

THE OUTLOOK

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

SEPTEMBER 1980



THE CHRISTIAN AND HIS WORK
QUOTAS
JONESVILLE REVISITED

QUOTAS AND CHRISTIAN GIVING

Peter De Jong

Confusion About Quotas

From time to time questions and discussions arise among us about our churches' "quota" system of giving. Whereas in some areas of the Christian Reformed denomination it has long been considered normal that poorer churches and classes contribute only part of the "quotas," in other areas the failure of a church or classis to fully meet them is being treated as a kind of delinquency comparable to failing to pay ones taxes. It is evident that the traditional system of per family quotas determined by classes and synods is coming to be widely regarded as a kind of tax which every loyal church member or family is, if at all possible, morally obligated to pay.

A little reflection on the matter would compel anyone to observe that if these quotas were really a tax they would be one of the most unfair and indefensible methods of raising money that could be devised. Is it not obvious that, in view of the wide differences in income among our members and families, giving such fixed per-family amounts as our quotas would be very easy for some families and very burdensome if not impossible for others? What civil government would consider such equal assessments on everyone as a satisfactory primary method of raising money? Should the churches be less considerate of individual needs and ability of members to pay than the civil authorities are?

What Does God's Word Teach?

Nowhere in God's Word is there any command or encouragement for such a "flat-rate" method of "giving." Although there were nominal assessments which were the same for all, such as the half-shekel poll tax (Ex. 30:11-16; Matt. 17:24-27), even the offerings prescribed for a mother were less for the poor than for the rich (Lev. 12:8), and the regular requirement for the worship of the Lord was a tithe or tenth of ones income.

When we turn to the New Testament do we find any indication (unless perhaps indirectly in 1 Cor. 9) that such a law as that given for the temple still applies to the support of the church? One can only argue with a measure of plausibility that if in the Old Testament a tenth of ones income was to be expected from God's people for the support of the temple, in the New Testament era of fuller revelation and greater responsibility, including that to bring the gospel to the whole world, the Christian should not be expected to do less. This giving of the Christian, however, is never put on the level of taxation, much less laid down as a "flat-rate." The New Testament teaches us to give "as we may prosper" (1 Cor. 16:2) and each "as he hath purposed in his heart; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7). It always places the emphasis on the relationship to and concern for Christ and His people which must prompt the giving.

Quotas Are Not Assessments But Averages

In the earlier years of our churches' history the classes and synods spoke of "assessments," but in 1939 the Synod observed that this term had no place in the churches' giving and should be dropped, and that "with respect to all the work in God's kingdom, for which we as a Christian Reformed Church are jointly responsible, we use the term 'quota' to indicate the amount per family recommended by Synod to the congregations" (*Acts 1939*, p. 72). Notice especially the term "recommended" which means to "advise," "counsel" or "suggest." It cannot be construed to mean "order" or "command."

There are many indications that although the term "assessments" has been dropped for 40 years, the idea it expresses still lingers or is returning, and in some cases is even being defended as proper church order.

The only way in which our quota system can be justified is by recognizing it as what it was intended to be, a statistical average to inform each member of the average amount which must be contributed throughout the denomination if the churches' common educational, missionary and other labors are to be carried out at the level planned by the synods. If that average is to be reached, obviously some will have to give more, much more, because others, less affluent or in smaller, more heavily burdened churches can properly be expected to give less. The effort to make of it a flat-rate, taxation scheme degrades it into an abuse unworthy of the church of Christ and its proper worship of its Lord.

The Abuse of Quotas

Regarding the matter in its proper, Biblical, spiritual perspective, we must observe that the motivation to give for "quota" causes must be the conviction that they are actually serving the cause of Christ and his gospel so that our love for Him demands that we give them our support. That motivation for giving must never be perverted into the idea: "Synod has commanded! What it does with the money is none of your business! You must pay up!" There are indications that the latter notion is gaining ground, at least in practice. Two overtures to our last synod (Numbers 2 and 9) attempted to get the denominational agencies to inform the churches what they are doing with their money. One of them (Number 9) observed that a 1978 synod instruction to have denominational boards report on salary schedules was being widely ignored.

Not only do church members have a *right* to know what is being done with their gifts. They *need* to know this if they are to be properly motivated in giving. When this principle is lost from sight church "offerings" can be perverted into a form of extortion (cf. 2 Cor. 9:5 ASV). Money collected "on command" violates the whole spirit of worship.

When the churches are not only kept uninformed about what is being done with their gifts, but quotas are also designated for purposes which are either not plainly promoting the cause of the gospel or for causes which may even be interfering with the progress of the gospel the evil becomes compounded.

Someone might object, "Our classes and synods would never do such things!" Have you been reading the acts of synod or even looking carefully at the decisions of your own classis? I am not questioning the good intentions of our church assemblies or the general honesty of our institutions. Thank God for the many dedicated Christian people who labor in both. A little closer acquaintance with the record, however, will turn up a number of examples, some of them of long standing, which show, to say the least, that the proper principle that church quota giving should always promote and not compromise our Reformed commitment to the gospel of Christ is being lost from sight.

One thinks of our synodical race committee (SCORR), dedicated to the laudable purpose of removing race discrimination from the church and the world, and the fact that for a decade over half of its quota has been used to run the office and the other to support the work of other agencies in ways which discriminate in favor of members of some minority races over others! One recalls our classis' decision a few years ago to loan \$15,000 of classical building funds to a Pentecostal church for its building just because it was made up of black people. Doctrine appeared to be unimportant when a racial concern appeared. On our big African mission field our denomination has for years been supporting a united seminary, the *Theological College of Northern Nigeria*, which is committed to teaching a variety of doctrines including particularly some of the very doctrines which we in our form of subscription have promised to try to keep out of the churches. And the Tiv churches' Reformed Theological College, now a going concern, was discouraged.

The Calvin Quota

Undoubtedly the quota which is getting the most widespread criticism is the large one for the support of Calvin College and Seminary. No one seems to be questioning the college's generally high academic standards, or, I trust, the dedication of many of its Christian teachers. Many of its students can assure us, however that higher critical views of the Bible are being freely and publicly taught in both college and seminary to the point at which a student who dares to challenge such a viewpoint may encounter some discrimination. Add to this fact the presenting of notoriously immoral and even blasphemous movies on the campus, and the student dances about which our synods have been arguing, in order to understand why many of our members and some of our churches are asking whether they can in good conscience continue to give the per family quota support to these institutions. We hear of churches which have gone to the length of refusing to put this quota on their budgets. We hear of more which, while they have not taken such a drastic step, are convinced that they must honor the conscientious

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(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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objections of their members against having their church offerings go to make up this quota.

Aren't Quotas "Settled and Binding?"

When the matter surfaces at classis meetings someone is sure to bring up the principle of Article 29 of the Church Order, that "The decisions of the assemblies shall be considered settled and binding. . . . "Doesn't that settle the matter? Church members or consistories who do not obey the decisions are guilty of mutiny and ought to be disciplined! Then the assembly needs to be reminded that we may not forget the rest of that article of the church order — the necessary qualification, "unless it is proved that they conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order."

As long as our assemblies remain faithful to the Bible, our creeds or "Forms of Unity," and our Church Order, we have agreed to honor and support the decisions which they make, but when they in their decisions begin to ignore that fundamental condition of our denominational fellowship, their decisions may have to be resisted, and the assemblies themselves become responsible for destroying the unity of the churches.

Our Confession about Quotas

Present confusion about this problem of quotas suggests that we need to look at what our churches have been and are confessing in our oldest Reformed creed, the Belgic Confession (Article XXXII on "The Order and Discipline of the Church"). "In the meantime we believe, though it is useful and beneficial that those who are rulers of the Church institute and establish certain ordinances among themselves for maintaining the body of the Church, yet that they ought studiously to take care that they do not depart from those things which Christ, our only Master, has instituted. And therefore we reject

all human inventions, and all laws which man would introduce into the worship of God thereby to bind and compel the conscience in any manner whatever. Therefore we admit only of that which tends to nourish and preserve concord and unity, and to keep all men in obedience to God."

This important word of caution against churches, on their own initiative, trying to "bind and compel the conscience in any manner whatever" is underscored by an earlier distinction between the "true" and the "false church," highlighted in Article XXIX. Characteristic of the "false church," we confess, is the fact that "it ascribes more power and authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit itself to the yoke of Christ" and that "it relies more upon men than upon Christ, and persecutes those who live holily according to the Word of God and rebuke it for its errors, covetousness, and idolatry."

One can hardly find sterner denunciations in the writings of the Old Testament prophets than those issued against the actions of religious officials who, like the sons of Eli, manipulate the offerings of God's people for their own convenience or advantage (1 Sam. 2:12-17; Micah 3; Ezekiel 34). I am not suggesting that matters have reached such a stage among us, but the first and biggest step toward such flagrant abuses of church office and authority is the loss of sensitivity to the fact that Christian offerings are a worship of the Lord. When that sensitivity is lost the church is open to the medieval church abuses that called for the Reformation, or the current abuses of church authority which are triggering mass secessions from the United Presbyterian Church today. A look behind and around us suggests that we need a Biblical Reformation, also in our handling of church offerings and quotas. ●

Note: This article is a revision of one under the same title which appeared in the Torch and Trumpet in November, 1970.

Labor Day Meditation

THE CHRISTIAN AND HIS WORK

John Blankespoor

"And I hated all my labor wherein I labored under the sun" (Eccles. 2:18).

"Now them that are such we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work and eat their own bread" (2 Thess. 3:12).

Various countries celebrate Labor Day. It is a day to remember in some special way labor and the working man.

The importance of labor is undeniable. It takes up a large part of our lives. We spend many of our waking hours in it. For that reason alone it is important that we have a wholesome attitude toward our work.

We ought first to observe that work is not the result of sin. Neither is it true that we will not be working in heaven. Still less is it correct to say, as I often heard when I was young, that "work (manual labor) is for the dumb." As if educated people didn't have to work.

Work began in Paradise. God gave Adam the duty to keep the garden, to "dress" it, whatever that implied. Mankind was to discover and develop the riches of God's earth with his inventions and industry. Jesus worked. He worked hard, without vacations. And lest we get a distorted idea of God, He said that His Father also continues to work.

We must not forget that man was created to work. Therefore normal work will not hurt anybody who is

healthy. All healthy people of working age should work, whether they need the money or not.

Sin has distorted everything, including our attitude toward and feeling about work. One of its first effects was that work became toil so that it made man weary and became monotonous. Adam after his Fall would have to toil "in the sweat of his brow." Whereas formerly he worked with joy, now his work became a burden. And man's place of work became a prison.

The author of Ecclesiastes 2 tells us that man, the natural man, hates his work. Working in the factory, he begins watching the clock at nine in the morning, eager for quitting time. Monday through Friday often become a drudgery in which he is always looking forward to the weekends. He often says, "I hate going to work." Although he may become resigned to it, he eagerly anticipates vacation, and even more, retirement. Perhaps he tries to escape from his frustrations with the job in the misuse of alcohol or other abuses. If he only had enough money he'd quit his job, which he regards as a waste of time, and replace it with a life of leisure, looking for pleasure and thrills. He likely considers his work to be just a way of acquiring money so as to become well-off and enjoy life's luxuries.

It seems that this has usually been man's attitude toward his work. The old Greek and Roman world were like ours in this respect. Cicero once wrote, "The callings of hired laborers and those who perform just common work, are unworthy of freedom and are vulgar. All common mechanics are engaged in vulgar business. A working man has nothing respectable about him. Commerce on a small scale is also vulgar. Only skilled labor and the rich can be considered to be really creditable."

Even the unbelieving world knows that the prevailing attitude toward work is unsatisfactory. But the unbeliever doesn't know how to correct it. He has no real solution to his labor problem. He senses that man may have everything to live with but nothing to live for. He knows that real living and working should have some meaning, for life is more than biological.

