of it to be much ado about nothing; notwithstanding the concern of certain evangelicals who would rather squelch it as an unnecessary and a nasty squabble that will do no more than spread disunity among their ranks; and notwithstanding the aloofness of those peace-at-any-price evangelicals who refuse to become involved in their hope that the matter will just go away of itself.

Indeed this *is* an issue, and one that is very much alive. And, try as we will, we can see this as nothing less than an instance of incipient higher criticism now asking for and also receiving acceptance in evangelical circles. The same devil whom Jesus calls "a liar, and the father thereof" (John 8:44), the one who at the beginning led Eve astray in the Garden, is still at it. The trick is to start ever so small (merely to concede errors in the Bible as to history, science, geography, chronology, and other "non-revelational" matters) — and then how easy it is to go on from there.

Voltaire, a deist and an opponent of all organized religion, knew what he was talking about when he once said: "If we would destroy the Christian religion, we must first destroy man's belief in the Bible". But, in making his attack, Satan is wily enough to begin with a soft touch and not with a sledgehammer.

In his "Foreword" to *God's Inerrant Word* (edited

by J. W. Montgomery) R. C. Sproul writes: "At the turn of the century, Abraham Kuyper warned of the possibility that developing trends in the higher criticism of the Christian Scriptures could become an exercise in 'Biblical vandalism'. That warning is no longer a future possibility but a *fait accompli* . . . 'Studied ambiguity' is the hallmark of modern confessional statements. In a word, the foundations of the church have been rudely shaken".

It was intriguing to learn recently of a church with a pulpit desk on the back of which confronting the preacher is this inscription: *Preach the Word*, and on the front of which confronting the congregation is the inscription: *Thus saith the Lord*. A pulpit will continue to have power only to the extent that it proclaims the Word, the whole Word, and nothing but the Word as being, inspired, infallible, inerrant, and authoritative — not only in part but in its entirety from start to finish.

Recent trends — The recent trends with respect to the inerrancy issue among evangelicals have been spelled out clearly and definitively by Dr. Harold Lindsell in his *The Battle for the Bible* (1976, Zondervan) and now in a second volume *The Bible in the Balance* (1979, Zondervan).

In "The Introduction" to the second book, Lindsell states: "*The Battle for the Bible* appeared in print in the spring of 1976. *Time* magazine featured it in the religion section shortly thereafter. In a few months' time the book elicited national and international responses which ranged from enthusiastic approval to intense opposition . . . This writer has published fifteen books through the years . . . More letters concerning this book were received than for all of the other works combined. The mail was supportive, encouraging, and appreciative, except for two or three letters at most. Those who reacted negatively chose to make their opinions known in other ways" (p. 9).

It will be recalled that Dr. Lester De Koster, former editor of *The Banner*, took vigorous issue with Lindsell's *The Battle for the Bible* even to the point of calling it "a highly incompetent work, at most a reservoir of unseemly gossip," an unbecoming and regrettable slur.

The current trend is to affirm the infallibility of the Bible while, at the same time, denying its inerrancy. For example, Dr. Stephen T. Davis, in his *The Debate about the Bible: Inerrancy versus Infallibility* (1977) writes "The Bible is *inerrant* if and only if it makes no false or misleading statements on any topic whatsoever. The Bible is *infallible* if and only if it makes no false or misleading statements on any matter of faith and practice. In these senses, I personally hold that the Bible is infallible but not inerrant" (p. 23).

The current trend is evident also from a 1973 table of statistics as to the percentage of ministers still in agreement with the following statement: "Scriptures are the inspired and inerrant Word of God not only in matters of faith but also in historical, geographical, and other secular matters".

The statistics reveal a significant disparity in the percentage of agreement on the part of ministers over 55 and those under 35 as follows:

	Over 55	Under 35
Episcopalians:	8%	4%
Methodist:	17%	8%
Presbyterian:	21%	6%
American Baptist:	42%	17%
American Lutheran:	50%	6%
Missouri Synod Lutheran:	90%	63%

These figures speak for themselves. It would be interesting to know what a survey of CRC ministers would reveal on this score. And please don't say, "It can't happen to us."

Dr. Harry R. Boer, whose recent gravamen denying reprobation is still fresh in our memories, in *The Reformed Journal* of March, 1978 stated forthrightly: "I do not at all believe that we have a Bible that is 'without error in all its parts.' Such a statement may be piously meant, but it is *scripturally untrue*. It is contradicted by a stream of data that flows from Genesis to Revelation . . ." (p. 17). Notwithstanding such a bold disavowal of the inerrancy of the Bible, Dr. Boer is allowed to go freely on his way as a member and as a minister "in good standing" in the CRC.

Theological seminaries are on record occupying opposite positions on the inerrancy issue. John Warwick Montgomery in *God's Inerrant Word* (1974, Bethany Fellowship) writes: "Today, entire evangelical faculties of theology line up on either side of the issue: Covenant, Dallas, Talbot, Trinity, Westminster, France's Faculté Libre de Théologie Réformée, Germany's Bibelschule Bergstrasse affirming the total reliability of Scripture; Asbury, Bethel, Fuller, North Park, the Free University of Amsterdam allowing the issue of biblical error to remain an open question" (p. 20). How gratifying it would be if Calvin Theological Seminary would remove doubts and misgivings on the part of the CRC constituency by publishing a consistent and unambiguous pro-inerrancy stance. If the trumpet is to give forth no uncertain sound from CRC pulpits, this also is of the essence.

The issue stated — In ascribing both *infallibility* and *inerrancy* to the Bible it is necessary that we define our terms precisely. Why, we are being asked, is it now necessary to add "inerrant" if we already have professed the Bible to be "infallible"? The answer: for two reasons.

First, the trend today among evangelicals is to ascribe only a limited inerrancy to Scripture while at the same time saying that it is infallible. We are being told by some that the Bible is infallible but that its inerrancy pertains only to matters of "faith and practice" or to what they call "revelational" matters while this does not pertain to matters of history, chronology, geography, science, and other secular matters regarded by them as "non-revelational". In maintaining the historic Christian position, we hold that all of Scripture is revelational, and that both infallibility and inerrancy are to be ascribed to it in all its parts.

Second, it ought to be recognized that, although similar, *infallible* and *inerrant* are not identical in meaning. The Bible is *infallible* in that it is not *liable to error*; it is *inerrant* in that, as a result of its infallibility, it is actually *free* from error. Although

the two terms may at one time have been synonymous in their connotation and coverage, this is no longer true and hence it is necessary to distinguish clearly.

To be sure, the inerrancy ascribed only to the autographs (the original manuscripts as they came from the Bible writers) does not apply to the copying, translating, and printing of the Scripture done throughout the years by those who were not infallibly inspired in what they did.

The objection is made, of course, that it is nonsense to affirm inerrancy for documents that we no longer possess. However, we may believe that God in His gracious providence, barring errors in copying, translating, and printing, has for all practical purposes preserved the autographs for us in the Bible we have. It may also be true that we no longer have the original manuscripts of the writings of Cicero, Plato, Shakespeare, or John Bunyan, but no one denies that we actually do have what they wrote. The Bible we have is inerrant to the extent that it is a true copy and translation of what the authors of Scripture were inspired by God to write.

To maintain the inerrancy of the Bible does not mean that we are now able to resolve every alleged error or apparent discrepancy with which we may be confronted. In many instances the solution is not difficult. For example, when the gospel writers do not give identical accounts of certain happenings, it does not follow that one must be in error, when both accounts may very well be true. Inerrancy does not necessarily require duplication or uniformity. Moreover, it is nothing else than picayune to say that Scripture is in error when it speaks of the sun setting or when it uses some other popular (but not strictly scientific) expression. Even the most learned men of science do the same.

As for those alleged errors or contradictions for which no solution has yet been found, we have no qualms about laying them aside until more light will appear. It is told of a believer and an infidel aboard a train that while they were enjoying a delicious fish dinner the infidel wanted to know of the believer what he did with errors and contradictions in the Bible in which he placed his trust. "The same thing that you are doing with this delicious fish", replied the believer. "You eat the fish and you lay the bones aside". For the believer, the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit is sufficient, and he is not dissuaded when difficulties arise that he is not yet able to understand.

