

# THE OUTLOOK

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DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

JULY 1980



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**COUNTING THE COST  
THE GOSPEL AND THE POOR  
PULPIT FAILURE**

# Mid-America Reformed Seminary Association

## A Progress Report

By now most readers of *The Outlook* have been informed of the meeting held in Chicago on April 21 concerning the organization of an association to establish a school for Reformed theological instruction.

By instruction of the newly formed Association, eight northwest Iowa ministers have been acting as a temporary board charged with arranging nominations for the election of the first permanent board. In spite of many questions relating to the size, representation and duties of the board, we are making haste slowly.

Since the meeting in Chicago, papers have been filed with the Secretary of the State of Iowa for incorporation and tax exempt status. We have also obtained a thirty day extension for closing a purchase agreement with the owners of the Harmony Home property located northeast of Orange City.

Part of our work which has taken more time as the weeks pass is public relations and informational meetings. One such meeting was held in Pella, IA, on April 28, attended by at least 250 persons. On May 11 the temporary board met with representatives of the Calvin Seminary faculty who had been instructed by the executive committee of the Calvin Board to request such a meeting. The discussion was frank, candid, and to a degree, fruitful. Of greater significance, in this writer's opinion, was the public meeting that evening in Hull, IA, attended by people from as far away as Platte, SD, and Prinsburg, MN. The purpose of this meeting, stated by Dr. John Kromminga, was not to obstruct the move for another seminary, but to answer (perceived) allegations against Calvin Seminary faculty members. More informational meetings have been scheduled, one on May 29 with ministers of six classes in the Midwest, and another on June 1 at the First CRC of Orange City for the public.

Soliciting charter memberships in the Association has been another part of our efforts. Almost daily, applications are received from various parts of the country and the denomination. Persons desiring to become charter members can apply before December 31, 1981, by writing to the undersigned for information and a membership card.

In closing this brief up-date, we wish to thank the Board of Reformed Fellowship for both moral and technical support, the former evidenced by their prayers and encouragement, the latter by their service as a channel for donations given to Mid-America Seminary Association. It is now possible to send tax-exempt donations directly to the Association.

Please continue to remember this effort in your prayers. ●

Rev. Nelson D. Kloosterman  
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## Counting The Cost

Norman B. Haan

It was time for a new car. The old rusted out gas guzzler had to go. My wife and I started shopping. We had set our expectations of the car we would buy. It had to be well built, within our price range, get forty miles to a gallon on the highway, and have a little size.

Rev. Norman B. Haan is the pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Waupun, Wisconsin.

We had looked at various cars. But today we had an appointment with a salesperson. It was a lady. I had detected something in these visits to show-rooms. When my wife and I came in together, a man would wait on us. If I came in alone or called asking for a salesperson, I was met by a lady. So we met this nice lady who would sell us a car.

We were told all the good features of the car in which we had an interest. We talked price. She wanted too much money. I hesitated. She came on a bit stronger. I still hesitated. She was a good salesperson and knew her stuff. She came on even stronger, writing up a contract and pressing me to sign my name to it. My resistance became even more intense. I told the lady that it was not my style to rush into a deal. I would sleep on it a couple of nights. She cautioned me that the rebate program might not last that long. It was near the end of the month. But I would still sleep on it.

On the way home I said to my wife that I was beginning to feel as if I was at an evangelistic rally. My thoughts went back to Flint, Michigan when I participated in a Ford Philpot crusade. I had been taught by them the method of leading a person to Christ. This involved pressing the claims of Christ, get them down on their knees to repeat a prayer, and get them to sign a commitment card. My thoughts also went back to Phoenix, Arizona and the Billy Graham crusade where the same thing was taught. I remember calling on some people in the area of our church who had signed these commitment cards, which had been referred to us, only to hear people say that they signed under the emotional excitement of the meeting. On second thought, they really did not want Christ and His church.

The question that came to me was: who was learning from whom? Had the church taken over the approach of the business world, or had the business world taken over the approach of the church? Which ever way it is, it was not the approach of Jesus and the apostles. Jesus challenged people to first think it over and consider the cost (Luke 14:25-35). Paul before Agrippa (Acts 26:29) as well on his other preaching events left the people with a challenge to consider. We in the Reformed faith believe that the Holy Spirit changes hearts and leads to conviction by way of the Word, not we by our presentation, argument, or strategy. I thought: if we would get back to that approach, perhaps our preaching and evangelism would be more effective and have more lasting results. Maybe we would, then, not be building churches so much around persons or a person, but around Christ.