In God's Word, and in Christ, whom we come to know through that Word, we find the solutions to man's problems, including that of the meaning and purpose of daily work. Christianity changes the total man. That change also alters his attitude towards work. God's Law, "Six days shalt thou labor..." may be differently applicable in the New Testament, but as a basic law is still valid. Man must work. The Christian, given a "new heart," as a new "creation," comes to know the meaning and purpose of life itself and therefore also the meaning and purpose of his labor. Restored to the fellowship and service of God he is called to labor in the duty to which the Lord assigns him. In that way all work becomes honorable and all honest work is to be respected. He remembers that the Lord worked, and he learns to do his own duty with joy and pur-

pose. He must learn to go to the job each morning thankful for the Lord's assignment and the ability to carry it out.

Laboring in that spirit, he is willing to do an honest day's work, not expecting to be paid for working only half of the time or for a poor job. His work is an opportunity for Christian testimony to people whom he has learned to know well and with whom he can easily communicate. He works for the paycheck in order to support his God-given family, the causes of God's kingdom, and the help of his fellow men. The money is not an end but a means to achieve more worthy ends. All of the Christian's work is in principle the work of God's kingdom. A lady has hanging in big letters before her at the kitchen sink where she has washed thousands of dishes, the words, "This is kingdom work." Providing and preparing food for her family is part of the work of God's kingdom.

The Thessalonians were expecting Christ to come back very soon. We get the impression that some of them quit working. In the meantime they still had to eat. Paul therefore warned them that they must do their own work and eat their own bread.

What a blessing it is to be able, as a Christian, to work with joy and dignity!

Each day has new opportunities, new callings, new experiences and challenges. As new creations of God we have a new attitude toward the old world.

Two men were laying bricks, day after day. When a stranger approached them and asked what they were doing, one replied grouchily, "I'm just a bricklayer, doing the same old thing every day. What a monotony!" The other said, "I'm helping to build a church for the Lord Jesus Christ." That is really what every Christian, moved and led by the Spirit of Christ, is doing. May your labor be blessed in this way, and you be blessed in your labor. ●

THE CAPITAL PUNISHMENT REPORT

This critique of the Capital Punishment Report printed in the 1979 Agenda of the CRC Synod, and submitted to the Churches, was made available to THE OUTLOOK by the consistory of the First CRC of Lethbridge, Alberta. The Editorial Committee believes it merits further distribution. Printing it may also awaken other consistories to send in their responses to the Synodical Committee.

Introductory Remarks

We wish to point out first of all that reports such as these do not appear to be written with the average church members in mind, but rather for scholars. Several reports over the years have erred

here, but this is surely one of the worst. What is the value of using words like "deontologist" and "teleologist" etc.? We agree here with De Koster: If it cannot be said plainly and clearly in 10 pages, then forget about saying it. The common man in the pew (and in the consistory bench) cannot possibly understand and evaluate reports of this nature. We are in great danger here of "the tyranny of scholars" ("experts").

We had a competent committee of six members (three from consistory and three from the congregation) study this Report, but it took a great deal of re-reading and sustained effort.

What is more, if the Scriptures are going to be treated the way they are in this Report, then for all practical intents and purposes the Bible remains a closed book to God's people. We are then in actual fact denying the perspecuity (clarity) of the Scriptures.

General Observations

1. The original overture from Classis Orange City asked Synod to address our governments urging them to *reinstate* capital punishment. This original request has now turned into something quite opposite. In no way can this Report be taken as a fulfillment of that original request (mandate).

2. In more than one instance, the committee has put up "straw men" and then shot them down. Often positions were quoted which had obvious weaknesses. But not *enough* attention was paid to Reports of our own church in the past, and to scholars in the Reformed tradition who argued cogently for Capital Punishment. This is a weakness in the Report.

3. In the first part of the Report, the committee goes to great lengths and efforts to try to show that the Bible does not *demand* Capital punishment. But lo and behold, in the second part it does admit that the Bible *allows* it. Did the first section prove too much perhaps? It's like saying that because the Bible does not *insist* on marital permanence in every single situation, it therefore does not *demand* such permanence. But that is spurious reasoning which doesn't follow at all. Could it be that the committee's *initial questions*, in terms of which the whole report was written, were the wrong (and prejudicial) ones?

4. The committee first unduly *absolutizes* Genesis 9:6 (*every one who kills shall be killed*), and, on the basis that this *cannot* be the meaning of the text, negates the meaning and purpose of the text completely. (cf. p. 479). The committee's comments regarding this are arbitrary and lack integrity. *Scripture must be compared with Scripture*, and then it becomes very clear that not all killing is murder, and that there are degrees of crime and punishment which must be taken into consideration. e.g. the "cities of refuge" etc. Again the example re divorce may be cited here. The Bible states, "What God has joined together no man shall put asunder." Period. But at the same time Jesus cites the so-called "exceptive clause." The sixth commandment says: "You shall not kill." Period. But Reformed Christians have always understood that this excludes killing in a just war or in self-defence.

Hence the committee's unjustified and arbitrary "absolutizing" of Genesis 9:6 holds no water whatsoever.

Positively, why did the committee not simply say that God here gives a very basic principle of *justice* which calls for capital punishment, but that it must not be applied without taking due circumstances into consideration, in the light of the *entire* Biblical teaching? Cf. Kuyvenhoven in *Partnership*, p. 7: "God protects the dignity and humanity of man (Genesis 9:1-5), and He will uphold justice in the society of man (9:5, 6)."

One could indeed make a good point for more strict and swift application of this principle today, in view of the increase in murder and violent crimes today. Surely Eccles. 8:11 and II Tim. 3: 1-4 are relevant in this connection.

More Specific Observations

a) Report 29 fails in the most critical area, namely, the grounds for its conclusions are not biblical but are very subtly saturated in American pragmatism, and the Report sets forth what is essentially a humanistic view of the Bible. It fails to zero in on the sanctity of human life as expressed in the Bible, "Man is created in God's Image."

It emphatically states that the ultimate function of the state and society is to secure the "well being of man" rather than faithful obedient service to God. It fails to show that man owes obedience first and foremost to God's law and secondly, as a natural outflow of obedience to God, the law structure which governs man's societal life.

It states, "Capital punishment is permissible only when the *state* or its citizens are threatened" thereby failing to emphasize that murder is first of all a crime against God's law.

b) *Concept, purpose, and function of the state.* Throughout the report runs the dominant concept that the *state*, or rather Man, becomes the arbiter of justice. The state must decide when it is *practical, expedient, and wise* to resort to capital punishment. (read pp. 506-507 — Considerations. p. 469 — The State #2, 3) Particularly unsound is the report's use of *State* in place of *magistrates* as expressed in Romans 13:1-4. The American political system is conveniently substituted in place of the Biblical magistrate. (read p. 468) The ultimate function of the state is to secure "self-fulfillment" for its citizens and to promote the "true quality of human life."

c) *Mosaic laws.* The manner in which Report 29 deals with the Mosaic Laws borders on irreverence for the Scriptures. "Moses apparently understood that not everything that is 'right' in God's sight is politically or jurisprudentially expedient, wise and good." Here obviously the report subjects God's laws to that which is good, wise and expedient in the eyes of man. It denies God being the absolute authority and law giver. (read pp. 504-505 — The Issue #1, 2, 3)

d) *Interpretation of Genesis 9:6 and verse 7.* The consistory wishes to express its strongest concern and objections to the manner in which the report interprets Genesis 9:6, 7. Genesis 9:7, the Report states, is not a mandate but a blessing and an ob-

vously *time conditioned* one at that, therefore verse 6 is also time conditioned. (Read p. 478, par. a, b, c) The report openly promotes or almost mandates birth control and the limiting of the number of children born. The Report seems to assume here that man has the authority to limit God's blessing and comes very close to endorsing abortions.

The report equivocally rejects Genesis 9:6 as a commandment of God by setting out to reduce it to "Hebrew wisdom literature," not legislation, but something like a proverb. Though these proverbs contain profound truths they are not juridical in nature, and are not to be taken as legal prescriptions. Again a serious questioning of Biblical and Divine authority; man shall determine what is mandatory. There is no internal literary or exegetical evidence whatsoever for calling this a "proverb." The consistory feels that at this point the Report not only calls into question the infallibility of the Bible but also subjects it to humanistic, relativistic interpretation. In other words, societal conditions and political expedience determine what is relative and binding in the Word of God.

e) *Conclusion and grounds.* The consistory concludes that in the light of the above concerns Report 29 is not acceptable and we wish to speak out against the report in the strongest possible terms.

Grounds:

1. Report 29 does not express the concept, purpose and function of the State in accordance with the Word of God.

2. Report 29 emphatically subjects God's law to man's authority, political expediency, and social conditions.

3. Rather than listening to the Scriptures in a childlike way, Report 29 tends to deal in a derogatory fashion with the Word of God, and in consequence calls into question the infallibility of the Bible.

Conclusion

In view of the above considerations, the consistory cannot concur with the recommendations of Report 29 (cf. p. 507) and urges major revision. ●

Let The Church Be Church . . .

Join yourself to the church (5)

Peter Y. De Jong

(Translation of Prof. C. Veenhof's *Om Kerk te Blijven*)

By no means everything has been said about the church's confession concerning itself which has been set forth to this point.

The confession of the Reformed churches also declares that all who, having been ingrafted into Christ, are members of His body are called to become co-laborers with Him in the gathering of His church.

Speaking thus about the church the confession imperceptibly shifts from the universal church to the local congregation. It accentuates that those who are gathered by Christ must themselves become active together with Him in gathering and building up His body, the people of God, the church which He bought with His blood.

Indeed, Christ gathers His church by His Spirit and Word. This He does entirely and alone.

But for this world-embracing work He enlists His own, *all His own*.

By the power and under the guidance of His Spirit and Word He wills to make them His co-workers. To that end He commands *all His own* to disseminate the Word, proclaiming the Gospel, so that many may be called out of darkness into light and in this way be incorporated into the congregation which is being saved.

Integral to Gospel proclamation — indeed an essential aspect thereof — is the doing of it by men and women in whom Christ has been formed, who are living epistles read of men and from whom the fragrance of Christ now flows forth. In short, these

are people who by their life and conduct demonstrate the trustworthiness of what they preach.

More specially and specifically Christ wills to gather, defend and preserve His church by means of Gospel proclamation in the assembled congregation and throughout the world. With this in view He through the Spirit has bestowed special gifts for that work upon some members of the church. If the church truly lives, it will discern and acknowledge such gifts and call those so gifted to the ministry of the Word, the eldership, and the diaconate. To the ministry of the Word is indissolubly joined that of the sacraments and the prayers.

Wherever this takes place, Christ's church assumes a specific and very simple "organization." It then appears among men in an organized and instituted "shape" or "form."

Now *three things* are of the greatest significance for a church which so manifests itself among men.

These are the pure preaching of the Gospel, the administration of the sacraments according to Christ's institution, and the exercise of ecclesiastical discipline for the punishing of sins.

Involved in this is the calling that such a church corporately and each member individually order their life according to God's pure Word, reject all things contrary thereto, and faithfully acknowledge Jesus Christ as the only Head.

Now the calling of every *believer* — of whatever "state" or "condition" he may be — is not to remain content to be by himself but to unite with that

church which manifests these marks. All believers are under obligation to join themselves to such a church to preserve its unity, to submit themselves to its doctrine and discipline, to bow the neck under Christ's yoke, and so to make themselves useful for the edification of the brethren, according to the gifts which God has given, as mutual members of one and the same body.

Since this is the calling of *all* believers, it is self-evident that it belongs to their "office," which is to say, their duty, to separate themselves from all those who do not belong to the church and to unite themselves with this congregation wheresoever God has established it.

Now especially in connection with that calling to work together with Christ in gathering His church in obedience to the Gospel we find woefully much neglect, sin, and misery among believers. Much of this results from historically developed situations, wrong leadership, ignorance, stubborn tradition, and spiritual sluggishness.

On the one hand there is a refusal to live and labor together in one and the same ecclesiastical communion where Christ expressly asks for this. Let us cite an example. In our small country (i.e. the Netherlands; tr.) we see six or seven ecclesiastical organizations which all claim to confess their faith in the words of the *Three Forms* (i.e. doctrinal standards; tr.), which by their very nature and purpose are forms of *unity*. For various reasons they refuse to let themselves be gathered by and together with Christ — unwilling to remove from among themselves whatever violates true communion with Him

— and so unitedly preserve the unity of the church and together bow under His yoke. To the contrary, some of these churches have even cast out many whom Christ without doubt acknowledges as His own.