It's in the Bible — There are those who have no patience with uncompromising evangelicals who are intransigent in holding that inerrancy is a corollary of the divine inspiration of the Bible. Such intransigence is thought to be obscurantism. Nevertheless, we hold inerrancy to be non-negotiable because of our conviction that it's in the Bible.

Rene Pache in his *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* (1969, Moody Press, translated from the French) spells out the Bible's testimony to its inerrancy as follows:

"The authors of the Old Testament speak most explicitly: 3,808 times they claim to be transmitting the very words of God . . .

"The psalmist cries out over and over: 'The law of Jehovah is perfect . . . I trust in thy word . . . I have seen an end of all perfection; but thy commandment is exceeding broad . . . Thy word is very pure; therefore thy servant loveth it . . . All thy commandments are truth . . . The sum of thy word is truth; and every one of thy righteous ordinances endureth for ever . . . Let my tongue sing of thy word; for all thy commandments are righteousness' (Ps. 19:7; 119:42, 96, 140, 142, 151, 160, 172)".

"Christ specifically confirmed the whole Old Testament . . . He consistently based His arguments and exhortations on Scripture. He declared: 'One jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished' (Matt. 5:18). Discussing a single word with the Jews, He said: 'The scripture cannot be broken' (John 10:35). And He exclaimed toward the end of His days on earth: 'Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth' (17:17)" . . .

"For the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, the Word of God, effectual and penetrating, goes so far as to judge even our feelings and our innermost thoughts (Heb. 4:12). It is not our prerogative to set ourselves up as its critic . . ."

Add to the above the well-known words of 2 Timothy 3:16, "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness . . .", and the evidence is altogether conclusive. The whole Bible is of one piece. There is no warrant whatsoever for separating that which is "revelational" from other parts that are "non-revelational", or that which is inerrant from other parts that are said to be in error.

The idea that the Bible admits of errors or is even riddled with them is foreign to the consistent tenor of everything the Lord tells us in His Word.

A fatal concession — To concede that the human authors of the Bible have erred here and there is by no means as insignificant and innocent as some would have us believe. The price for yielding on this point is simply too high.

The late John Murray in his contribution to *The Infallible Word* (1946, Eerdmans) has said it well. "Human fallibility cannot with any consistency be pleaded as an argument for the fallibility of Scripture unless the position is taken that we do not have in the Scripture content of any kind that is not marred by the frailty of human nature" (p. 5).

And that is so serious because then in reality we have no Bible left at all. As soon as anyone claims the right to deny the inerrancy of some of Scripture he must grant others the same right to deny the rest of it. There is a domino effect when we push over any part of the Bible that soon results in knocking down other parts of it as well. This is fatal because it lands us in a subjectivism that deprives us of any objective and ultimate source of truth outside of ourselves. Then man becomes the measure of all things and spiritual and eternal bankruptcy is the sure result.

"Thy word is truth".

Jesus said it. We neither dare nor care to say anything less. It is only then that we can keep on singing "How firm a foundation". ●

DEATH OF A FRIEND



EDWIN H. PALMER (1922-1980)

Encounter with our "last enemy" (1 Cor. 15:26) is never easy.

And so the news that our friend, Dr. Edwin H. Palmer, had died was not easy to absorb. Ed was healthy. He worked at keeping physically fit. And he looked it. Seeing him was pleasant for many reasons, among them the fact that the ravages of time didn't seem quite so inevitable when this vigorous, youthful-looking man was around.

But he is now with the Lord, "which is far better" (Phil. 1:23) for him, although a great loss for us. By this little piece we of the Reformed Fellowship and **THE OUTLOOK** wish to express our sympathy to his wife and sons, to all who mourn because of his passing, and to pay tribute to the memory of one with whom we expect reunion one day soon in everlasting glory.

Edwin H. Palmer — as any discerning Christian Reformed person of Dutch descent can easily guess — was not born "in our circles." I know little about his spiritual roots except that they were not typical of us. He came to us "from the outside," and in this instance it was a very happy and fortunate accession.

I met him first on the campus of Harvard University in the Spring of 1943. He was a student there, and he made his room available to me so that I might spend a few days with a mutual friend, Dr. H. Evan Runner. Runner was then a junior fellow under the famous Greek scholar, Werner Jaeger, and they had become acquainted.

It was Runner who introduced Ed Palmer to the Reformed Faith as we know it, and he won a convert. They worshipped together in historic Park Street Church under Harold John Ockenga, I understand. Out of all this came a decision on Palmer's part to go to Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, after which he went to Holland to do

his graduate work at the Free University. From that institution he received the Th.D. degree in 1953. His sponsor, I suppose, was G. C. Berkouwer.

The Christian Reformed Synod of 1953 by way of exception (he never attended Calvin Seminary) granted him candidacy, and so it came to pass in the Fall of 1953 that Edwin H. Palmer was ordained into the sacred office of Minister of Word and Sacraments in the Spring Lake, Michigan Christian Reformed Church. Interestingly enough, this was the same congregation which had called and ordained one of Palmer's most influential theological professors, Cornelius Van Til, some twenty-six years earlier.

Dr. Palmer was to have a varied ministry. Four years after his ordination he received a call to a new congregation, the church at Ann Arbor, and he saw in it a responsibility to do what he could to minister effectively in the Name of the Lord and in terms of the Reformed Faith there. He enjoyed that work, but it was cut short when he was invited by his alma mater, Westminster, to become an instructor in Systematic Theology.

Four years later (1964) he succeeded me in Grandville Ave. Church, Grand Rapids, at that time just about the largest congregation in the denomination. In spite of the fact that Grandville Avenue was perhaps more "ethnic" in character than even most other Christian Reformed churches, this "American" fit in well and served with distinction. I felt then that his adjustment to us was complete and wholehearted. Harvard had been overcome by Grand Rapids!

Four years later Ed surprised us all by accepting a call to the Preakness Church of Wayne, N.J. so that he might assume the executive directorship of an organization quite strange so far as we mid-Westerners were concerned: the New York Bible Society. Frankly, I couldn't see him as a kind of

office-bound administrator, no matter how prestigious the organization. But then we learned that he had been enlisted to supervise, organize and implement the translation of the Bible into contemporary language from a believing point-of-view (like all else, translation isn't 'neutral' either!).

This was a huge project, and a person of less conviction and vigor would never have attempted nor completed it. Many people and a great deal of money plus all kinds of ingenuity and perseverance were required — but Ed was up to it. Under God's guidance and blessing the New International Version of the Bible was published. In cooperation with the Zondervan Publishing Company this version was quickly recognized as a significant event in the history of biblical translation. Acceptance by the Bible-reading public was readily obtained, and today hundreds of thousands of copies* have been distributed.

From this sketchy account of our friend's life you can already gain some impression of his person as well as his work. To know Ed Palmer was to love him, especially if you shared with him a deep concern for the faith once delivered unto the saints. Ed loved the Christian Reformed Church because he believed that it stood for that faith, and he was minded

**An understatement, I think.*

to fight against all contrary influences. We were privileged to have him as a comrade and ally in that struggle, and we know therefore what we have lost.

I could say several things about his character and personality. But I prefer to say something in tribute to his faith. He was sincerely confessional, sensitively Reformed, and candidly Christian. He wanted the best for His Lord and for the Truth which He is and reveals. He wanted Reformed people to love their doctrine and to promote their heritage with competence, courage and conviction. My last memory of him is a speech delivered in the new chapel-auditorium of Dordt College in which he pleaded with us to bring what we know and believe into the marketplace and arena of everyday life so that the claims of the King might be heard by all.

To his dear wife, "Peter," we say, Thank you for the support and love which made it easier for Ed to do for all of us the things he felt called of God to undertake. We commend you to the grace of Him who led Ed Palmer from Cambridge to Philadelphia to Amsterdam to us.

To his sons we say, May God ease your sorrow and at the same time stir you up to follow after a father who spoke to you the Word of God. Please follow his faith! ●

John H. Piersma

TWELVE YEARS AGO

I thought my life had ended
Twelve years ago today;
The one I loved most dearly
No longer chose to stay.

There were no words of parting,
I simply found he'd gone;
My heart could only wonder
And try to carry on.

What do you say to children
Who do not understand?
"Is daddy never coming back?"
"O God, please take their hand."

How do you give your loved one
To someone else's heart?
With man it is impossible,
But God does strength impart.