Perhaps you are wondering about the car. We did eventually buy it from that lady, not because she was female, but because she lowered her price and outdid all the other competition. It payed to sleep on it for two weeks. ●

# THE OUTLOOK

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

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# The Gospel and The Poor

Peter De Jong

## A Trend in Missions

The above title appears over the leading editorial of the Feb. 2, 1981 issue of *Getrouw*, the Dutch monthly publication of the International Council of Christian Churches of which Rev. J. C. Maris is secretary.\* The article begins by comparing two unusually important missionary conferences, both of which were concerned with the subject "the gospel and the poor." The first was the World Mission and Evangelism Conference (a division of the World Council of Churches) held last May at Melbourne, Australia; the second was a consultation for world evangelization of "new evangelicals" (associated with Billy Graham) held a month later at Pattaya, Thailand. The *Getrouw* article observes that the second ("evangelical") conference, as also other recent international conferences such as that of the World alliance of Baptists and the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, all clearly show by their reports that they are influenced by the World Council of Churches and are more or less moving in the same direction. Is this direction right or wrong? That question urgently demands our attention.

## The Social Gospel

What is the course charted at Melbourne? It is, in short, that of the "Social Gospel." As men neglect the spiritual content of the Bible, the Kingdom of God is regarded as a social order to be realized by people, an ideal human society. Accordingly, a great deal of attention is focused on the position of the poor, the oppressed, the "third world," etc.

It has long been more or less common to charge the church or Christendom with responsibility for the faults of society. "The church has failed," and that is the reason for the rise of socialism and communism. This popular charge, repeated on all sides for many years has lately been accepted by many church leaders, especially those in the ecumenical movement. The World Council of Churches which is unable to give a clear, united testimony about the Bible and its content, does assume the right to speak with pretended Biblical authority regarding social and political matters (although it must refrain from

criticizing international communism). There must be no obedient submission to what the Bible says about man's relationship to God; but there must be admonitions about the relationships of man to man, or, more correctly, of one group or class to another.

## "Evangelicals" Follow

In opposition to this "horizontalist" movement it must be maintained that anyone who does not take the first table of the law — love to God — seriously, cannot observe the second table — love to his neighbor. Although this principle is theoretically accepted by orthodox believers, one gets the impression that many have let themselves be intimidated by this constantly reiterated criticism of the Church and therefore hasten to do something about the social needs. Presumably such efforts will again make the Church a little more "credible" with the world. There is something half-hearted in this attitude. The misery of the world is so encompassing that our whole existence as church and the whole of our lives might have to be exhausted in social action if this were indeed the divinely assigned calling of the church. If, however, the church of Christ has a completely different kind of calling in the middle of the world, it will, especially now, earnestly have to respond to that.

## A Different Calling

In order to exclude all misunderstanding, let it be immediately added that this calling does not exclude, but includes the neighbor, the fellow-man. But it involves the totality of God's demands and promises and of man's material and spiritual needs, temporal and eternal. No right-thinking Christian will assert that we according to our ability have fulfilled this calling. There is, indeed, all along the line a frightful deficiency. The question, however, is whether this deficiency is supplied by Melbourne, — in other words, whether this and similar movements are in accord with the Word of God. By choosing the prayer, "Thy Kingdom Come" as its theme this conference obliged itself to do justice to the Biblical content of the Kingdom of God. This entails listening to what the Bible says about it. An international conference long prepared and divided into study

\*The address of *Getrouw* is Post bus 80, De Bilt, Netherlands.

groups to discuss the meaning of this subject, ought to have come with Biblically authoritative conclusions. Regrettably, there was simply no hint of such sound Biblical study. A text might occasionally be cited, but its context was scarcely noticed. This is a serious business. If the ecumenical movement were moving in a true course it would have given a clear Biblical testimony. How that would have appealed to orthodox churches and confessors! That it was not able, in a well-prepared international conference of capable theologians, to do this, suggests that it tried to draw from the Bible certain social views which it first attributed to it. And even in this there was no unanimity. And the worst of the whole business is that the "social gospel," so constructed, is not the genuine gospel. It is no gospel at all.

### A False Gospel

If it is no "gospel," what is it? I met a student who, during a World Council meeting, attended an ecumenical church service led by one of the leaders of the World Council. I asked her whether it had been an edifying service, but she answered, "It only made me tired and fearful. As young people we're loaded down with the burdens and needs of the whole world with the charge to do something about them quickly and effectively as possible. But — what can we really do?"

It is to be feared that this characterizes the whole social perversion of the gospel. A new yoke is placed upon people which inevitably resembles that of the scribes and Pharisees of whom Jesus said that they lay upon people unbearable burdens, while they themselves do not stick out a finger to help them carry them (Mt. 23:4).