But on the other hand we also see everywhere a striving after and defending of an "ecclesiastical unity" not rooted in the full Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Gospel of God's justification of the ungodly through faith in the one sacrifice of Christ.

The worst sin in connection with the church is, however, its degeneration into an assembly which arrogates to itself and its regulations more authority than it ascribes to God's Word, which fails to administer the sacraments according to Christ's prescriptions but either adds to or subtracts from them according to its own opinions, and which relies more on man than on Christ, even persecuting those who live holy lives and rebuke the church for its faults, its covetousness, and its idolatry. When such sins set their stamp on an assembly which calls itself church, it has become a false church.

Our confession declares that such a false church can be "easily known and distinguished."

The sins which disclose it to be false cry to the very heavens and manifest themselves so clearly that there need be no hesitation to designate such a gathering as a false church.

A corollary, to be sure, is that a church may only then be disqualified as "false" when its sins clearly give evidence of this horrible, God-dishonoring character. ●

Toward a Financially Responsible Indigenous Church

Vern Sterk

Thirty years ago the Christian Reformed Churches adopted an indigenous mission policy making it their aim from the beginning of work in each field to establish self-propagating, self-governing and self-supporting churches. Such an aim is easier to adopt than to realize. Today our missionary efforts face new pressures to have the churches in the various fields control the missionary efforts (see our June Synod Agenda review) and economic pressures at home to reduce our expenses. Even more significant than these in moving us toward a truly indigenous missions policy should be the real interests of the missionary effort itself. This article by a missionary in Mexico states the case for such a way of doing missionary work especially clearly and convincingly.

A government engineer came into an Indian village and began to explain the details of a community

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rabbit project which would increase meat protein in the villagers' diet. A large brick building would house well-bred rabbits, which would be cooperatively cared for by villagers. When the town leaders asked who would pay for all this, the engineer announced that the government would cover all of the costs. Soon the government had built a building and brought rabbits to put the project into operation.

In less than three months the villagers had eaten all of the breeder rabbits and had begun to use the bricks from the rabbit house for their individual purposes. When I asked the town leaders what had happened, their simple answer was that they had never really wanted the project. "Then why did you lead the engineer to believe that you would like a rabbit project?" I asked. The answer was simply, "The government wanted to do it, and they paid for everything, so we had nothing to lose."

This incident took place a few years ago in the Zinacanteco Indian village where we were living. It is a clear reminder of the fact that when people invest nothing in a project, they feel no responsibility toward it. It is also a reminder that the way money is used must be based on well-thought-out principles. We seem to have no trouble recognizing the

government's fatal mistake in the above example, yet when it comes to our use of money in mission we often fail to recognize similar flaws.

In order to discuss mission and money, I must first pose a basic assumption that the purpose of Christian mission is to give birth to a church of Jesus Christ in a particular place and then to aid it to grow into a mature church which will give birth to other churches. If that is, in fact, an acceptable assumption, then we must follow with some working principles which apply to the use of money in relation to the national church.

1. *The financial responsibility for the ongoing work of the indigenous church should belong, from the beginning, to the indigenous church itself.* Let's start from the beginning. A missionary goes to an unreached tribe, and in a few years the Lord calls forth a group of believers. These believers become a small group which we call a congregation. Up to this point the finances have been pretty simple; the missionary took care of himself and his program with foreign funds.

Now the congregation sees the need for a few tape recorders to use for evangelism; they need a building in which to worship and money for a needy family. As the number of congregations multiplies, the number of needs grows. Soon they need to pay a pastor. It is often at one of these points that the missionary jumps in and makes the fatal mistake that was made by the government engineer. The missionary often uses foreign money, either without any consideration of good principles or by bypassing the principles, because he has decided that the indigenous church is "not ready to take the responsibilities itself."

It is my contention that preparing the indigenous church for its financial responsibility is a process that must be started from the time there is even one small group of believers. Only giving people responsibility prepares them for handling that responsibility. A child will learn to walk faster by practice and tumbles than by sitting around and watching how well we can walk.

My experience in the Zinacanteco tribe has confirmed for me the fact that although new believers are "babes in Christ," they are usually well versed in the use of money in their economic system. The idea that we have to wait until the indigenous church is ready to take the financial responsibility is often nothing more than judging their culture's way of handling money inferior to ours. Because we have given birth to this church, we want to make sure that it gets the best financial setup possible. We want "our baby" to be perfect. To insure its financial strength, we assume the responsibility, at least at the start. If our goal is to help the indigenous church grow into a mature and responsible church, then the financial responsibilities must be culturally and actually its own from the very beginning.

This does not mean that the parent never helps the growing child; it simply means that all help (especially in the financial realm) is based on clear principles that keep the growth and maturity of the child in mind. As the young church continues to grow, it will also have growing needs and larger

financial projects which extend beyond what might be termed the ongoing work of the church. Where I have been working, the Zinacantecos soon joined with other congregations and groups of Christians to form a Tzotzil church. In a short time, they realized the need to build a Tzotzil Bible institute for leadership training. It would be necessary to provide sleeping quarters for more than 60 people, a kitchen-dining area, and a large meeting room — obviously an expensive venture. At this point, the missionary must be well aware of another important working principle:

2. *A mission should never use foreign money to finance or support any project that can be financed and supported by the indigenous church.* This principle naturally follows out of principle 1, but I believe that it has to be stated separately. We tend to get "cloudy vision" when it comes to helping the indigenous church with large projects that involve a lot of money: It is at this point that we missionaries often get caught in the "tourist syndrome," which simply says, "These poor people have so little and we in the U.S. have so much." We then proceed to bring the goodies down from the North so they can advance more rapidly. What we actually do is make Christianity and the indigenous church dependent on a North American economy. Foreign subsidies mean foreign dependence, and I think that it is naive to think that indigenous churches can regularly receive the former without the latter.

We seem to be able to see the principle in the case of our children. To lavish gifts on them expecting little or nothing on their part simply gives us irresponsible young adults. However, we fail to apply that principle to the growing indigenous church and its people. When we hear that the indigenous church is contemplating some program, and the question of finances is raised, the missionary jumps in with, "Oh, we can probably find brethren in the U.S. who would like to help with that." In this way we subtly imply that the indigenous church could never do it — even that God could not do it through them. Our real faith and trust, when it comes to money, is in some western economic system. History has shown that we do not develop a mature and financially responsible indigenous church when its work is based on foreign funds.

This can be illustrated by again referring to the Tzotzil church's need of a building for their leadership training institutes. When the Tzotzil church leaders met to discuss the plan for their much-needed new Bible institute, their concept of what they should build was much different than mine. Considering their own resources, they didn't plan a western-styled dormitory but envisioned a crude, three-tiered bunk arrangement which could be built by native carpenters.

As they considered the cost of the construction, their discussion focused on how to stimulate support for this project in the many Tzotzil congregations. Instead of all eyes going to the missionary for outside funds, all heads were bowed in prayer to God for his working in the hearts of the Tzotzil Christians in supplying this need. The Lord will do it, and the Tzotzil church will gain a new trust in God and a

valid sense of pride in planning and completing a truly indigenous project. Finally, the Tzotzil Christians will not have to present Christianity as a foreign commodity.

3. *When outside help is needed, it should only come after a program or project is initiated with indigenous church money and planning.* Some might criticize principles 1 and 2 as a selfish policy of mission that would simply turn its back on needs around the world. Some are going to say that if we do not finance many of the larger programs, then they simply cannot be carried out, and world mission will be greatly hindered. I'm not convinced of that. It may be that many of our programs will not be carried out in our way within our time schedule. However, from my experience, if the indigenous church comes up with a vision, a program, and is convinced (without the foreign financial push) that it is something that must be done, it will usually sell that dream to its own people and raise much of the money itself. We must give it a chance. We must give the indigenous church the opportunity to test how important a dream is by investing its own money and effort into it. If we fail to let it struggle to raise the money and plan the project, if we push it ahead with our financial subsidy, we rob the indigenous church of that opportunity. There will, at times, be projects that need financial help from foreign sources, but I believe these should be secondary resources which assist the indigenous church when its own primary resources fall short. The indigenous church must be given a chance to exercise its own financial responsibility and to develop its own sense of stewardship before foreign funds smother the fire.

Some missionaries defend foreign financing with the contention that they are involved in a "seed program." I am not convinced that this is a valid way to work with the indigenous church. However, if a missionary believes that he has a high-priority program that must be instituted even though the indigenous church does not see its importance, he at least must ask the question: Is it so important that we ignore our basic working principles to do it? If the answer is yes, then we must expect that this program may

always be just a missionary project for which the indigenous church will not feel any responsibility. Further, we may be saddling the church with something it never even wanted. The missionary does have the responsibility of raising the awareness of the indigenous brethren in material, social, and spiritual realms. The indigenous church, however, must be free to initiate its programs without unfair outside money pressures.

The principles set forth in this article are by no means final. They are observations that I have made in working with the Tzotzil church in Chiapas, Mexico, and they will need continual revision as I learn from my indigenous brethren. However, I do believe that as the Reformed Church in America looks forward to an exciting future in world mission, it is extremely important that we do some clear thinking about our use of money. Knowing that our resources are not unlimited and realizing that some of our past and present financial approaches in mission are outmoded, the RCA and its missionaries could gain much from a rethinking of this issue. I am also convinced that the RCA members who are giving their dollars to make our mission program possible would appreciate knowing that their money is being used according to well-thought-out principles.

For me, the above principles are essential in helping the indigenous church grow to financial responsibility — especially since missionaries are guests with a temporary and diminishing role, while the indigenous church is the landlord with a permanent and increasing role. Missionaries of the RCA have a responsibility not only to warn our indigenous brethren of the dangers of reversing these roles, but also to allow them the pride and fulfillment which will be theirs when they find that, with God's help, they can handle many financial responsibilities themselves.

A mission program based on sound financial principles would not only promote a more responsible and mature indigenous church, but would also allow more of our financial resources to be used to reach out to unreached areas of our world. It is my dream that the RCA become a leader in developing new strategies in this important area of mission. ●

Spotlighting the Issues

VII. A KINGDOM MISSION

Peter De Jong

One of the important issues about which there is increasing confusion and division in our churches is that of what we may call "our kingdom mission." That covers, broadly speaking, our relationships and behavior in the world. Let's again consider side-by-side (1) the historic, Biblical Reformed view and (2) the emerging, changing broadening view held by an increasing number in our churches.