And can there be forgiveness?
Ah, yes, at Calvary
Our precious Savior shed His blood
That we forgiven be.

I thought my life had ended
Twelve years ago today;
But God, in love and mercy
Had planned a better way.

He whispered words of comfort
And lifted me above;
He drew me closer to His side
With tender cords of love.

He opened doors of service
I never thought could be;
And how I thank and praise Him
For all He's done for me.

I thought my life had ended
But God had much in store;
And I will love and serve Him
Now and forevermore.

Annetta Jansen
Dorr, Michigan

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THANKSGIVING: THE WAY IT REALLY WAS

Gerda Bos

Each year, in October and November, stationery counters offer napkins and paper plates depicting plump children and smiling parents in quaint hats and buckled shoes, preparing a lavish meal.

In schoolrooms throughout the nation, teachers instruct pupils in the art of making cornucopias filled with yellow and red and orange construction paper fruits and vegetables. There are pageants, too, and plays, for which mothers sew charming costumes to be worn by plump, freshly groomed girls and boys.

It is the time when candle stores offer wax figures in wide-collared suits and pointed hats — out of which a bit of wick protrudes — to shed a romantic glow upon the dinner table or sideboard.

All this and more accompanies our twentieth-century celebration of a festival first observed in this nation in 1621 when a small group of settlers in Massachusetts called for “a day of rejoicing” after their first planting had produced an adequate harvest.

But however nostalgia-provoking this decor may be, it is a far cry from the original event. The paper napkins and candle figures are part of a myth which substitutes imagination for reality, that emasculates the originators, and that emphasizes eating instead of worshipping. Like

Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny, the Pilgrim has become a motif around which to plan a holiday.

For the true story of the first Thanksgiving Day, it is necessary to return to the records written by people who were there. On such account is included in **A Relation or Journal of the Beginnings and Proceedings of the English Plantation Settled at Plymouth in New England** (Printed in London in 1622). It is a letter from Plymouth Colony, dated December 11, 1621, offering advice and directions to others who might be interested in coming to that settlement.

The writer, generally assumed to be Edward Winslow, reports that during the colonists' first spring, with advice from the Indians, they planted 20 acres of Indian corn and 6 of barley and peas. The corn crop was good, the barley fair, but the peas had not been worth gathering.

When this crop had been harvested, the leader, William Bradford, sent men to shoot fowl so that, as the letter puts it, “we might after a more special manner rejoice together after we had gathered the fruit of our labors.” This celebration lasted almost a week, during which the colonists feasted, practiced marksmanship, and entertained their friend Massasoit and 90 of his men, who contributed 5 deer to the occasion.

The other record of the event occurs in Bradford's history, **Of Plymouth Plantation**, which he began to write in 1630, 9 years after it took place.

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His account develops the theme: "the Lord is never wanting unto His in their greatest needs; let His Holy name have all the praise."

They began now to gather in the small harvest they had, and to fit up their houses and dwellings against the winter, being all well recovered in health and strength and had all things in good plenty. For as some were thus employed in affairs abroad, others were exercised in fishing, about cod and bass and other fish, of which they took good store, of which every family had their portion. All the summer there was no want; and now began to come in store of fowl, as winter approached, of which this place did abound when they came first (but afterward decreased by degrees). And besides waterfowl there was great store of wild turkeys, of which they took many, besides venison, etc.

In Bradford's history, this short passage follows his narrative of the Pilgrims' sufferings in England, their sojourn in Holland, their extensive preparations for removal to the New World, the Mayflower voyage, and the hardships of the winter of 1620-1621.

He recalls how after the ship's arrival at Cape Cod on November 11, it was necessary for searching parties to explore the mainland to find the most advantageous location for their settlement. On these trying, sometimes hazardous expeditions, the men endured bitter winter storms; the sea spray often froze to a glaze on their coats. At night they tried to shelter themselves in crude barricades, made of thick pine boughs. Indians skulked about them; there were terrifying sounds in the night, whether of men or animals they could not be sure.

More than a month of such exertions was necessary before a place of settlement could be agreed upon. By that time, exhaustion, frequent wettings, cold, and inadequate diet had taken their toll. The result was that many, who had caught heavy colds, developed bronchial infections and racking coughs; scurvy and other diseases began to claim victims.

During the January and February that followed, in the depth of winter, sickness raged. Bradford writes that in the time of greatest distress only 6 or 7 persons remained well enough to care for the sick. These few:

spared no pains night or day, but with abundance of toil and hazard of their own health, fetched wood, made the fires, dressed them meat (meaning, prepared their food), made their beds, washed their loathsome clothes, clothed and unclothed them.

And although Bradford makes no mention of it, surely they also had to bury those who died, sometimes 2 or 3 in a day.

Death made no distinctions: it took husbands with their wives, children with their parents, masters and apprentices, mistresses and their servants. Of the 101 who made up the original

number, one-half died. Mary Chilton, Samuel Fuller, Priscilla Mullens, and Elizabeth Tilley each lost both parents. Isaac Allerton's 3 children were motherless, as was Francis Eaton's baby boy. Of the original 18 married couples in the group, only 3 pairs survived. In 9 cases, husband and wife had both died; 5 men were widowers; Susanna White, whose second son had been born on the Mayflower, was a widow.

Not until warmer weather returned to the Atlantic coast was there relief. Bradford writes that when spring came,

it pleased God, the mortality began to cease amongst them, and the sick and the lame recovered apace, which put as it were new life into them, though they had borne their sad affliction with much patience and contentedness as I think any people could do. But it was the Lord which upheld them, and had beforehand prepared them; many having long borne the yoke, yea, even from their youth.

It was the remnant, then, who had prepared the alien, rocky soil, planted English barley and Indian corn, and picked up the pieces of their lives. There can have been little leisure time, except perhaps for those Sunday hours not spent in worship. Dwelling places had to be improved; relations with the Indians needed to be established on an honest basis. There was a heavy debt to be paid, now the responsibility of one-half the number of original borrowers. Fishing, fur trading, and lumbering had to be carried on to provide means of satisfying London creditors. For protection from possible Indian attacks, the colonists used precious time and energies to build a palisade around the settlement and its gardens.

It was this small band whom Bradford wisely called away from their toil for "a day of rejoicing."

No artist was present to reproduce the occasion — to sketch the rude tables and the simple foods, to capture the shrunken, faded clothing and shapeless shoes, the burned skin and the bleached hair.

There was no journalist to interview the surviving leaders, Bradford and Winslow, whose wives were both dead, or widowed Susanna White, or orphaned Priscilla Mullens. No one has recorded, with words or brush, the effects on the children of being hungry and cold and feverish, of crying in the black night for a parent who did not come.

The scant surviving record does not deal with these matters. It does relate what its writers thought was most important for following generations to understand — that it was an unshakable faith in God's providential dealings with them that sustained the Pilgrims.

These are the real people who observed a day of thanksgiving. They are very different from Hallmark's mannikins. ●

The Editor of this department is Mrs. L. Vanden Heuvel whose address is 207 Kansas Ave., N.W., Orange City, Iowa 51041.

IAIN MURRAY ON THE BEGINNINGS OF CHURCH DEMORALIZATION

Peter De Jong

Among the significant books recently being published by the Banner of Truth Trust in Scotland is *The Diary of Kenneth A. MacRae — A record of fifty years in the Christian Ministry*. The over 500 page book is a selection from the diaries of a Scotch Presbyterian minister from 1912 to 1963 edited by Rev. Iain H. Murray. Especially fascinating are some of the observations made in the first chapters about what was happening in the Scotch Presbyterian churches in the earlier of these years. "In later life, recalling the strength of Christian influence in the Scotland of his youth, MacRae wrote:

"Fifty years ago the Sabbath was universally observed throughout Scotland, and whatever desecration there might have been was furtive and shame-faced. This being so, church-going was the order everywhere. The writer remembers as a little boy how both sides of Earl Grey Street and Lothian Road in Edinburgh from 10:45 till 11 o'clock every Sabbath morning were thronged with a double stream of worshippers . . . converging upon their respective places of worship. Then, with the cessation of the church bells, a strange hush fell upon the city . . . Such an order of things may appear incredible to the city-dweller of today, but it was literally true. In the country districts a similar sight was to be seen, the roads being almost black with people as practically the whole community exercised their privilege of waiting upon God in the courts of Zion . . . In the evangelical districts of the Highlands at any rate, family religion in those days was a reality, and the daily worship of God was a permanent feature of most homes."