The writer then called attention to the way in which the Liberal Tübingen Professor Kaseman reportedly castigated both orthodox and liberation theologians saying that the hour of the western way of living had struck and that the critics and rebels had rightly seen this. Thus the churches of the western world were all lumped together. That is not surprising if we remember that in these circles the church is here "for the world." Other speakers hammered on the same anvil. The church must identify itself with the poor. The Japanese Koyama spoke of the crucified Christ who is a challenge to the might of the world: "The wounds of Jesus heal the wounds of the world." But it was no biblical theology.

Raymond Fung (Hong Kong) stated:

It is no wonder that the poor, who every day experience unjust and unworthy treatment care not a whit for our gospel preaching. A middle class church that is an island in a sea of factory workers and small farmers has no meaning, either theological or statistical. Let me finally — by way of recapitulation — state that preaching the gospel to the poor does not begin with bringing the poor to listen to God's Word. It does not begin with flooding whole states with Bible tracts and gospel songs. *It begins with God, or God's representatives, listening to the voice of the poor.*

*This doesn't suggest much appreciation for the preaching of the gospel to the poor (Matt. 11:5).*

### Focus on Poverty

The pervasive line was that Melbourne made poverty a missionary issue. But — the poor of the world are for the most part outside of the reach of the church. And that, "while the gospel emphatically announces itself as good news for the poor!" Accordingly it was difficult, according to C. M. Boerma, in section I of the conference "to come to an agreement about the real relation between poverty and the coming of the Kingdom. The Russians were absent from this section because according to their declaration, they know no poverty in their world." There was much difference of opinion, even though people understood one another, in the accounts of the various forms of poverty, poverty as hunger, as powerlessness, as cultural denigration, the poor as victims of racism, or of capitalistic exploitation, as refugees, as drug addicts, the poor as unemployed or without purpose. There was general agreement that all of these forms of poverty involved a process of slighting ("achterstelling," literally "putting behind"), poverty as a relational concept. The statement that followed was especially significant: "Therefore there was little chance to discuss poverty as estrangement from God, which would have been appropriate in a missionary meeting, but in this framework would have introduced confusion. "One asks in amazement what we must think of a Christian missionary conference on the theme, "Thy Kingdom Come," in which the estrangement from God cannot even be brought up for discussion: This shows that neither the theme nor the poverty were discussed in a Biblically responsible manner.

In spite of this we were told that there was a "clear agreement regarding God's preference for the poor." The South African "black" theologian, Allan Boesak, stated that "good news for the poor" is by definition, bad news for the rich.<sup>1</sup>

This was, stated in various ways, the tendency of Melbourne — God is on the side of the poor. Many "evangelicals" in the later conference at Pattaya (Thailand) were inclined to follow this track. But Professor Peter Beyerhaus (Tübingen) warned them and stated very clearly that the World Council propagated "another gospel," "not that of Jesus Christ."

### Whose Kingdom?

We could drop the matter at this point if it were not for the fact that many orthodox confessors, despite objections of principle, are still obviously influenced by such discussions and plead that the Church busy itself more than it has done with social and political questions.

Psychologically, this is understandable. People feel themselves more or less guilty because the Church is ever and again criticized as having failed. It should have brought better conditions, a better world. Bodies such as the World Council of Churches and the whole new theology tell us that *this* is the

Kingdom of God. We know that the Scripture teaches something quite different. But then we must also see clearly that a faulty rendition of God's Words cannot possibly lead in the proper course. One cannot with impunity pervert the salvation of Christ into a social improvement aiming at inter-human earthly relationships. The Kingdom of God is not established by us men. It is the kingship of God, coming near in Jesus Christ, and extending itself in the way of personal rebirth (John 3) and faith, by which men willingly and heartily submit to the Eternal King. A world that rejects this Kingdom will try in vain to achieve an ideal society on earth, even with the help of ostensibly Biblical catch-words. This is the tragedy of the World Council of Churches and of all social-political action which has this root-age. It is too superficial to make "the church" or "Christendom" responsible for all kinds of world-misery — unless one is referring to churches and Christians who have en masse turned away from the Word of God. But then there would have to be a repentant return to that Word, and of that there was no trace in Melbourne. The many charges against the church and Christendom assume that the church is called and proposes to bring about a better world — without "conversion." And it has no power to do that, even if it were only because "the world" refuses to submit to God's order, and continues on its way away from God.