(1) The Biblical, Reformed View

The Lord, when He preached His gospel or "good news" of salvation, often called it the "gospel of the kingdom" (Mt. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14). A "kingdom" is not merely a loose term for "government"; it is a special kind of government in which one individual, the

(2) The Broadening View

God's revelation comes to us not only through the Bible, but also through the experience of all mankind in its growing and improving understanding of man and his universe. The Bible as a genuinely "historical" revelation relates religious experiences

"king" rules. God as the Creator and Owner of all has absolute control over all things, working "all things after the counsel of his will" (Eph. 1:11), and he ought to be everywhere acknowledged and obeyed as King. Man, at the instigation of the devil, revolted against Him, bringing upon himself the judgments of suffering and death. Christ, the Son of God, came to save us by reconciling us to God. In saving us by faith in Him he also commits to us the gospel or "word of reconciliation" which we must bring as His "ambassadors" both in the church and to all the world. We must urge men to "be . . . reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:18-6:2; compare also Psalm 2). Unless one is "born again" by the Spirit and Word of Christ he "cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3, 5; cf. 1 Pet. 1:23; James 1:18). Really being saved by faith in Christ requires acknowledging and obeying Him as Lord and King (Mt. 7:21-23; Luke 6:46). Accordingly the missionary gospel of faith in Christ as Savior must include calling men to submit every area of interest and activity in their lives to His sovereign control and direction (1 Cor. 10:31). The devil's effort to oppose this gospel necessitates our spiritual warfare using God's Word as well as our labor with it. This gospel of "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21) includes everything "profitable," in fact, "the whole counsel of God" (vv. 20, 27), the equipment of the "complete" "man of God" (2 Tim. 3:17); "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3); God's complete purpose for our personal and collective lives. The missionary outreach to the world and the social implications of the gospel calling to serve the Lord always and everywhere (1 Cor. 7:20-24) cannot be separated from it. It is the "gospel of the Kingdom" calling men to trust and obey Jesus Christ as King of Kings. It promises His triumphant return when all men shall be saved as His servants or condemned as His enemies (Psalm 2; Mt. 25). ○

and presents insights which are inevitably colored by the cultural limitations of a past time. That past culture and society had an authoritarian structure which no longer applies in our changed, more "democratic" society. Accordingly the old figures of speech of "king" and "kingdom" need to be reinterpreted in our time in terms, not of rule, but of service. After all, didn't Christ state this very emphatically when he said that He came not to be served, but to serve (Mt. 20:25-28)? Christians today ought to be concerned not about dated doctrines and laws but about people and the social, economic and civil needs, "hurts" and rights of mankind. Christ as the great "Liberator" came to free men from all kinds of handicaps and restraints, and if we really follow Him we must have the same concern. People in today's society are not interested in the hereafter but in the present urgent needs and problems of a suffering world. If we are to have any influence in this world as Christians we must try to do something about meeting those present "felt" needs of people in our society. Often in today's world, social and political movements which are not associated with Christianity are showing more concern with human needs and rights than traditionally-minded Christians do. Believing in and seeing the Spirit of God at work in the great liberating social and political movements of our time, we ought to join forces with such progressive efforts wherever we find them and so make a real contribution in today's world. We ought to be working to correct or replace oppressive and unjust structures of society with freer and therefore better, more human ones. This is the "kingdom" of freedom and justice which we ought to be promoting. We ought to be trying to stop poverty, hunger, war, prejudice. Though there may be many a disappointment and frustration in the long struggle to achieve such aims, we must go on in confidence that the Spirit does bring progress in realizing this ideal "kingdom." ☺

This article concludes a 7 item series which began in the March OUTLOOK. In these articles I attempted, at the suggestion of the Fellowship Board, to focus attention on seven of the fundamental issues which we see confusing and dividing our churches. The series has included articles on:

1. The Nature of the Problem: The Biblical Antithesis (March).
2. The Authority: God's Inviolable Word (April).
3. An Honest Confession (or Creed) (May).
4. An Obedient Church (June).
5. A Godly Life (July).
6. A Covenantal Education (August).
7. A Kingdom Mission (September).

On each of these subjects I attempted to show in parallel columns how the Biblical, Reformed view is opposed by a broadening view which, although it may use traditional terms, really is

a radical departure from the Reformed Faith. While some might like to ignore or minimize the differences between the two views, it is our conviction, as it was the conviction of J. G. Machen over a half century ago, that the fundamental difference between these views may not be ignored. To try to build a church on two such contradictory foundations is, to borrow the words of J.I. Packer (*Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, p. 45, cf. also Luke 6:47-49) to ensure its "collapse." "Sham unity is not worth working for, and real unity, that fellowship of love in the truth which Christ prayed that His disciples might enjoy (John 17:17-23) will come only as those sections to the wall which rest on unsound foundations are dismantled and rebuilt." It has been and continues to be the conviction of the Reformed Fellowship that it is for an uncompromisingly Biblical and therefore Reformed Faith that we must prayerfully labor, and when necessary, fight.

THESSALONIAN LESSONS

Henry Vander Kam

PAUL'S ENCOURAGING WORDS TO THE THESSALONIANS.

Lesson 3

I Thessalonians 2:13-20

In this section the Apostle continues his defence but he also does more. His defence is never for its own sake. He has the welfare of the church in mind and even his defence of his own ministry is for the benefit of the church. Any question concerning his motives would be injurious to the church. The attacks leveled against his person or his work might cause the members of the church to begin to question the content of the message he brought. Consequently, he defends himself against the attacks which have been made so that the gospel be not hindered.

He first of all gives thanks that the word which he has brought has proved to be effective among the Thessalonians. This is the purpose he has in mind in all his labors. The gospel of Jesus Christ must be proclaimed. He has given up everything in order that that purpose may be attained. Then, when he sees that the gospel is believed, he is profoundly grateful.

The Word, Not Man's But God's

The Apostles, as any messengers, were only able to bring the gospel to the physical ear of the listeners. This they had done. They had not come with any other kind of "wisdom," but had only brought the word. Now Paul is so extremely grateful that the people in Thessalonica have listened to and have received the word which was brought to them. But, the most important reason he has for thanksgiving is the fact that they did not receive the word brought to them as the word of man, but, as it indeed is, the word of God! These people were persuaded that Paul and his associates were not bringing men's words of wisdom, but that they were bringing the word of God with men's lips. It is always amazing when this happens. What a conviction of the Spirit is necessary for men to receive words spoken by human lips as the true word of God! Unbelievers hear only the human speech and conclude that the words spoken are the product of a man's mind and heart. Only the Spirit of God can cause one to recognize it as the word of God.

Notice that the Apostle is also fully convinced that he indeed brought the word of God. Not only is he a channel through whom the word comes to those who listen, no, he actually spoke the word of God to them. He was, of course, used by the Spirit of God as an instrument of revelation. However, that fact is not in the foreground here, but, rather, that the preaching of the word is the word of God! This fact is often lost from sight today and as a result the

faith of the individual, the respect for office and the view of the church has been seriously damaged.

God's Word Works

He knows that they have accepted the message which was brought to them as indeed the word of God and he does not have to base that only on their confession, but is able to see that word at work within them. The word of God is powerful and it is alive. It cannot be hid within those who receive it. God works through His word. That, in fact, is His common mode of operation. Paul has brought the message to the ear and he now sees the work of God in those who believe! This is proof of the power of the word, of the Spirit's presense, and of their faith. When he sees all this, is it any wonder that he rejoices?

Common Persecution by the Enemies

In the previous chapter he had spoken of the fact that the Thessalonians had become imitators of the Apostles and of Christ. He now brings to their attention that they had also become imitators of the churches in Judea. As the churches among the Jews had suffered persecution, so have also these people in Thessalonica. In Judea the Christians suffered the most at the hand of their fellow countrymen — the Jews. In Thessalonica the people are suffering the most at the hands of their own countrymen — the gentiles, even though there was also a persecution of them by the Jews living in their city. It doesn't really make any difference where you live or who your countrymen are, persecution will come! The power of evil knows no geographical or national boundaries. Now you have become just like the churches which were organized first, those in the holy land. He here again uses the name for "church" which meant "assembly" in the Greek, but shows them clearly that he means the assembly of the people of God who have been redeemed by Christ.

The reason why he mentions these things is not merely to state a fact. It is rather to encourage them in the midst of persecution. They, as new converts, might well wonder why they were now despised and treated shamefully. They must understand that this is a part of bearing the reproach for the sake of Christ. "Let a man take up his cross and follow me." However, the word which they have received is at work within them and will safeguard them.

Enemies of Salvation

He has more to say concerning the Jews who are persecuting the churches in Judea. They have not recently begun their work of persecution, no, their history shows a pattern of similar deeds. He openly states that the Jews have killed the Lord. There is no possibility that they will be able to lay the blame

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on others, e.g., the Romans — the Jews did it! Is this anti-semitism? Of course not — it is the simple statement of a fact! Not only are they responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus, they also killed the prophets of the Old Testament times. Stephen had accused them of the same crimes (Acts 7:52). When the prophets spoke to them to turn them back to God and also spoke of the coming Messiah, they sought to silence the voice of these prophets. Jesus also referred to this. This is the pattern of behavior which goes on to the present day, says Paul. They drove us out too. This had happened in Thessalonica and the readers of this letter were witnesses to it. It had also occurred in various other places. These people (the Jews) do not do the things which are pleasing to God! No, they do the opposite! They are contrary to all men! A word is used here which is nowhere else used concerning men but is used, for example, of winds, etc. Taken by itself these last words of this verse would give the impression that the Jew is the enemy of all other men. However, the meaning is given in the next verse.

How are they contrary to all men? In the fact that they are forbidding the preaching of the gospel to the gentiles so that they may come to salvation. They thereby show themselves contrary to all men in that they try to rob all men of the greatest gift which could be given them! This is no small matter. These people had resisted the Spirit of God throughout their history (Acts 7:51). With the persecution of the church of Christ the measure of their sins had been filled. This sin will not be overlooked. "The wrath (of God) is come upon them to the uttermost" says the Apostle. The Jews (as everyone else) had fallen into sin countless times throughout their history. Then they would repent — and God would forgive them. Now, however, this wrath is come to the uttermost — they will be rejected! This doesn't mean that none of them will be saved, far from it, but the *nation* has been rejected! Paul has more to say about their future in Romans 9, and his strong language here must be compared with his teachings there.

Deep Personal Attachments

There is one more subject with which he deals in this chapter and it is one which is very important to him and of which he writes with deep feeling. As was stated in the first lesson in this series, Paul and Silas and Timothy had worked in Thessalonica for a very brief time — three Sabbaths are mentioned in Acts 17. They then had to flee the city because of the persecutions on the part of the opponents of the gospel. These could now charge that the Apostles had taken the easy way out. That they were not so fearless! That they considered their own welfare more important than the welfare of the church. Their flight gave the impression that these charges might be true. Paul will, therefore, defend himself. They were not allowed to become needless martyrs! The gospel had to be preached in many more places. He had come to Thessalonica on his *second* missionary journey. Part of the second and the entire third missionary journey was still on God's program for him. It was not fear nor lack of concern for the church at Thessalonica which had caused his sudden

departure. His God controls his life and he will be obedient.

He writes that he and his helpers have been "bereaved" or "orphaned" of them for a short time. These people were dear to his heart and he had been "torn away from them." In other words, he wanted to stay! This, however, was not possible. But, if they are now separated, he and this church, it will be for but a short time. And it is only a physical separation! With his heart he is still with them, i.e., he has not forgotten them. He speaks of the intense longing he has to see them again. How dare anyone accuse him of leaving his post? Here is a man who bears the concern for all the churches upon his heart. These are his brethren! They are together members of the household of God! He becomes very emotional in his language when he speaks of these things.

Satan Hinders

He now informs them that he has wished to come back to Thessalonica more than once since they had to flee this city. Although he has spoken in the plural almost all of the time, he now speaks of himself. Don't let anyone think that he is comfortable with his present state of being absent from this church. He wanted to go back there to see his people again. But, even though that was his desire not once but several times, his purpose had been thwarted. "Satan hindered us," he writes. He does not believe that natural circumstances can be cited as the reason for his inability to return to this church. He is fully aware of Satan's wiles and speaks of them frequently. He does not speak of Satan's hindering as a handy address for all the things which go wrong and for which there is no logical explanation. We must remember that the gospel is making giant strides in the days of the Apostles to cover the whole inhabited world. Then Satan goes on a rampage. In the days when the Son of God appeared in the flesh, Satan entered into many human beings — seeking to imitate the incarnation. Now he will do everything possible to hinder the spread of the gospel. But, Satan can only go as far as God allows him to go. Paul is no "match" for Satan, but neither will he follow Satan's plans. He will continue to hope for an opportunity to return to Thessalonica! Satan may have "broken up the road" to make it impassable for the present — but God will repair it!

The Lord's Return

"For who (rather than what) is our hope, or joy, or crown of glorying"? Are they the larger churches he has founded? Are they the important people in such places as Corinth, Ephesus or Philippi? You are as well as all the others found in the other churches! Naturally he has high hopes for them. It is a joy for him to see fruit upon his labors. However, they are also his *crown*! They are the victor's crown before the Lord at His coming. For the first time he uses the word "parousia" which means the return of Jesus Christ when He shall bless them with His presence. It is a term which is used in a technical sense. All kinds of "comings" might be termed "parousia," but from now on it will designate THE SECOND COMING of Jesus Christ. Then He will

take His people to Himself. Then all shall receive according to what they have done — and Paul will have that victor's wreath which is made up of all those who have believed his preaching . . . including the Thessalonians!