Harbingers of Change

"Yet even at this period," Murray observes, "the influences which were to bring sweeping changes across the face of Scotland were already well established. First in theological colleges, and then, more hesitantly, in traditionally Calvinistic pulpits, voices were to be heard which would in time transform both the church and the day school. It began with professors of divinity tentatively questioning the historicity of the Pentateuch, and this was coupled with theories as to the authorship of portions of the Bible which assumed errors in the Scriptures' own testimony." ". . . The same school of thought which urged a less 'rigid' view of doctrine was often equally strong in asserting that a personal *experience* of Christ would not be undermined by this approach. The need for an evangelical faith remained unquestioned and if the Bible required in some measure to be re-constructed it would only result, it was said, in establishing its authority on a truer and firmer basis. It is difficult today to understand how this assumption was possible, but the fact is that the new religious outlook — for the present at least — inspired enthusiasm and offered reassurance in a century which believed it saw so many proofs that 'truth' cannot 'stand still'. The claim was that with the new outlook the church would retain her credibility in the face of modern scholarship and thus extend her influence in the contemporary world" (pp. 8, 9).

The Direction of Change

At the same time, it appeared that some sensed where these trends in church thought were really leading. At the beginning of the next chapter

Murray refers to a sermon of a Dr. Kennedy, preaching in 1881 on Isaiah 26:20, "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers . . ." "In applying the teaching to his own time he said that judgment was fallen upon the church in Scotland. It was a judgment with in the church and would manifest itself in five ways. (1) The Lord would remove most of his living witnesses and great blanks would be left unfilled in the church. (2) False teaching would take the place of the Gospel. (3) Spiritual discernment would leave the people, and under their darkened understanding they would swallow new teaching as a blind man would swallow a dish of water whether clean or unclean. (4) A spirit of worldliness would fill the minds of the people, and they would forsake the means of grace. Where hundreds once attended, they would soon be counted only by tens. (5) The Lord would deny to Scotland the work of the Holy Spirit. Though He promised to leave a seed to serve Him, He did not promise that Scotland would continue to enjoy this favour. As in days of old the worldliness entering in would grieve Him and cause His Holy Spirit to be withheld and then His true servants and people would be few" (p. 14).

The Movement to Tolerate Higher Criticism

In this chapter our attention is directed to the controversy that arose about "the reliability of Scripture". "In 1881 Dr. Robertson Smith, a young Free Church professor in the denomination's theological college at Aberdeen, was — after much hesitation — removed from his post by the General Assembly for advocating opinions on the origin of the Old Testament inconsistent with its divine inspiration. But while such Higher Critical views . . . were not common in the Free Church ministry in the 1880s there was a growing readiness to believe that the Higher Critical view of the Bible did not necessarily affect the substance of the Christian Faith." At this point a footnote refers to some "evangelical" advocates of such toleration of Higher Criticism. One of them, Alexander Whyte "could plead for a return to Puritan preaching . . . apparently unconscious that he had been a party to the removal of the *foundation* of such preaching." In 1883 the General Assembly Moderator, "the aged Horatius Bonar, considered it necessary to warn the Church that 'Fellowship between faith and unbelief must, sooner or later, be fatal to the former'. Others of Bonar's contemporaries repeated the same warning. The day of the older leaders was, however, almost over, and when, in the 1890's a charge was levied against two Free Church professors, A. B. Bruce and Marcus Dods, on the grounds that their teaching was undermining the New Testament, it was put aside by the General Assembly even though confirmation of the charge could be drawn from their writings. Speaking of Dod's role in the Free Church, C. H. Spurgeon wrote, 'That Church in which we all gloried as sound in the faith and full of martyrs' spirit has entrusted the training of its future ministers to professors who hold other

doctrines than those of its confession. This is the most suicidal act a Church could commit' " (p. 16).

Toleration Inspired by Unbelief, Even in Evangelizing

Probing further into the background of these developments, Murray sees that "Underlying to some degree all the above controversies was a growing unwillingness on the part of ministers to preach, and indeed to believe, the full Calvinistic theology of divine grace as set down in the Confession to which they had subscribed at their ordination. While it was not yet openly said that these doctrines hindered evangelism it was observable that the kind of evangelism which had become so popular and apparently successful since D. L. Moody's visit to Scotland in 1874 had small doctrinal content. The 'old school' evangelism . . . had been firmly founded on a clearly recognizable doctrinal position; the new evangelism, in so far as it was doctrinally oriented at all, leaned more to Arminianism than to Calvinism. For the first time in Scottish Church history a comparative disinterest in doctrinal purity was found in alliance with evangelistic endeavor and this explains why men who were adopting Higher Critical views could be found engaged in evangelism alongside others who still retained the orthodox view of the Bible. The latter were still the large majority and perhaps their very numbers served to blind them to the danger. They believed that a toleration of different views of Scripture and of a modified Calvinism would do no harm to the evangelical witness of the Free Church" (pp. 16, 17).

The chapter goes on to trace these developments as they prepared the way for the Free Church to unite with the more liberal United Presbyterians and precipitated the decision of a few who could not in good conscience join the union to form a continuing Free Church.

The parallels between this Scotch Free Church history and current developments in our own traditionally Reformed circles are many. The toleration of higher critical views of the Bible even by some who do not personally hold them, the notion that they can contribute to the real "progress" of the church "and the propaganda for a doctrinally indifferent or even doctrinally subversive form of "evangelism" become commonplace among us. In calling attention to such old fallacies and their destructive consequences Iain Murray and the Banner of Truth are offering a very important service to the wavering and confused Reformed churches of our time. Let us pray that the Lord may lead us to learn from the errors of churches in the past to identify and escape from the same errors as they reappear today. ●

Diary of Kenneth A. MacRae: A Record of Fifty Years in the Christian ministry. Edited with additional biographical material by Iain H. Murray. The Banner of Truth Trust. XIV + 535pp. \$16.95. U.S. address P.O. Box 621, Carlisle, PA 17013.

THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Lubbertus Oostendorp

SAVING FAITH

How Much Must We Believe?

When is faith saving? Time was when the intellectual requirements were too high. Today they are too low. Both extremes have hindered people from entering the Kingdom. The true preaching of the Gospel adds no requirements beyond the necessary truths. But it is also insistent that the standard shall not be less than Scripture requires. We must not make the gate narrower or wider than the Lord has made it. Ours is the day of the wide open door and the broad way to heaven.

As evangelists vie with each other to offer an easier Gospel, the time has come to set some very definite limits. Perhaps we should echo once more the stern warning of the Athanasian Creed. "This is the Catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved." Extreme as this may sound, when we consider the faith in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit which it defines, it is nothing less than essential.

The Heidelberg Catechism mentions three things which we must know. Note, it does not say "to be saved" but that in this "comfort you may live and die happily." The definition of saving faith is rather broad. The content of true faith is all that God has revealed in His word. Then follows the summary in the Apostles' Creed evangelically explained. After outlining the essential elements of Christian doctrine, the question is asked: "What does it profit that you believe *all* this?" (Question 59). However, we soon find ourselves dealing with a more condensed Gospel. The believing heart accepts Christ and all His benefits (Question 60).

Faith in a Doctrine and a Person

Is there a contradiction here? Sometimes we are speaking about all kinds of "truths". Then suddenly we shift to the Person. But this is only following the Biblical method. By preaching the truths the Truth Himself comes to us. For Calvin and the Catechism there is a correlation between sound doctrine about Christ and the benefits of Christ. This does not mean that to know the truths is enough. We must accept Christ and His benefits with a "believing heart". The Catechism suggests the same idea when it defines faith not only as a certain knowledge, but also a "hearty confidence that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sins, everlasting righteousness and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits" (L.D. VII).

How Much Certainty Must We Have?

There has been fully as much reduction of the ideas of the confidence as of the knowledge. Both requirements have often been reduced beyond recognition. When asked how much certainty a believer must have, Witius went so far as to require that he should at least "hope so" or "wish to wish to be saved". Some questions might also be raised about Berkhof's sharp distinction between faith and assurance.

Don't Seek a Minimum

The Catechism does not fall into the trap of trying to present a "least possible" faith. That would be more dangerous than trying to fly a

plane on the least possible amount of gas. It treats the use of Scripture as the natural man deals with food. He does not usually want to gauge a starvation diet. In fact, the whole minimum faith attitude is itself a sign of spiritual sickness. When we use the concentrated forms of the gospel, it is not to reject their elaboration. Rather, without the further explanations, the concentration is meaningless and faith is not faith but illusion.

Faith Also Sanctifies

The catechism is concerned not only with a faith which justifies, but also with sanctification. The Belgic confession contains a remarkable statement about sanctifying faith. In Art. XXIV we read: "We believe that this true faith, being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Spirit, regenerates him and makes him a new man, causing him to live a new life, and freeing him from the bondage of sin. Therefore it is so far from being true that this justifying faith makes men remiss in a pious and holy life, that on the contrary without it they would never do anything out of love to God, but only out of self-love or fear of damnation. Therefore, it is impossible that this holy faith can be unfruitful in man; for we do not speak of a vain faith, but of such a faith which is called in Scripture a faith working by love, which excites man to the practice of those works which God has commanded in His Word."

It should be noted that "regeneration" here is used in a wider sense of sanctification. Later in the Canons of Dordt and in Reformed circles it received a narrower meaning. Confusion in the usage has accounted for a good deal of controversy about mediate and immediate regeneration. If we mean by regeneration an observable, radical transformation of character and life, then we have given it a broad meaning. Note also, we are not here dealing only with the problem of faith and works. Rather faith and works are here not only always together, but faith produces works.

Berkouwer, the leading Dutch Reformed theologian, was deeply concerned about this relationship. He wrote two books on faith: *Faith and Justification* and *Faith and Sanctification*. He was on the right approach to the doctrine of sanctification. However, he seems to me to have failed to do justice both to faith and sanctification. In fact, his very way of linking the two seem to force him to modify each too much. *In his evaluation of Berkouwer, Lewis Smedes points out the defective view of the Dutch theologian regarding an actual change in the Christian. I am not sure if this reflects a Barthian influence, but it is obvious in his writings.

While trying to maintain the principles of "only by grace" and "only by faith", Berkouwer limits the character of faith. On the one hand, saving

faith is anti-works. It knows only the sinner who is justified as sinner. We must add, however, that there are other sides to the action of saving faith. The faith of Hebrews 11 is not a different faith than that of Romans 1:17. It is faith seeking a different result. Faith in Christ may seek forgiveness or justification *without works*. But faith in Christ may seek from Him renewal and sanctification. The "working by love" or the transforming grace is never part of our justification. But it is part of our salvation in a wider sense. With Calvin we may affirm that God justifies no man whom he does not also sanctify.

Saving faith must thus be considered as it seeks the basic foundation of our salvation in justification. However, it is not really saving faith if it does not also seek a new life in Christ. In this sense, faith is the victory that overcomes the world. Nor is it less a matter of grace when God solely of His gracious work makes us new creatures in Christ.

Faith Does More than Justify

In Barth one finds many statements which make of sanctification a form of justification. The effort to apply the identical faith to the reality of sanctification as to justification either destroys the concept of sanctification or deals in the illusion of sanctification. I cannot be sanctified by believing I am changed without any empirical change. But I can be sanctified by a faith which finds the power of real transformation of character and life in dying and being raised with Christ.

In short, saving faith is a wider, broader and deeper function than only the seeking and finding of justification. This is true both personally and collectively. Faith creates not only the new person but also the new community. Outside such movement toward the Church there is no salvation.

Faith and the Kingdom

But saving grace and saving faith also are used by God to create other aspects of His kingdom. Abraham Kuyper correctly saw that salvation involves the building of the Kingdom of God in this world here and now. He had inherited the illusion or confusion that the believer might take over the world. This had been the heritage of Constantine and "Christian" Europe. Today we have, however, a wave of cultural pessimism. We are told that Western civilization has no Christian roots or fruits. Kuyper could say this, too, of the "revolutionary age". But always there remained the duty and opportunity to have a Christian beach-head in the world. Saving faith creates an antithesis with the world. But saving faith which does not try to change its environment by creating the Christian family, Christian school, and christianized influence in the community is certainly not fully developed saving faith. Saving faith not only inevitably reaches out for a better world to come, but also moves toward a better world here and now.

*Hughes, P. ed., *Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology*, Eerdmans 1962.

THESSALONIAN LESSONS

Henry Vander Kam

AWAITING THE LORD'S RETURN

Lesson 7

I Thessalonians 5:1-11

The last event in the history of the redemption of God's people is the second coming of Christ. The question naturally arises, when will He come again? This question has been asked throughout the ages. Are we not to look forward to His coming? Can this be done if we don't know the time?

There were various questions in the Thessalonian church regarding the return of Christ and Paul deals with these questions in his letters to this particular church. However, when it comes to the question how long it will be before the Lord returns and the exact time of His coming, there is no need to give an answer. Jesus had spoken of this when He was still on earth. He had made it abundantly clear that no one knows the time. Therefore, it is a useless exercise to try to give an answer to such questions now. Later he will tell them about the things which must happen before He returns whereby they will have an idea as to the approximate time of His coming again, but it is not necessary to speculate regarding the exact time. The prophets had spoken of the approximate time of His first coming too, but not the exact time.

"As A Thief"

They are sufficiently acquainted with the teaching of Jesus and the Apostle's teaching during the time of his ministry among them to know that His second coming will be "as a thief in the night". Jesus had used similar terminology in His teaching about this matter. His coming will be sudden and unexpected. The thief does not give warning as to the time he will strike. So will it also be at His return. Surely, then, it is idle to speculate about the exact time.

The term "day of the Lord" is used here to describe the day of His return. This term had been used for the end of time since the days of Amos. It is the day which belongs to Him in a very peculiar way. It is the day of His triumph.

The writer now makes it clear that the unexpected return of Christ has reference primarily to the unbeliever. Many of them, of course, don't believe that He will return. They preach peace and safety. Jesus likened them to the people living in the days of Noah and in the days of Lot. They have lost themselves completely in the present.

Their engagement in the various pursuits of life, though legitimate in themselves, has only their own

enjoyment as its goal. They speak of peace and safety because everything from the beginning of the world till that time seems to go on without a cloud in the sky. While they are "enjoying" life to the full, sudden destruction comes upon them. For them it is totally unexpected.

Inescapable

The one figure of speech crowds the other in the writings of Paul. He now speaks of that time as that of a woman in labor. No, this does not refer to the unexpected nature of that time because she indeed knows that time is coming, even though she does not know the exact hour. Neither does it refer to the destruction which comes upon them because this is not a figure to indicate destruction. But, they shall in no wise escape! A woman will bring forth! Neither can the labors attending it be escaped.

Prepared Believers

For the believer, however, that day will not come as a thief in the night, neither will it bring sudden destruction. The unbelievers are characterized as those who are in darkness. Their minds are darkened and they are not able to see where they are going. This is not true of the believers — even though they do not know the precise time of the Lord's return. These are his brethren in the faith. They have the light and are, therefore, prepared. We must not overlook the fact that the Apostle teaches very clearly that believers will be ready for His return even though they do not know the time!

The believers are the sons of light — in contrast with the darkness which characterizes the unbelievers. The light has taken possession of them. They are sons of the day rather than of the night. Christ has called them: The light of the world. They are the light of the world because they are united with Him who is THE light of the world. The contrast is as sharp as possible. The thief, coming at night, doesn't affect the sons of the day and of the light!

Seeing they are the children of light they must not sleep as do the sons of darkness and of the night. This sleep speaks of laxity on the unbelievers' part. They believe that all is well — peace and safety — they fall asleep, not realizing that the thief is about to victimize them. Not so His people. They are to keep watch. They are to be alert! They do not know the time, but are always ready. Though the unbeliever thinks he is fully aware of what is happen-

ing, he is asleep. While he thinks he is alert to his surroundings, he is drunken. His mind and heart are beclouded. Sleep and drunkenness belong to the night and the night is the sphere in which the unbeliever lives. The believer is to be watchful and to be sober — the direct opposites of the unbeliever — and so await the return of Christ.