The second coming of Jesus Christ is considered the day of the greatest glory for His people by this Apostle. Judgment day, yes, but it will be a judgment of acquittal for His people. Their salvation will then enter its complete state.

Let not the Thessalonian Christians listen to those who say that the Apostle is only seeking self and that he has forgotten about them. He has made it very clear that he is ready to sacrifice all things for them and that they are the joy of his life. In his relation to the church he has indeed become an imitator of the Christ Whom he serves. The criticisms which some have uttered would not be so bad, but they may be injurious to the faith of the weak.

Questions for discussion:

1. Is the criticism of the church and its ministry ever an "innocent pastime" or is it extremely dangerous?
2. Does a minister today bring the word of God, i.e., is the sermon actually the word of God? Which problems are involved here?
3. Does persecution always follow the preaching of the word? Is there persecution in our lands today? Is there something wrong when we are not persecuted?
4. Is the guilt of the Jews greater than that of other people? How has the wrath of God come upon them?
5. When things don't succeed may we say that it is Satan's fault? If Satan had not "hindered" him, would it have been possible for Paul to return to Thessalonica and perhaps have suffered a martyr's death?
6. What do you understand by the "parousia"? ●

PAUL'S JOY IN THE REPORT FROM THESSALONICA.

Lesson 4

I Thessalonians 3

Personal Letters

One of the most fascinating things about the Epistles of Paul is the fact that they are indeed *letters* sent to a specific people, dealing with a specific purpose and written at a specific time. They are not, as has often been charged, dry treatises on doctrinal matters, but are throbbing with life which is of great benefit for all subsequent ages. We learn to know him who writes and also those to whom he is writing and find that their experiences were similar to ours.

Solicitude for the Church

In the closing part of the previous chapter the Apostle had spoken of his strong desire to go to Thessalonica to meet with the brethren there. However, it wasn't possible for him to go — Satan had hindered him. But, he says at the beginning of this chapter, I couldn't stand it anymore! Something has to be done. If he is not able to go himself he will send someone else whom he trusts. As a result, Timothy is sent. We thought it was so important, he says, that we were even willing to be left alone at Athens. It is not easy to determine exactly what he means by this. When we go to the book of Acts there are some historic items given us, but usually the Bible does not give a detailed history. We know that Paul had first gone to Athens and that he had requested that Timothy and Silas join him there as soon as possible. No doubt they came to him there. When he now speaks of being left alone at Athens, he seemingly includes Silas with himself as having been left there alone. This departure of Timothy for Thessalonica would create a real hardship for those left behind in Athens because that city proved to be very difficult. We do not read of a church having been formed here.

Timothy, though young, was one of Paul's most trusted helpers. When he addresses two letters to him later he calls him his "child in the faith." Here

he refers to him as "our brother." This man is a minister of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The purpose of his travel to Thessalonica is to establish (strengthen) and to comfort (encourage) them concerning their faith. This is the same message he would have brought had he been able to come. Paul is concerned about these particular things. How are these people, newly come to the faith, going to be able to stand when the difficulties come? That strengthening and encouragement is, of course, necessary for believers everywhere at all times, but there was a special reason for the Apostle to be concerned about these matters in this particular church.

He had been afraid that they might be received by the afflictions which came on them. No doubt many attempts had been made by those who were opponents of the gospel to cause them to renounce the word and return to the paganism out of which they had come. He reminds them that they have been appointed to this affliction, i.e., it is inevitable that afflictions come on those who follow Jesus Christ. They must not be surprised at this. When the missionaries had worked among them they had told them of these things. They had been forewarned. Well, it has happened! To know about these things before they actually come will serve to strengthen them, but to know about them or to experience them, are two different things. It may be that the pressure of opposition has now become greater than they can bear.

Once more he mentions the fact that he could no longer endure his uncertainty about the Thessalonian believers. While he had spoken in the plural in verse one, he now emphasizes the fact that *he* couldn't stand it any longer. Others may say that he has left Thessalonica only to save himself; his readers will now hear from him how he thought about them. He is sending Timothy so that he may learn of their faith. He wants to know whether or not the tempter has ruined the work he performed

while he was with them. Then our labors would have been in vain. How is it possible that this thought should even enter his mind? Had he not spoken of his assurance concerning their election? (1:4) Some have seen a contradiction between 3:5 and 1:4. However, there is no contradiction here at all. Remember, he has written both 3:5 and 1:4 *after* he has heard the report from Timothy! He simply speaks in terminology which is immediately understandable to all readers. There had been a wonderful turning to the Lord in the city of Thessalonica. But, suppose this had been only a temporary or historical faith. Then the tempter could easily lead them astray. He does not minimize the works of the evil one! He has sent Timothy to find out what the situation is and when he knows of their faith he is assured of their election! It (their faith) has stood the test of affliction! That is true faith. Those people are elect.

Good News of Persevering Saints

Timothy has just returned from Thessalonica and the "news" he brought causes the Apostle to sit down immediately to write this epistle. He is overjoyed by the news Timothy brought. Paul is informed that the faith of these people is genuine. That is the faith which will stand regardless of the attacks made upon it. Their love, too, is genuine. Their love also goes out to Paul and Silas. They want to see the Apostles as much as these want to see them. This does the heart of Paul good. The malignity of his opponents has had no effect on these Thessalonian believers! Their influence has, therefore, not been undermined. This is also an evidence of faith and love on their part. They might speak glibly of their faith and love but if it was not directed to those who had brought them the gospel, it would not be genuine but hypocritical. Oh, how the news Timothy has brought has comforted the heart of Paul! The faith of these Thessalonians has made it possible for Paul and Silas to continue even though they find themselves in great distress and affliction. He is writing from Corinth and they have suffered many things there. But, they have undergone distress and affliction wherever they have worked. Persecuted for bringing the greatest news ever heard! Working day and night — both as gospel ministers and laboring with their hands. But, the news he has heard of the Christians makes it all worthwhile! They are comforted. God is still in control!

"Now we really live," he says when he hears that these young Christians are standing fast in the faith they have professed. That faith is anchored and grounded in the Lord Himself and gives a life-union. That is the whole life of the Apostle — to see the work of his Lord flourish.

How can he give adequate thanks to God for this great favor shown him? His soul is flooded with thanks and he cannot find words to express it. The concern he had for them has given way to a joy which cannot be expressed. He also prays for them day and night. His prayer is that he may himself be able to go to them and — that he may then supply those things in which they are still deficient. He re-

joices greatly but he prays for still more! Of course, faith is never perfect. Later he will speak of those things in which they are indeed deficient and in which they will need far more instruction. The genuine faith, however, is present and therefore there is a solid foundation on which he will be able to build further.

Prayer to the Lord Christ

The last paragraph of this chapter is really a prayer even though it does not come in the regular form of a prayer. He prays, as he said in the previous verse, that God will open the way for him to come to Thessalonica. He prays that God the Father Himself and our Lord Jesus may open this way. The author is not teaching a doctrine of the Deity of Christ, he simply assumes it! This is one of the earliest writings of the New Testament and the fact of the Deity of Jesus Christ is spoken of as a fact believed by all who have believed the gospel. When critics say that this was a doctrine of late development, they ignore such passages as these. We are not certain whether or not this prayer of Paul was answered although it is very well possible that he was able to see the members of this church during the time of the third missionary journey.

Abounding Love

Everything is, however, not dependent on the Apostle's physical presence in Thessalonica. That would be wonderful and he hopes and prays that this may happen. But, they have the word and they have the Spirit of God! They are to labor with the gifts they have received. May the Lord give them the power to increase and abound in love to each other and to all men. Paul is fond of joining Greek words together in all of his writings. Thereby he is able to express himself in what could be called "super superlatives"! The increase in love might be expected as something quite natural. He wants them to do more. They must abound — they must overflow in love toward others. It must be in such volume that they are not able to contain it! This is to be shown to their fellow members of the church, of course! How can there be true faith without the accompanying love which is the fruit of faith? But it must also be shown to others, even those who do not have that same faith. This will take that overflowing amount. This is the kind of love which the Apostles have also shown them. Paul has a consuming zeal for the church and its members because he has such a love for his Lord! And — he has that love for his Lord because his Lord has loved him with a love which knows no bounds.

Holy Living

He prays that God will so strengthen them that they may be blameless in holiness. He here refers to the mode of life which is to be followed by the believer. This kind of life is based upon the love where-with their hearts are to be filled. It is a holy life to which they are called. This does not mean "perfection," but a life which is separated unto the service of God! It is a manner of life separated from the world. The love which has been shed abroad in their hearts does not feel at home with the pleasures of

this world. Now they are to walk blameless in that holiness. They are not to live a life for which they have set the standards themselves, but it is to be lived before the face of God. He has set the standards and He will judge. They, and all believers, must learn to walk in faith and love.

Who Are the Returning Saints?

The last words of the last verse of this chapter have given a great deal of difficulty. As a result, there are many different interpretations. The Apostle again speaks of the "coming" of our Lord Jesus. Here the term "parousia" is again used as also in an earlier passage. Everyone is quite well agreed that this has reference to the second coming of our Lord. In that "coming" He will bless His people with His presence. However, the words are added: "with all his saints." Saints means "holy ones." The question is: who are meant by these saints or holy ones? It is true that the Bible sometimes refers to the angels when it speaks of His holy ones, Psalm 89:5, Daniel 4:13, Zechariah 14:5. Although the Apostle uses the term "saints" frequently, he nowhere uses the term to mean "angels." He always uses it to refer to the true believers in Jesus Christ. It is not impossible that he would use the term once to mean something different than his usual meaning, but it is not very probable. Besides, the angels, of course, accompany the Christ at the time of His second coming. This is clearly taught in the Book of Revelation.

Perhaps the most important reason for seeking Paul's usual meaning in this term is the fact that one of their "deficiencies" was their view of the second coming of our Lord. As chapter 4 will show, they wondered about those who had already died when the Lord would return. Will they be in a less favored position than those who are still alive? Here he already lays the groundwork for an answer to that

question. When the Lord returns in great glory He will not only be accompanied by an angel host, but those who have fallen asleep in Jesus will come with Him! They will not have a lesser position than those who are still alive on the earth at that time. There will be the throng of the redeemed who will come with Him and share in His glory. Their bodies shall then be given them! What a day that will be!

They are to see to it that they walk blameless before Him in holiness so that they will be able to greet the Lord at His coming with all His saints. Those who had fallen asleep in Jesus before His return will not have an inferior place with Him and those who are still alive must so walk that they will not receive an inferior place!

Questions for discussion:

1. Is Paul's concern for the Thessalonian church also a good indication that we constantly need strengthening and encouragement in the faith? Can our faith "live on itself"?
2. Could Paul's labors have been in vain in Thessalonica? Does he give any indication how we should view election and our own concerns?
3. Why does he attach so much significance to the fact that these people loved him and desired to see him? Isn't this glorifying self?
4. Can one be thankful and still not satisfied? Or is this a *must* in our spiritual life?
5. Notice Paul's treatment of the Deity of Christ. How important are "proof texts"? Must our beliefs be totally grounded on specific proof texts? Explain.
6. Do you get the impression from the verses 11-13 that to believe is easier than to live the Christian life?
7. Does the fact that Jesus will return "with all his saints" make that day even more glorious and more desirable? ●

Modern Criticism and the Word

THE UNERRING BIBLE — A LOST CAUSE?

Edward J. Young

Have you ever stood without an adequate answer before modern critics who declare that the so-called "scientific" method of Bible criticism has destroyed the authority of the Word? Whether you work in an office, attend a university, or wherever you mingle with people from other walks, you have heard the remark, "But the Bible is full of mistakes! Modern investigation has proved it!" The Christian answer to this challenge is presented by "Torch and Trumpet" in this first of a series of articles by Dr. Edward J. Young on the subject, "The Unerring Bible — A Lost Cause?" Dr. Young is professor of New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary.

Two mutually exclusive religions are contending for mastery in a life and death struggle within the

Christian Church today. One of these is the supernatural redemptive religion known as historic Christianity. The other is a religion which denies the genuinely supernatural character of Christianity and which exalts man as his own savior. It is with this latter religion and its attitude toward the Bible that we are going to deal in this series of articles.

Throughout the history of the Christian Church there have been those who, whether within or without the pale of the Church, have leveled attacks against the Bible. During the eighteenth century, however, the spirit of unbelief seemed to become more self-conscious. The reason of man was by many exalted to a place of supreme arbiter and judge of all questions. The supernatural content of the Bible was attacked, and the Bible was considered to be, not a divine revelation, but merely the best literature of the ancient Hebrew people.

Modernism Today

This spirit of unbelief which so greatly characterized the eighteenth century has by no means died out. In fact, although it has somewhat changed its method of approach, it is very much present. A quarter of a century ago there was a loud cry against doctrine. The fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, we were told, are the only essential doctrines. Whatever salvation there is can be worked out by man himself. Man is his own hope, and the social gospel is the only gospel that is really needed.

These positions have somewhat changed today. A number of causes have contributed to bring upon the scene a shift in emphasis. The Theology of Crisis has now come to the forefront of attention, and associated with it are kindred emphases. In the realm of biblical studies the schools of form-criticism and comparative religion occupy the dominant position. Today, as perhaps never before, a serious scholar who holds to the trustworthiness and absolute authority of the Bible as a revelation from God is regarded as upholding an utterly lost cause. He is treated as one would be treated who seriously sought to defend belief in Santa Claus.

In the light of this fact we may ask, What about these new emphases? Have not Barth and Brunner and others with them brought about a return to the Reformation? Have they not restored theology to its rights? Is not their work one of the most hopeful signs upon the religious horizon today? For our part we must answer these and all such questions with an emphatic negative. These new teachings have rightly received the designation, "The New Modernism." They are undergirded by a critical philosophy which is basically at war with the biblical revelation.

There is, however, another charge which must be brought against them. It is their attitude toward the Scriptures. Jesus Christ said, "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice" (John 18:37b). The modern theology, however, does not hear Christ's voice. Rather, it is very vigorous in telling us that the old doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures must go. It comes forward with a new interpretation of the Scripture, an interpretation which at first sight seems to be quite in line with the teaching of the Church, but which, upon closer examination, proves to be one piece with the unbelief of previous days. The hands may be the hands of Esau, but the voice is that of Jacob.

The Attitude Toward The Bible

In discussing the attitude of the modernist toward the Bible, there is one caution that must be observed. We are in no position to tell whether any particular person is or is not a true believer in Christ. God alone knows the hearts, and he alone can judge. Happily, there is gross inconsistency in the position of many. Our study, therefore, cannot be a study of men themselves, but rather of what they write concerning the Bible. What, therefore, is the attitude of the modernistic scholars and theologians toward the Bible today?

One characteristic that applies to much recent study of the Bible is that men believe the Bible

should be approached just like any other book and treated just like any other book. It is perfectly true that this is not always explicitly stated, but one gains the impression, after reading many pages of modern works dealing with the Bible, that this is the attitude which their authors have adopted. The Bible, they think, should not be set upon a pedestal and regarded as a book dropped down from heaven. It is an intensely human book, and should be treated as such.

For our part we can have no sympathy whatever with such an attitude. It is wrong to regard the Bible as one would any other book for the simple reason that the Bible is not like any other book. In fact, the evidences of the uniqueness of the Bible are so compelling that he who does not behold them must be blind indeed. The Bible bears within itself the marks of its divinity.

We may thus compare the Bible with God's revelation of himself in the created universe. "The heavens," says the Psalmist, "are intensively engaged in declaring the glory of God, and the firmament causes to make known that it is his handiwork." Thus the heavens and the earth are regarded as preachers who actively call one's attention to the fact that the hand that made them is divine. He who will not read aright this clear witness of the creation is spiritually blind.

The Bible also exhibits itself as the Word of God. There are several things which show beyond question that the Bible is from God, and we cannot do better than quote the words of the Westminster Confession, "... the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God" (1:5).

Since, therefore, the evidences that the Bible is the Word of God are so clear and plain that there is no excuse for not accepting them, it is a very wrong thing to adopt the attitude that in our investigations the Bible should be treated as any other book. The Bible should not be treated as any other book. All other books should be regarded as of human origination, the work of men; the Bible should be regarded as of divine origination, the work of God. With this underlying assumption of so much modern scholarship we, therefore, are unable to agree.

The "Scientific" Method

Another assumption that undergirds much modern study of the Bible is the so-called scientific method, which we may describe as follows. "In studying the Bible we must deal with facts which we ourselves can check and control by historical methods. There are many subjects, however, which lie outside the realm of our investigation. They do not lie in the realm of controllable facts, but in what we may call the realm of faith. In this realm it is every man for himself. In this realm belong such questions as the Virgin Birth of Christ, the doctrine

of God, and so forth. Our investigation must be limited to those areas which we can ourselves study by historical methods."

This method sounds very plausible, and it is very widely adopted today. Of course, it finds its philosophical grounding in Kant's distinction between the phenomenal and noumenal worlds, and it is a method which is basically at variance with the historic Christian faith. What reason is there for this arbitrary distinction, this rigid separation of the areas of investigation? The "scientific" method really seeks to separate the created facts to be investigated from God their Creator. It says in effect that it matters not what one believes concerning God, he may arrive at truth in other areas of investigation. This, of course, is to deny the gospel and the whole scriptural teaching. If God is himself the source of truth, how can a man attain unto truth when he is in basic error about God?

A Challenge Overdue

We believe that the "scientific" method is the greatest obstacle to true progress in the biblical field today. Before a man can interpret correctly and understand any historical fact or any area of investigation, he must go to the source of true interpretation, namely God. Unless one first thinks rightly about God, he will not think rightly about other subjects. To assume that it is possible to write a true in-

terpretation of the history of Israel when one disbelieves in the Triune God is to proceed upon totally false assumptions.

What have been the fruits of employing the "scientific" method in biblical study? Suffice it to say that where the "scientific" method has guided the investigation, the Bible is robbed of its supernatural character, and the easygoing doctrines of a modernism, complacent toward sin, hold sway.

The time is at hand to challenge the fundamental assumptions that have been guiding much biblical scholarship. We who believe the Bible to be the Word of God need not be ashamed of our position. Rather, we should constantly study to become more self-conscious in our Christianity, confident that the God of Truth is on our side. Despite all the learning and ingenuity that have accompanied the employment of the "scientific" method, the truth has not been reached thereby. The religion of modernism, despite the new forms in which it appears, is as vigorous today as ever in its desire to destroy the historic faith. We must meet it by attacking the false presuppositions which undergird it and by setting over against them the true presuppositions upon which our historic faith rests. And this we may do in the confidence that the battle is the Lord's. ●

Reprinted from Torch and Trumpet, December-January, 1951-1952.

DO JIM JONES AND THE GUYANA TRAGEDY MEAN ANYTHING FOR THE REFORMED COMMUNITY?

John H. Piersma

Dr. R. De Ridder's review of the year 1979 in the CRC *Yearbook* for 1980 commented on the "spectacular rise and unexpected success of new religions and cults. The tragedy in Guyana focussed world attention on the demonic forces behind such movements. It is still difficult to understand why the youth of conservative churches (including our own denomination) are attracted to these movements. There are few signs of readiness to undertake an honest and thorough look as to why this is so, however, and the questions raised have to this time been too easily dismissed" (p. 392). Rev. John Piersma, pastor of the First CRC of Sioux Center, Iowa, focusses our attention on these matters.

In recent years we have become increasingly aware of the rising tide of religious cults in the United States and Canada.

Reactions at first ranged from amusement to shock as we saw the shaven heads and weird sounds of the Hare Krishna group, the benign smiles of Reverend Moon and his followers, "the Moonies," the intriguing predictions of the psychics, the captivating recommendations of the daily horoscope, the fascinating moves of the Ouija boards, the mesmerizing films on demonic possession and exorcism, the impressive calm of the gurus and their

Transcendental Meditation, and the sobering reports of the excesses of Satan worship!

Few, except for some Bible-believing, evangelical Christians (I assume that we still acknowledge that we are part of that classification), viewed these religious aberrations with much suspicion or concern. Unless one as a pastor, sees the effect of such movements on some particular person in his congregation, they seem far removed from us. Some disturbed parents tried to alert us! They did get involved, some even having their children "deprogrammed."

The general population, however, seemed to feel that the First Amendment to the Constitution so guaranteed the right of religious freedom that no one should monitor these cults, even when reports indicated that something should be done.

The terrible tragedy of Guyana and the 911 people (!) of the People's Temple who lost their lives under the leadership of Rev. Jim Jones in a mass murder and suicide pact awakened us to the tremendous dangers that cultist activities and ideas can have. We are told now that prior to this great tragedy, reports had come to our State Department of enforced hunger, beatings, threats of death for defectors, and other horrors.

Like most other American Christians we deplore the current secular and apostate religious environment that led to this awful scene. Because there are so many religious cults out to capture the minds and

hearts of people on our continent, it is imperative that we understand more fully the dangers connected with these groups. Let us take a brief look at the following questions: Why do cult groups exist? How do they develop? How are they recognized? What lessons can we learn from this recent tragedy?

1. WHY DO THEY EXIST?

Many reasons are given for the present influence and prosperity of groups such as those led by the late Mr. Jones. It has been suggested that the church is at fault by moving away from truly Biblical principles and their traditional values, and by failing to meet the real spiritual hunger and psychological needs of people today.

Some have suggested that the pressures and complications of our present secular and technological age have created an environment in which false Messiahs can easily arise, play on the emotions of people, and offer simplistic solutions to complex problems. Others say that scores of people face deep insecurities, loneliness, feel alienated, unfulfilled and even rejected. A religious sect of this kind offers a sense of community, a sense of "belonging," a sense of identity, and a sense of purpose.

Still others suggest that an all-pervasive sense of despair permeates North American society, offering an environment in which charismatic leaders can bring some sense of hope, no matter how false it may be. The failure of science and technology to bring deep personal satisfaction; the economic pressures with which people are faced today; the political realities of our present world-system; — all contribute toward making people vulnerable, even weak, unless they have the reality of a genuine faith in Jesus Christ in their life.

Our Lord said, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." We may feed the hungry, give jobs to the chronically un- and underemployed, care for the sick, minister to the lonely and despondent, devise social programs to meet certain social ills, all of which should be done. But unless man's needs are not seen as *religious*, as related to man's basic need for God, people will chase after false gods and follow false Messiahs to try to satisfy the deep longing of the human heart.

Of course, the totally-depraved sinner will always look for consolation in that which does not satisfy. We are dealing, however, with a different question. When we face that question we must confess that today's church has not always provided a clear verbal declaration of the good news of the Gospel in such a way that believers will be saved from despair and society profoundly influenced by their presence and witness. Weak churches and faltering Christians are not much help to anyone in the struggles and agonies of man's pilgrimage through this vale of tears!

2. HOW DO THESE CULTS DEVELOP?

Many cults grow because of what they do with the Biblical revelation. Someone has suggested that there are three ways in which cults treat the Bible, and all three lead to error — they *add* to, they

subtract from, or they *reinterpret* the Biblical revelation.

This is not to say that all cults that develop are actually based upon the Bible. However, many of them use the Bible as a point of departure.

The cults that *add* to Biblical revelation always claim that they have additional revelation not contained in the Bible. The founding father of the cult, or his immediate or more prominent followers, usually claim that a new special revelation has been received from God, and that it somehow enhances or completes the Biblical revelation. By clearly mixing this new revelation with the truth of God's Word, the new counterfeit religion takes on an appearance of reality and acceptability, and its followers feel that theirs is the only true and complete knowledge of spiritual things. Just as counterfeit money appears to be the "real thing," but is not, so, too, the counterfeit religion includes just enough truth to make it appear genuine and to attract some who lack a keen sense of spiritual discernment.

Those who *subtract* from Biblical revelation carefully omit areas of Biblical doctrine that are offensive to the sensibilities of people. These cultist leaders talk about the love of God, but not His holiness; they talk about the justice of God, but not His judgment; they talk about heaven, but not hell. In other words, any *doctrine* that may be offensive is omitted.