Properly Armed

How are the "sons of light" going to remain watchful and sober until the return of Christ? Must the thought of His return fill their minds and hearts every day and color their whole existence? These are the natural questions which arise. First of all, the Apostle points out that, since we are of the day, we are to be sober. Sobriety is natural for him rather than the drunkenness of the world. This sobriety comes by way of faith and love. Those are the qualities natural and necessary for the believer. His faith in Christ readies him for the return of Christ! He makes us ready by giving that faith. Love is the manner of life which is the product of his faith. Now, this faith and love is the breastplate for the believer. It guards his vital organs. It is one of the pieces of the Christian's armor (Eph. 6) and it is a defensive weapon. Only when faith and love is exercised will he be protected against all the forces which would lead him astray and cause him to sleep and be drunken.

It is noteworthy that the same things which are necessary for the union with Christ (faith and love) are necessary to defend us till the end of time. To know the exact time for the return of Christ is not essential. Faith and love are. His people have already received enough to keep them in safety even in the most difficult of times. He has given them a breastplate which nothing can pierce. Put it on! Exercise that faith and love! The inquisitive probing into the question of the exact time of His return betrays a lack of faith and love. Such inquisitive people think they need more than what He has given.

The hope of salvation is the result of the exercise of both faith and love in all of Paul's teaching. Salvation is hoped for, but is also assured. Hope is not used in the sense of desiring to obtain the uncertain, but is used in Scripture as that which is certain of fulfillment and is a present possession in principle. This hope must not only be kept alive but is to be worn as a defense until the great day of the Lord. They must put it on as a helmet. This, again, is a defensive piece of armor. It covers the head. It protects the thinking. They will not be led astray by the vain thoughts of others when they keep the hope of salvation clearly before them. Clothed with the breastplate and with the helmet, His people will be kept in safety.

Coming Judgment

When He comes again, what will be His purpose? Will it be a day of wrath for men? Indeed, for the unbeliever it will be the day in which he beholds the wrath of God. It will be the decisive day. It will be the day which cuts off the time and opportunity for

conversion. The day of the Lord may, therefore, well be feared by every unbeliever.

And Salvation

But, such will not be the nature of this day for the sons of light. The hope of salvation will then be fulfilled. This does not mean that they have lacked that salvation until then, but that the *full* salvation will then be manifested. The last event in their salvation will then be completed. God has "appointed" us to the obtaining of that salvation. Although he uses a different word than is usual with him, the writer has the same thought in mind as when he uses the term "election". He also uses a strange word to show how his people come into the possession of this salvation. They "obtain" it. Immediately he adds: "through our Lord Jesus Christ" to make it clear that this "obtaining" is not their own work. His return will be a glorious day for His people because their salvation will be complete and they shall be with Him.

This Jesus, who will return, is the same one who has died for them in the past. Seeing that He died for them, all the rest of the deeds in their salvation are assured, including His return. Through His death salvation was begun. Because of His death they are drawn into union with Him. Whether we are awake, are on the watch, are alive, whether we die, or are asleep, we shall live with Him. Nothing can separate us from Jesus Christ. His return will demonstrate again His close relationship to His loved ones.

They are to exhort, to encourage, to comfort each other with these words. They do not need the "comfort" of knowing the precise time of His return, but they do need the comfort and instruction which the Apostle has brought them. A curious prying into those things which have not been revealed will never be able to comfort anyone, but the gospel which has been received will do so. They are to be obedient to this gospel.

Even though questions arose in Thessalonica concerning these matters, Paul is also aware of the fact that they do speak to each other in the vein he has held before them. God's people have sufficient knowledge and gifts to look forward to the return of their Lord whenever that may be. In full assurance of faith they pray: Lord Jesus, come quickly! ●

Questions for discussion:

1. Why do so many wish to know the time of Christ's return? Why is it hidden from us?
2. May we speak of "doomsday"? May we speak of death as "the king of terrors"? Explain.
3. What responsibility rests on us as "sons of light"? How must our lives be different from those who "plant and build and marry" etc.?
4. The Bible has a higher estimate of our faith, love and hope than we do. Do you agree with that statement? If so, what should this teach us?
5. We often ask: Was he ready?, when someone is taken away. What does this mean? How do we get ready? Do we make ourselves ready?
6. Is there a danger of emphasizing eschatology (the doctrine of the last things) too much? Too little? What are the results of each?

ADMONITIONS FOR THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Lesson 8

I Thessalonians 5:12-15

It was difficult for the church to answer to her high calling in the early days of Christianity. Especially was this true of a small church and one which did not have the benefit of an apostolic presence to guide her in regard to doctrine and the defence of the faith. Such a church was the one at Thessalonica. It is no wonder that the Apostle ends most of his letters with admonitions to the church to be faithful, and I Thessalonians is no exception.

In the study of this epistle it must never be forgotten that Paul had spent a very short time in Thessalonica. He had used every moment at his disposal to instruct and to build them up in the faith. But, there is a very definite limit to the amount of instruction which can be given in a few weeks and there is also a limit to the amount of instruction which can be absorbed and understood by the hearers in so short a period of time. It is evident from these two epistles that the Apostle had proclaimed "the whole counsel of God" to them — that he had fed them with meat as well as with milk. We indeed stand amazed that these Christians have understood the gospel as well as they did. However, there are a few things which he desires to bring to their attention in order that the life of the church may prosper even more than it has.

Respect for Office

Because he does not mention elders and deacons in these epistles, there are those who believe that the admonition found in these verses is directed to the whole membership of the church. Besides, it was one of the first churches to come into existence, and, therefore, they believe, there was no organization to be found in this early church. We believe, however, that this view is not correct. Indeed, these admonitions come to the church, but they are to be seen in reference to the office-bearers which he appointed in every church. Those who labor among them are in office. In all of his missionary labors Paul has sought to establish the church — the *body* of believers and not an *aggregate* or loose collection of individuals. Therefore his insistence on office in every place so that the church could be the church and carry out her task in this world.

His admonition to the church is very gentle. He beseeches them, he asks them to do those things of which he will speak. He speaks of their attitude to those "that labor among you and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you". These are the characteristic duties of the elders in every church. The people are to "know them", i.e., they are to appreciate them. Apparently there was a problem on this score in this church. This is not surprising. It is a fault which has been repeated throughout the history of the church. The members of this church must remember that these office-bearers are the gift of Christ to the church. Their office is to aid the church. Even when they admonish you — it is for your welfare. When we remember that this church

counted some "important" people among its members and that some of the elders may have been from the lower classes, we can understand that a problem might arise.

These office-bearers labor among you. He uses a term denoting strenuous labor. They labor diligently and their work is difficult. These have been appointed by the Lord and their authority is from Him. There is a beautiful Christian warmth associated with these words. They do not labor among you as those who are serving themselves, but they labor among you and are over you in the Lord! They also admonish you to obey His Word. So the flock of Jesus Christ is tended and nourished and led.

Now these office-bearers are to be highly esteemed in love for their work's sake, says the Apostle. He forms a new Greek word, a compound, in order to express the high esteem in which they are to be held. There must be an affection for them. It is not to be an esteem because of their persons, but for their work's sake! The people must remember that these men are doing the work of Jesus Christ!

What is the nature of this office? Is it authoritative or is it service? Both. They are to serve the body of Christ with all their labors. They are not working for themselves, but, for Another. At the same time this service cannot be rendered properly except by the authority He has given them. They never come with the cold voice of authority — but, in the Lord! These two aspects of office may never be divorced from each other. Authority apart from service leads to hierarchism and service apart from authority leads to a man-centered institution.

He admonishes them to be at peace among themselves. They are to stop criticizing office-bearers and others. If they will have the proper esteem for office, that peace will come. True peace in a church is the only climate in which the gospel can be preached and where the people will grow in grace.

Mutual Discipline

After he has admonished them concerning the respect they are to have for the office-bearers who work among them, he also addresses a few words to the whole church regarding some of its members. The discipline is not to come by way of the offices only, but mutual discipline is to be exercised. The church of Christ is not to be a passive body, it is to be deeply concerned about all those who are in need. Christians are to be sensitive to the spiritual needs of their brethren.

First of all, he exhorts them to admonish the disorderly. By these disorderly ones he means those who are idle, those who do not work for a living. Paul has little respect for those who will not work. He tells the Thessalonians in his second letter to them that those who will not work shall not eat (3:10). However, in this particular place he does not seem to have in mind the generally lazy person, but rather, those who do not work because of their erroneous view concerning the imminent return of Christ. Why work anymore if He might come today or tomorrow? These are "out of step". These must be admonished. These are not promoting the work of the church but will become a burden. The thought of the return of

Christ may not lead to idleness but to unbroken labor while it is day.