A third source out of which cults arise is "truth" that is based upon *reinterpretation*. Some religious leaders take Biblical terms, and, by reinterpreting their meaning, actually pour in their own meaning. The simple meaning of great Biblical doctrines can be changed, diluted, and may be made totally contrary to what was originally meant. Many good people are therefore deceived into thinking that this religious leader is "orthodox" or truly Bible-believing when, in reality, he is a heretic.

For example, it takes keen Biblical discernment to pin-point the error of Herbert Armstrong. A casual listener, lacking good Biblical knowledge and an adequate doctrinal background, can easily be swept along by his most eloquent presentations that have the appearance of truth, but are based upon erroneous ideas and the evil devisings of a heretical mind.

Another reason for the easy development of cults is that man is inescapably and irresistibly religious. He is a creature of God. He has a certain desire for truth. He seeks answers. Instead of turning to Biblical revelation in faith, fallen man creates religions after his own spiritual character in order to meet his inner needs. In his search for God, in his quest for truth he concocts religions of his own making, religions that are marked by hatred for the Truth and love for the world. After the turbulence of the 60's many have fallen for the world religions that have been introduced in North America, either in whole or in part. We are now accustomed to the idea that Cassius Clay is "Mohammed Ali," and that the last score was a basket by "Khareem Abdul Jabbar!"

In the United States one of the more prominent contributing causes to the rise of cultism has been

the decline of expository preaching from the pulpits of America. Dr. James M. Boise, pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, has declared that good expository preaching has declined because of "a prior decline in a belief in the Bible as the authoritative *and inerrant* (italics inserted) Word of God on the part of the church's theologians, seminary professors, and those ministers trained by them."

Dr. Boise adds that, quite simply, it is "a loss of confidence in the existence of a sure Word of God. Nothing is sadder than this loss of true authority, particularly when the preacher does not even know it."

Dr. Dean Kelly, in his book *Why Conservative Churches are Growing*, has set forth clearly that people are seeking answers for the great questions of life — Who am I? Where did I come from? What is life all about? Why am I here? Where am I going when life is all over here on earth? When answers to these basic questions are not given by the preachers in established churches, people may turn to others for answers. There is no substitute for strong, Biblical, expository preaching that addresses contemporary issues in such a way that the hearer responds within his own heart — "that's my problem!"; "that's my need"; "that's the solution!"

There was a time when the Reformed community and the Christian Reformed pulpit could claim exception to this situation. It is doubtful whether they could claim that today. There is uncertainty, indifference, sometimes real disdain with respect to the nature and effectiveness of preaching today. All kinds of gimmicks are being introduced, all kinds of techniques are being tried to "make the Word interesting." Meanwhile cult leaders dare to speak boldly, eloquently, seriously and lengthily.* They believe in the exposition of their ideas, even if the things they say are not easy to be grasped. And they grow . . .

3. HOW ARE CULTS RECOGNIZED?

In his booklet, *The Marks of a Cult*, Dr. David Breese outlines several marks which clearly identify a cult. We can use his listing of these characteristics, and many of his comments under them.

a. *Extra-Biblical revelation.* Virtually every cult that I know of gives token respect to the Bible. After acknowledging the value and importance of the Bible, the cult usually goes on to announce some kind of subsequent revelation that not only adds to Scripture, but usually has a way of cancelling out certain teachings of Scripture in favor of this "new" revelation from God.

This is not only characteristic of the better known cults such as Mormonism and the Jehovah's Witnesses, but of even the new rash of cults that have sprung up in more recent years, such as the Moonies (the Unification Church). Contemporary cult leaders claim that they have special authority because "God spoke to me last week, or last year."

Cult writings are replete with accounts of some

revelation from God apart from the writings of Holy Scripture. The Apostle Paul warns us against any who would bring us another Gospel even though that Gospel were brought by an angel from God (Gal. 1:8, 9).

We must recognize that the final revelation from God has been given through His Son Jesus Christ and through His Word, the sacred Scriptures. Even under the intense pressures of modern neo-Pentecostalism (its jargon and patterns have crept even into churches like our own!) we must affirm that the canon of sacred Scripture is closed — or play into the hands of the cults!

b. *Salvation by works.* Virtually every cult is characterized by offering to its prospects the true knowledge of God or the promise of heaven (in some form). However, *you must earn it!* Eternal life is not dependent altogether upon the grace of God but upon human responsibility. Moonies are moved to herculean efforts in witness and fund raising because they have to pay "indemnity."

The Bible makes it very clear that the Gospel of Christ is a free gift of God. It is by grace alone. "For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9). Generally the religious cult presents no such Gospel. Its message is almost always one which results in slavish servitude to a set of obligations and practises ordered by some law or laws it has concocted.

The glaring example of the willingness of sinful people to accept such bondage is the row upon row of dead bodies at Guyana! People will literally do anything to pay for their own "salvation" (Micah 6:6, 7).

Who are better equipped to resist this false Gospel than we who are known as the proponents of "the doctrines of grace," as the whole-hearted professors of the T-U-L-I-P doctrines?*

c. *An uncertain hope.* Seldom do cults present a sure hope of eternal life. The issue of personal salvation is never settled. The cult leader is interested in producing continuing obligations rather than spiritual liberation. His followers are kept in hopeless bondage because they can never feel that theirs is a secure, saving relationship with God.

"For the member of the cult there is always more to do, more to pay," says Dr. Breese. There can never be a feeling that you have done all that you should do in order to gain the acceptance of God. The cultist never knows exactly where he stands with God.

How different from Biblical revelation! Our security rests squarely upon what Christ has done, not upon what we have done or are doing. Our hope of eternal life is therefore certain and sure because it is based upon a divine work rather than upon human effort.

d. *Presumptuous messianic leadership.* Certainly one of the most characteristic marks of a cult is the dominant presence of a self-appointed "Messiah," "guru" or other leader who presents himself as

*A former Moonie told me that Rev. Moon would often speak for as long as three hours at their Sunday morning services.

*Total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, perseverance of the saints.

divinely appointed with special authority, asking people to bring obeisance and obedience to him. Deliberate efforts are made by such leaders to create the impression that here for once is uncompromising dedication to truth ("they don't want this to get out") and unusual saintliness (if you help me, God's man, you help Him).

Leaders of this kind cannot help but diminish the person and position of Christ as well as the integrity and authority of the Bible. Often these messianic human leaders use the powers of their own intelligence and charm to impose their will and directives on the ignorant (our world has no shortage of spiritual and doctrinal ignorance!). *Time* magazine in a recent article on Jim Jones pointed to the fact that he had a messianic complex. The story is told that on one occasion he threw his Bible to the floor in angry disgust, asserting that the people were paying more attention to it than to what he had to say.

e. **Doctrinal ambiguity.** Often cults are not willing to carefully define their system of doctrine and expose it to the eyes of the general public. They make things "sound good" to their hearers, but when it comes down to specifics the details are usually ambiguous.

This is the reason why one can listen at length to representatives of the cults on the radio and television and never be sure what they are saying. In contrast, a reputable Christian leader is one who preaches the Word and seeks to be faithful in presenting the historical, grammatical interpretation of Scripture.

Incidentally, we would urge OUTLOOK readers to make use of Dr. Joel Nederhood's radio sermon series on the doctrine of Scripture, entitled "Understanding the Bible." It is a prime example of the difference between cultist and sound Christian leadership! You can get a copy by writing to THE BACK TO GOD HOUR, 6555 W. College Dr., Palos Heights, IL 60463.

f. **Denunciation of others.** The cultic leader usually presents his new type of teaching as the *only* truth and solemnly denounces all others as either false or ignorant with respect to what he is presenting. Frequently he is unwilling to appear in public debate or to answer questions from perceptive Christian scholars.

There is a fine but real line of difference between the proper Christian and Biblical attitude toward others and that of the absolutistic cult leader. This is not to say that if a Calvinist criticizes an Arminian, or vice-versa, that we are necessarily seeing a sample of the thing here scored. It is the difference between mere toleration or outright denunciation and an absolutism which asserts or suggests that the "only Christians" in the world are those of our group.

g. **A wrong view of Christ.** Cults often are marked by a defective Christology. They usually deny either the true deity or the true humanity of Jesus Christ. The central truth of Christianity is related to the question, "What think ye of the Christ?" The apostle John, especially in his first epistle, goes right to the heart of the problem when he addresses himself to

the cult of his day — Gnosticism. About as severe a test as any for the cults is what they do with Jesus Christ. It seems impossible for cultic leaders to give full due to "the Christ, the Son of the living God."

h. **Entangling organizational structure.** Cults often demand total commitment by converts to the organization and its complicated set of human strictures. This is not to imply that loyalty is bad. Blind loyalty, however, that leads to extremes is very unfortunate.

This is usually a central characteristic of a cult. As a result followers think of little else except their involvement with the movement and its human leaders. In the tragedy of Guyana Jim Jones required a slavish loyalty to himself, which ultimately led to brutality, murder and even mass suicide.

i. **Financial exploitation.** Cults are "big business," and almost without exception a cult plays upon and financially exploits its people in any and every way possible. Moonies are often required to bring in \$100 per day, and all of us know the high-pressure, end-justifies-the-means tactics of the Hare Krishna movement (you can't travel through America's more prominent airports without seeing and being approached by its representatives).

This can go to extreme lengths. Jim Jones exploited his followers by getting them to contribute their entire Social Security checks, bank accounts, and real estate holdings for his own personal purposes. After all, if the leader is what he says he is, and if the movement is as important as he claims, what is wrong with demanding such devotion? It is not unheard of for a conscienceless religious leader to build for himself a massive, personal financial empire.

In contrast, the New Testament tells us that salvation comes as the free gift of God, that the believer should give as God has prospered him out of a spirit of true thankfulness for the grace bestowed. His giving ought never to be for the personal advantage or gain of some human leader. And the purpose of any responsible Christian organization is to be a faithful steward of God, utilizing funds and resources for His Cause: the glory of His Name as it is realized through the evangelizing of the world, the discipling of believers and the promotion of His Kingdom.

4. WHAT LESSONS CAN WE LEARN FROM GUYANA?

Marvin Stone in *Newsweek* magazine wrote the following: "What happened in Guyana should send a message to our priests and ministers — to get out of politics and back into the pulpit; to cease being agents of social and economic reform; and begin again ministering to the soul, for there are quite obviously needs in the affluent society which cannot be filled by food stamps."

If this means that we ought to leave Christian philanthropy in *part three* of the Heidelberg Catechism — *after* the Biblical message concerning man's plight and *after* the Biblical instruction as to God's salvation — we can only approve! No doubt about it, there is in our day a confusion of social and political issues with the main focus of the Gospel, the salva-

tion of God's people in the way of a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ. Our fathers desperately feared "a social Gospel," and rightly so!

Our first lesson here, however, must be that we cannot divorce "the spiritual" from the rest of life. People like Jim Jones recognize that one can profitably trade upon the indifference of today's organized churches whose concern is cool toward the needs of soul and body. We need to stress the importance of the traditional offices in the church: the preaching eldership and its proclamation of the whole counsel of God, the ruling eldership and its pastoral concern for and disciplining of the saints, and the diaconal office with its proper understanding of, sympathy for, and assistance with the daily needs of God's children. Government agencies are always a poor substitute at best for any part of this divinely-ordained program!

In this connection let me repeat that expository preaching must continue to hallmark a soundly Reformed church. While we are definitely concerned about social and political issues, we are most significantly concerned about them in terms of "the pure preaching of God's Word." That kind of preaching will not fail to touch on the whole range of human concern and interest!

A second lesson comes in the form of a danger. Many have suggested that Guyana proves that the government was delinquent in its responsibilities toward the People's Temple encampment in Guyana and the reports that came back from this commune.

There is a danger that we could over-react by asking our government to interfere with the free exercise of religion. As Americans we treasure the freedom of religion guaranteed by our Constitution. As Reformed people we have not been here so long as to forget the oppression endured by our forbears in the struggle for recognition of the free church movement in Europe. This does not make for an easy solution to difficult questions, however.