Mutual Support

Then there are also the "fainthearted", those meek souls who worry about various things. There were those in Thessalonica who worried about those who had passed away before the Lord's return. They also worry about their own faith. These fainthearted have been found in the church of all ages. Assurance is lacking. The rest of the church must deal gently with them. They must be encouraged. This encouragement is given in the Word. Only when the Word is understood and believed will they lose their faintheartedness.

The weak must be supported. He does not refer to the weak in body, i.e., the sick, but those who are weak in faith. The Apostle distinguishes between the fainthearted and the weak. These two groups seem to have a lot in common and one would have to know the congregation at Thessalonica intimately to be able to understand the difference between the two. He commands the congregation to be long-suffering to all. Don't let them go! Be aware of the needs of each one and minister to these needs with the riches of the gospel. The church of Jesus Christ may never evidence the spirit of satisfying only one's own ego, but must be of spiritual help to all those who are fellow members of the body of Christ.

Kindness Instead of Revenge

Having given several specific admonitions to the church to correct some of the difficulties which have risen in the Thessalonian church, the Apostle now comes with a more general exhortation. The church must always give evidence of the fact that she is grounded in Jesus Christ. All of her teaching and action must display this foundation. She may not live contrary to the principles which He Himself has laid down. This particular church has been harassed by both Jews and Greeks. There was the temptation to strike back. This, however, would be contrary to the clear teaching of her Lord. Christians are not to render evil for evil. Instead, they are even to love their enemies. To love in the face of hostility will put their faith to the test, but it is required. It is often said that this teaching of Christ was totally new. However, this teaching was rooted in the Old Testament. The writer of Proverbs counseled the people

of God to give bread and water to the enemy (Prov. 25). Time and again the people were told that vengeance belonged to God alone. Christ brought it into sharper focus but it is the teaching of the Word of God from beginning to end.

Instead of rendering evil for evil they must "follow after that which is good." They must pursue this. They must strive with all their might to be of benefit to those who are hostile to them. Thus the church will exert her greatest influence in this world. The message of the gospel is foreign to the thinking of the natural man. The members of the church of Christ, who have believed the gospel, must make it plain in their lives that this gospel changes men's lives and that their attitude to others is the direct opposite from that of the world.

These admonitions which the Apostle has given to the church are to be accepted for their own welfare and to pave the way for the gospel in the lives of those who are now still hostile. They are not only to pursue that which is good to their fellow believers but also to those outside. The true church must live its confession in all relationships. Then only will its faith prove itself genuine and that church will be the light of the world.

Questions for discussion:

1. Do the offices in the church belong to its well-being or to its being? Can a church exist without them? Explain.
2. What is the proper relationship between authority and service as shown in the offices of the church? Discuss.
3. When Paul speaks of esteeming them exceeding highly *in love* for their work's sake, does this mean anything more than the love which we must show at all times and to everyone? Explain.
4. Is discipline only to be exercised by elders? What is the importance of self-discipline? Of mutual discipline? Are all three related?
5. Does Scripture demand that we identify the poor? Is one who refuses to work entitled to the financial help of the church?
6. How can we encourage the fainthearted? How does a person receive assurance?
7. What does it really mean to love your enemies? Does this trample justice?



Dear Editor:

The interesting article "A Break Overdue" by H. VanderKam, July 1980, evoked memories as well as insights re the Schilder controversy in the Netherlands.

There are several parallels which I feel should have been made since, although the issues may have been different, the mode of procedure is almost identical to the past history of the Christian Reformed Church in the U.S.

The author notes that Dr. Schilder was

deemed a *persona-non-grata* to the Christian Reformed Churches when he visited this country and indicated this attitude by an announcement in *The Banner*. Why not, to complete this observation, tell us that he was welcomed and given opportunities to speak in the Protestant Reformed Churches of America?

Two striking parallels, which are so clear to anyone familiar with church history that they had to be deliberately ignored are these:

1. "The Synod of 1942 . . . first suspended him (Schilder) and three months later deposed him as a minister and professor of theology. On what grounds? On none of the points of doctrine . . . Rather on the ground of his refusal to subscribe to the doctrine of Assumed Regeneration! . . . This one point was now elevated to the status of a creedal statement which he had to sign! He, of course, refused stating that he was only called to sign the Confessions. Dr. Greijdanus . . . retired . . . also deposed. A candidate would not sign . . . refused ordination . . . another church called him and ordained him, he together with the whole congregation were expelled from the denomination . . . Almost 100,000 people left to follow those who had liberated themselves from this tyranny."
2. "It became clear later that the ground used for deposing Schilder was not so important to the GKN. Two years later much of it was taken back, but it had served the purpose!"

And now let us transpose the above given quotes:

1. In 1924 the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church of America deposed from office the Rev. Henry Danhof and Rev. Herman Hoeksema followed by deposition of Rev. G. Ophoff and Rev. N. Yonker. On what grounds? Refusal to sign three points of doctrine formulated not as an interpretation but an appendage to the Confessions. They dealt with the matter of common grace, civic "good works" of unbelievers and the general operation of restraining work of the Holy Spirit. These theories were not new but never had they been elevated to the status of a creedal statement. They refused to sign these infamous three points claiming even as Schilder that they were required to sign only the Confessions. They together with their consistories were deposed and the Protestant Reformed denomination was born. Incidentally the Synod of 1924 declared that these men were "Reformed" but added that they were inclined to one-sidedness. We found it a bit amusing that someone asked a protestant: "If you are Reformed, what are we?" The reply was: "Your Synod didn't say!"

2. And for this parallel we can almost quote the former No. 2 verbatim. For it has become clear that the signing of the three points is no longer required for office bearers. They have served their purpose although their adoption has made a complete explanation of Questions and Answers 8 and 91 of the Catechism rather awkward. Neither can we with comfort read the *entire* Art. 4 of the 3rd and 4th heads of the Canons of Dort. The Synod of 1924 quoted as "proof" for the "good works" theory, only the first sentence and that for self-evident reasons.

Perhaps some may be asking, "Why pick the scab off this old pustule?" There are several good reasons for exposing this excreta. One of these is another parallel which you may transpose yourself. Quote: "Later history has shown that the decline of the GNK can be traced to 1944." Your transposition requires changing only the abbreviation and one number in the date.

Someone once said that the reason history repeats itself is because we didn't learn the first time around.

George TenElshof
Sparta, Mi.

Editor's Note:

The parallels to which this letter draws our attention are indeed instructive. Pursuing this instructive history a little farther, we recall that there was an effort to draw the Liberation movement in the Netherlands and the Protestant Reformed movement here together. That effort contributed to a conflict which split the Protestant Reformed churches. Although both movements opposed Liberalism they held to opposite emphases in their views of God's Covenant of Grace. The issues involved were more complex than simply orthodox opposition to Liberalism.

Dear Editor:

The excellent article by the Rev. John Piersma in the September issue of *The Outlook* was used as the feature for our first Adult Sunday School meeting in our church. Incidentally, three of our four elders (the fourth one has clerical duties which prevent his attending) are members of this class. It is probably a higher ratio than is usually found in our churches.

In the introduction to this article we find the following: "It is still difficult to understand why the youth of conservative churches (including our own denomination) are attracted to these movements."

Allow me to make the following observations, comments and questions, and perhaps those who are more knowledgeable (and their name is legion) can shed some light on the subject.

It so happened that on this same Sunday morning we had a Preparatory Sermon and, as is the custom, the first part of the formulary for the Lord's Supper was read. Our pastor chose to read from Form Number 2.

While turning to this form in the back of our Psalter the thought occurred to me that among the list of gross sins enumerated as reasons for persons abstaining are: ". . . all who seek to raise discord, sects and mutiny in Church or State;"

And so, since the list has over the years become familiar, we glanced ahead a bit in Form No. 2 and we do not find this sin enumerated as it is in Form No. 1. Is there any particular reason for this omission?

In light of the increase in cults, mutiny and discord it would seem that its inclusion is needed even more than in our original form.

Also a little asterisk (*) and footnote advises the reader that the reading of this list of sins may be omitted. Why?