We want to protect the religious freedom of

everyone, and yet somehow we need to prevent a re-occurrence of what happened in Guyana. The problems are occasioned, I think, by the fact that there is so little understanding of the proper role of formal ecclesiastical activity in our society (which gives some the opportunity to pester people in the interests of "religious freedom"), and by the idea that separation of church and state means that anything religious or spiritual in character is as such contraband in American society outside of the church, the home, or a person's "heart."

The lesson here can be summarized by saying that we still need to learn how the United States, for example, can grant to people the full right to their religious views without giving people like Jim Jones an opportunity to exploit the pocketbooks and ruin the lives of many! It is obvious that something has gone wrong among us, and we will need much reflection on this difficult problem.

Finally, if there is a third lesson for us as members of the Reformed community it is that we must live in close and careful relationship to the Lord of the church and kingdom! We must resolve to be clear in our declaration of the Gospel, and forthright in expository, doctrinal preaching. We ought to stop resisting the solid tradition which includes "Catechism preaching," realizing that a well-taught congregation is less subject to the trickery of Satan through cultist leaders than one that is untaught.

All of us ought to be keenly aware of the fact that Satan is alive and well on planet earth. He is doing all he can possibly do to corrupt the minds of people, even through religious means. In his hand cults become a substitute for and antidote to the real thing.

Unfortunately, many professing Christians and/or their children have been drawn into cultist movements because they have abandoned the solid Biblical foundation on which they ought to be standing. Let us determine anew to be true to our Lord and true to His Word! ●

THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Lubbertus Oostendorp

SALVATION, SOME BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES

The teachings of the Christian faith are often studied under the six divisions of, the doctrines of (1) God, (2) Man, (3) Christ, (4) Salvation, (5) the Church, and (6) the Future. In this article Dr. Lubbertus Oostendorp, who recently retired after spending the last 15 years of his service as a minister teaching Christian Doctrine at the Reformed Bible College, continues a series of studies on the fourth division, the Doctrine of Salvation.

The Bible is a book about salvation. Most of the mighty acts of God reported are redemptive. To these may be added a great variety of promises of salvation. What kind or kinds of salvation does the

Bible teach? The answer seems to depend on who is studying it. Once more we are faced with the same danger of shaping the answer to fit the question. God appears to be the source of many "salvations." He saves nations, cities, the poor, the oppressed, the distressed, the sick, and the dying. He redeems from the guilt and power of sin, but he also frees from demonic powers. He is the savior of the world, but also the electing God. And the Saviour redeems in a variety of ways. He preserves and restores; uses his "mighty arm"; heals bodies and delivers souls, and even raises the physically and spiritually dead.

In spite of all the complex scriptural data, for many centuries Western Christianity had concentrated its attention on personal redemption. The basic elements in salvation were forgiveness of sin, escape from eternal condemnation, and going to

heaven after death. Controversy centered around the process. There was agreement about the goal. The argument between Augustine and Pelagius, or between Luther and Romanism are still important. But radically new issues have been introduced.

The Nature of Salvation

The World Conference on Salvation Today at Bangkok (1973) attempted to make the meaning of salvation compatible with the views of social revolutionaries. Much that was said and done in the name of "liberation" theology made no pretense at being scriptured. However, there were others who most seriously claimed to find their position in the Bible. Some evangelicals have tried to construct "a viable liberation theology." Nor should we forget that there was a literal Exodus. Psalm 72 promises that "Christ shall have dominion over land and sea" and "when the needy seek Him, He will mercy show." And Jesus promised to put to naught the works of the Devil and to make us free.

With Prof. Verkuyl of the Free University, we might want to speak of "Christ, the Liberator." Abraham Kuyper once wrote that Calvinism was the source and protector of Dutch liberty. English Puritans wanted to purify not only the church but also the state. American Christianity has always been concerned with freedom and somewhat obsessed with the hope to "make the world safe for democracy." Even our fundamentalist brethren have become deeply concerned with "saving America."

Not Dispensationalism

We do not wish to escape the problem by resorting to dispensationalism. This would make Christ a literal, social, political savior, but only in the Millennium. It would seem to take care of the Jewish problems as well as the promises of a liberated world. Moreover, it would tend to make of salvation now too limited and exclusively spiritual a process. However, God may plan to deal with (save) Israel, we dare not posit more than one plan of Salvation. Christ is not two saviors with two peoples.

How shall we then understand the mighty redemptive acts of the O.T.? One message is obvious. God is the savior of His people. In many diverse ways and by manifest terrestrial judgments and blessings His saving ways are made known. Since Christ is the center of the O.T. as well as the N.T., the message of salvation is essentially the same. We must not think of the spiritual character of salvation presented by the Apostles as a response to some kind of failure of a literal kingdom. Rather it is the fulfillment of the O.T. hope. If mankind, as Israel, needed a social and political hero who would free from Rome and restore to external glory, God would have sent such a savior. But the people of God needed a savior from sin, Matt. 1:21. H. Ridderbos in his *The Coming of the Kingdom* shows its basic element to be truly transcendent-soteriological.

The Elements of Salvation

For Christ the Gospel of salvation included five basic elements. (H. Ridderbos *The Coming of the*

Kingdom pp. 211-277) Jesus preaches the remission of sins, the restoration through Christ to the fatherhood of God, the moral restoration to fulfill the Father's will (the regenerate person), God's fatherhood and temporal care, and the gift of eternal life.

Jesus took sin seriously. He bore the name Savior "because he would save His people from their sins." The modern idea that Jesus proclaimed a God who was different from the O.T. Jehovah cannot be supported by His words or deeds. He came even to give His life a ransom for sin (Heb. 7:27). The newness of His message lies in the complete assurance of forgiveness by His word and work. Here is One who has power on earth to forgive sins. All men, moreover, lie under a debt beyond their power to pay. Their only hope to escape the judgment of God is His forgiving grace.

Restoration to God

Certain theological positions make much of the fact that Jesus accepts the sinner just as he is. And in a sense this is true, as clearly taught by the parable of the prodigal son. Here all the depth and beauty of divine forgiveness shines forth. However, there is another side to the life of sonship. He who of purest grace brings us to His Father also gives us grace to live as children of God. Christ does something about sin for us, but also within us. Being saved means being regenerated (Jh. 3:3) and made "good trees" who bring forth good fruit (Matt. 7:17). Those who receive the salvation of the kingdom and have remission of sins and adoption as sons, receive also the heart that brings forth good treasures (Lk. 6:45). We may put it theologically by saying that Jesus knows no man who is justified who is not also sanctified.

Moral Restoration

Perhaps the most extreme and also the most disturbing of the sayings of Jesus which stress the need for conversion is found in Matt. 18:34, 35. After telling the parable about forgiveness He concludes, "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do unto you if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." Here the "as we forgive" of the Lord's prayer is reinforced. However, we are not dealing here with a cause for our forgiveness. The Heidelberg Catechism has caught the spirit of these words when it makes our forgiveness the result of divine forgiveness. Those who really experience God's pardon will forgive and thereby show themselves to be children of their heavenly Father. His sheep hear (obey) His voice and follow Him — also forgiving as He forgave (John 10:4; Col. 3:13).

Nowhere is the gospel of salvation by faith only more clearly stated than in John 3:16 and 6:29. Yet John also records the discourse about the vine where our Lord most clearly makes the fruit depend on the vine. However, there is no place for the fruitless branch (Jh. 15)! In their own way the Savior's words are as stern as those of His brother James. For Christ "faith without works is dead."

God's Fatherhood and Temporal Care

Ridderbos includes the Father's care for our temporal life as part of Christ's teaching about salvation. I never cease to marvel at the insight expressed in the first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism. The Father's care "even for the hairs of our head" is an important part of our only comfort in life and death. With body and soul we belong to our faithful Savior. The total character of our security rests in the fact that the almighty Father has adopted us and will care for us.

Our temporal welfare brings up the importance of Christ's healing ministry. Not only have many claimed the power of miraculous healing, but some have affirmed a right to constant health. "By his stripes we are healed" (Is. 53:5) is quoted as proof of an atonement which heals the body. Why did Christ spend so much time and effort in His healing ministry? Why did He send forth the apostles to "heal the sick"? John R. W. Stott argues that the great commission is really Jh. 20:21, "So send I you." Consequently, we must carry on our mission just as Christ carried on His. Therefore we too must feed the hungry and heal the sick (and raise the dead). Perhaps we will have to be content to agree that salvation is for body and soul, but we are safest to live within the providential care of God. It is much more important and comforting to believe that for Christ's sake our Father cares for us in health and sickness than to claim divine miracles which He neither performs nor promises. The redemptive meaning of the miracles has been variously understood. The casting out of demons is regarded by some as the most significant demonstration of "defeating the Powers." Some find here a warrant for casting out demons. Others have constructed a comprehensive theology centering on Christ's victory over and our freedom from "the Powers" (usually understood demythologically). For most of us the purpose of the miracles of Christ was essentially a testimony to His person and a symbolic evidence of His redemptive power. In this context, efforts to do the same things Jesus did would be self-defeating by confusing the very point that the exclusive power of Christ intended to prove.

The Gift of Eternal Life

Much more might be said about Christ's gospel of salvation. Most wonderful is His offer of eternal life to all who believe in Him (Jh. 3:16). John filled his gospel with wonderful words of life. It may be noted that his recording of the many mighty deeds is not in any hope of repeating them, but "that believing we may have life through his name" (Jh. 20:31). Although in the Synoptic gospels the whole of our redemption and future bliss is summed up by the word "life" (Matt. 7:14; 18:8, Mark 9:43) or "eternal life" (Matt. 19:16 and Mark 10:17); it is John who develops this theme. Indeed the term "life" takes on the meaning of authentic, imperishable existence.

The Synoptics seem to limit the gift of life to the future. John brings eternal life into the present. The Synoptics let us infer from the miracles of resurrection that Jesus can give life to the dead. In John 11 we find Christ establishing the relationship between the resurrection of Lazarus and the power to give eternal life. The whole mystery must be revealed. Jesus is Himself the resurrection and the life (Jh. 11:25).

Jesus leaves no doubt as to the way of salvation. "He that believeth in me has life or eternal life." We are saved by faith in Him. This faith is in Him as a person, but also involves truths about Him (Jh. 3:32, 33; 11:26; 20:31). Believing on Him requires "eating the flesh of the Son of Man" (Jh. 6:51), implies "hearing His voice and following Him (Jh. 10:27), and being a living, fruitful branch in the Vine (Jh. 15:1-6).

In the Johanne discourses our Lord bears personal testimony to His redemptive work. He came down from heaven, gives His life for His sheep, cares for His flock, is lifted up like a serpent in the wilderness, gives His sheep eternal life, infuses His Spirit in them, prays for His own, and goes to prepare a place for them. He will come again to receive them. All this and more the Savior does for His own. They are His, moreover, only by divine election (Jh. 10:29, Jh. 15:16, Jh. 17:9). Only those drawn by the sovereign grace of the Father come unto Him (Jh. 6:44).

The fulness of the blessing of eternal life, its perfection and consummation are presented by our Lord as future. Much controversy continues to rage concerning the eschatological character of Christ's message. A recent fad emphasizes what is called "Eternal life here and now." It has emphasized quality over against quantity and is often based on a very objectionable existential or dialectic philosophy. Christ does indeed promise the gift of life as a present gift and speaks of "the dead who hear His voice and live" (Jh. 5:25). Certainly, however, the present life of faith should not be confused with the glory that awaits us. Nor should we forget that there are at least two steps upward toward the blessing of eternal life. Christ assures the dying thief that he shall "today be with the Lord" (Lk. 23:42, 43). A similar promise of bliss in heaven is given in Jh. 17:24: "Father I will that those whom thou hast given me should be with me to behold my glory."

No amount of argument about the nature and independent existence of the soul (and many radical views are being expressed) should in any way rob the Christian of this blessed assurance. When I die I will go to be with Jesus! Nor should we rest satisfied with less than the fulness of the redemption promised us by the Savior. The resurrection, too, is ours in Him who is the resurrection and the life!

He is able to save *absolutely!* (New Eng. Bible, Heb. 7:25) His own Gospel preaching made this abundantly clear. How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? ●