If, as is usual in our circles, this form is read or listened to once in three months and even then these sins are omitted from that reading, must we wonder why our young people (and older ones too) are deluded by the cults?

Fraternally yours,
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THE STRENGTH OF THE HILLS,
Elswyth Thane, Christian Herald House,
Chappaqua, New York. 219 pp. \$6.95.
Copyrighted 1950, 1976. Reviewed by
Marian M. Schoolland.

Originally published under the title *Reluctant Farmer*, this charming book of Elswyth Thane has reappeared with a new title, one which at first blush suggests a devotional book. It is not that. In fact, there is little or no expression of Christian faith in the book, although two quotations from the Psalms are printed above the introduction. Nevertheless it is a book to inspire appreciation of God's creation and lead one to "look to the hills".

The author tells how she, with the help of a faithful worker, restored an old Vermont farm. The farm was bought during the early days of World War II, as a substitute for trips to England, and as a restful place where she and her husband (the famous explorer William Beebe) might work on their manuscripts. To her surprise, country life grew on her. She became so fascinated by the farm activities that she found herself thoroughly enjoying taking part as much as she could. First there was the maple sugaring, which turned out to be much more than painting pails and tapping trees. Then the haying. Every day there were experiences to be enjoyed.

Her view of life is positively refreshing. For example, after being startled by a bear crossing the driveway of the farm she comments, "The bears, it seems, are growing on us, and becoming a bit of a nuisance. It's a nice cheery thought that the original New England wilderness is not irreparably tamed." Rain during haying time inspires the remark that nothing so reduces you to your proper size in the universe as your dependence on weather. She gives hours of her work time to save the life of a baby bird blown from its nest in a storm, feeding it with cut-up grasshoppers and teaching it to fly. Reflecting on this she asks, "Would I do better to anesthetize myself into a comfortable conviction that it was none of my business so long as I did not actually see him die?" — a question that has much more implication than appears at first glance. So *The Strength of the Hills*, if not a religious book, does have a message for Christians too wrapped up in material interests, in the hustle and bustle that easily stifles deeper appreciations. The book is interesting, well worth reading as wholesome entertainment.

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE: A COMMENTARY ON THE GREEK TEXT, by I. Howard Marshall. William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1978. 928 pp. \$24.95. Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien, pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa.

This is the first volume of an ambitious series of commentaries: *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*. The author, lecturer in New Testament exegesis at University of Aberdeen, Scotland, is one of the editors of this new series. The purpose of the series, and therefore of this volume, is to provide an up-to-date commentary on the Greek text of the New Testament. It has been some forty years since a commentary on the Greek text of Luke has appeared. Obviously, a new work will consider the scholarship of these intervening years.

This scholarly work would be best used by the minister or student who has an acquaintance with the Greek language. It is not meant to be a practical commentary which draws lessons and applications, though some will certainly be found as the exegesis is done. It is not a commentary meant to be of help for the studying of society and Bible study lessons.

Sad to say, this volume is marked by tradition criticism and redaction criticism. Not only are we told "that Luke used Mk. substantially . . . beyond reasonable doubt" in the writing of this Gospel (p. 30), but more unacceptable ideas are laid out. In commenting on the Sermon on the Mount, recorded in chapter 6:20-49, the author refers to the parallel passage in Matthew and writes: "It is generally accepted that one basic piece of tradition underlies the two Sermons and that both Evangelists (and possibly their predecessors in the transmission of the material) have expanded it and modelled it in accord with their own purposes. A greater degree of freedom has been shown by Matthew" (p. 243). In commenting on Luke 23:56b-24:12, the author writes: "The historical basis of the tradition is also much debated, but there are no compelling arguments against the view that certain women found the tomb of Jesus to be empty early on the first day of the week. The doubling of the angel in Lk. and Jn., and the variety of statements attributed to him (them) may indicate that the angelic message is a literary device to bring out the significance of the discovery, which the different Evangelists felt free to develop in different (and characteristic) ways; on the other hand, the possibility of angelic manifestations is not to be dismissed out of hand . . . even if the nature of the sources make it difficult to establish exactly what happened" (p. 883).

While the discerning reader may certainly gain some insights from this enormous work, it will be disappointing in gen-

eral since there is a different view of Scripture that underlies the work. One questions the stewardship of spending so much money on a volume like this and ultimately on the whole set if all the forthcoming volumes will represent the same view of Scripture.

COMPLETE IN CHRIST and LOVE'S LOGIC by C. H. Spurgeon. Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1978. 144 pages, \$1.95, paperback. Reviewed by Rev. G. Vande Riet.

These two separate devotional gems, by that "prince of preachers," are in one volume. Inspiring, spirit-lifting, praise-evoking. Eloquent and warmly personal.

The former is based on Colossians 2:10: "You are complete in Him." Describes delightfully the fulness of our riches emanating from our oneness with Christ. A refreshing stimulus to sanctification, to "working out one's own salvation".

The second meditation draws from Solomon's Song 1:4: "The upright love Thee". As in any fruit of the Spirit, growth in grace is displayed also in the believer's love for the Lord. This growth may be traced by the *motives* that underlie the Christian's love. So the motives of such love are examined — again in a captivating way.

The entire book is highly recommended for group or individual meditation. Ideal for husband-wife devotions. Ruminant on it together, sentence by sentence and thought by thought. You'll be glad you did!

THE JOURNAL OF PASTORAL PRACTICE, Jay E. Adams, Editor in Chief, Baker Book House, Vol. 1, No. 1, Winter, 1977, pp. 143, \$3.50. Reviewed by Rev. Elco H. Oostendorp.

This is described as a "Professional Periodical for Ministers". The opening editorial points out that while there are many academic and theoretical publications for ministers there is none devoted to practical aspects of the ministry. The book is divided into sections on Christian Education, Counseling, Evangelism, Management and Finance, Medicine and Health, Missions, Para-Christianity (cults), Pastoral Work, Preaching, and Book Reviews. Obviously, it is difficult to enlarge on each item of such a wide range of subject matter.

The content of most of the contributions may be characterized as both inspirational and practical. There is much appeal to Scripture. The section on counseling gives specific applications of Adams' nouthetic method. "God's Blueprint for Marriage" by Wayne Mack could serve very well as an outline for a seminar for couples planning marriage. The articles by Dr. Bob Smith give some common-sense advice on matters of health. The section on the cults is devoted almost entirely to Mormonism,

and has material that is very valuable for the minister who finds these zealous missionaries active in his community. Dr. Adams makes a very good point in his brief article on "Preaching with a Purpose". No doubt, much preaching would improve if his suggestions were followed.

This is the first of what is projected as a *Journal* to be published quarterly, or possibly bi-monthly. The Editor and The Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation are to be commended for attempting this project. If the other volumes carry on in the spirit and position of this one, ministers subscribing to this *Journal* will be given many inspiring and helpful suggestions and much sound information.

A BOOK OF COMFORT FOR THOSE IN SICKNESS by P. B. Power. Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh. 1974. 100 pages, paperback. \$1.65. Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien, pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa.

Here is a very fine devotional book for those in armchairs or beds of illness. Many thoughts develop in the minds of those who are laid aside with sickness. The tempter comes with fears of being dependent on others, of being useless, about the future, of unworthiness of blessing and many more. When we are down, these feelings bring us even lower.

This little book is for those moments of quietness when we need some spiritual direction for our thinking. This might even be helpful for the young or inexperienced minister who sometimes struggles with what to say and how to say it.

There is one serious omission in the printing of this book. I find no answer to the question: Who is or was P. B. Power?

THE ROLE RELATION OF MAN AND WOMAN AND THE TEACHING/RULING FUNCTIONS IN THE CHURCH, George W. Knight III, Privately printed by the author, Covenant Theol. Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri 63141, \$1.00, 1975, Pamphlet, 11 pages. Reviewed by Rev. Elco H. Oostendorp.

This short study of the teaching of the New Testament on the relationship of men and women with special reference to its bearing on whether women should be ordained to ruling or teaching offices takes the traditional position in exegeting especially three passages from Paul's epistles. The author rejects interpretations that would blunt the force of these passages as time- or culture-conditioned. Anyone interested in a summary of the conservative position on this subject will find this paper by an Associate Professor of New Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary helpful. Dr. Knight does not address the question of how the biblical teaching here outlined should be applied in these days of changing roles for women.