It is vain to attempt healing where there is no proper diagnosis. Now the impression is given that "poverty" in social and political respect is the real illness, and that the Bible teaches this. And furthermore, that in one way or another, the social "structures" and institutions, in short, the whole organization of society, must radically change in order to get a healthy society. But this has often been proposed and attempted in the course of the centuries and the fact that it has never succeeded should move us to reflection.

### The Real Illness and Its Remedy

The malady is much deeper. "Poverty" is only one of the symptoms. Why should what calls itself a world missions conference not deal with the whole complex of sins and abuses pointed out in the Bible? Christ said that these *proceed from the heart* (Mt. 15:19). Man has become a sinner. That means, among other things, that he puts himself in the center instead of God — he is egocentric, egotistic. He seeks himself and his own (supposed) advantage, if necessary at the expense of others. Throughout history every attempt at world improvement has run aground on that.

Be a "structure" ever so perfect, its results will be disappointing if people are not renewed. On the other hand we will, even with very imperfect social institutions, see surprising results if the people have truly become "new." And this is the fruit only of the preaching of the gospel, through the power of Christ's Spirit — exactly what Melbourne overlooks. It is tragic that people thus neglect the one thing necessary, to spend much time and money on

considerations that do not touch the heart of the problem and will do no good.

Are we then indifferent to the need and misery of the world? Far from it! But "poverty" is only a tip of the iceberg in the cold sea of human misery. One who knows his Bible and takes it seriously can hardly be optimistic about the future of mankind. And this is no fatalism, it is the obverse side and consequence of a steadily progressing falling away from God and His ordinances.

In the middle of this world the church of Christ stands with the summons to repentance and faith. And exactly for that reason it is hated. But there is no substitute for the one, God-given medicine. That the missionary labors of the church are accompanied with all possible material help is well-known. We may well recall that exactly Christian missions have first practiced that. And when it comes to offering help to the miserable, the followers of their Merciful High Priest Jesus Christ are certainly not backward. One who himself in the full spiritual meaning of the word has *experienced* mercy will be driven thereby to *show* mercy to others both near-by and far away. But a Christendom that ignores the only genuine salvation, and in its own strength tries to take on the problems of the world is like the legendary Baron Von Munchhausen who tried to lift himself out of the swamp by his own hair.

This remarkably perceptive analysis of much present "missionary" thinking which I rather freely translated, invites our attention, the more as we see increasing indications of the same humanistic and materialistic perversions of the gospel in our churches, schools and missions. The shift of attention from evangelism to world relief and world "hunger" programs, talk of "restructuring" societies, political pressures in favor of El Salvador guerillas, etc. worry many thoughtful church members. We may well ponder the warning and profit by the suggested correction of *Getrouw's* editorial. ●

1. In this connection Arend De Graaf writing in the Australian Reformed magazine, *Trowel and Sword* of August 1980 in one of a series of articles referring to this Melbourne meeting called attention to the pervasive, often strident, and at times malicious caricature of missions that prevailed at the conference. One "Aboriginal woman . . . boldly stated that 'the only gospel the churches ever brought her people is a gospel (?) of murder, plunder and poverty' and Australia's churches were doing this still today." Among such strident speakers De Graaf mentions especially:

*There was the angry voice of the Kampen graduate, Dr. Allan Boesak, Coloured South African, now student pastor in Cape Town. "The White Church conspires together with the white Caesar to oppress and to kill. Good News for the Oppressed can only be good if it is Bad News for the Oppressors! And the Day of reckoning is coming fast!" (i.e. the day of civil war). And this minister serves the Dutch Reformed Mission (!) Church!*

*It seems especially significant that Dr. Boesak, who took such a prominent role at Melbourne has in the past months been the "inaugural lecturer" for Calvin College's new Multi-Cultural Lectureship Program (See Agenda 1981 for the CRC synod, p. 32). The report of the synodical Race Committee (p. 230) also said of him, "The presence of Dr. Allan Boesak at Calvin during this school year is a rich resource for the CRC; SCORR has been delighted to learn from him, and to cooperate with the college in hosting a day of dialogue between Dr. Boesak and Black church leaders from across the country."*

# Contemporary Failure In The Pulpit

John Richard De Witt

In broaching the whole matter of the failures of the Christian pulpit at the present time you have hit upon one of the most serious problems we face in the church.

You wish me to list ten 'serious failures of the Christian pulpit.' I think I have to say at once in that connection that my list will have in view quite different situations. By that I mean to say that there are serious failings among those committed to the Reformed faith, and there are also serious failings among those of a broader evangelical commitment. Hence, whatever I say about the former will in the nature of the case apply to a narrower circle than what I have to suggest about the latter. I shall attempt to make that distinction as I go along.

(1) I would say, first of all, that, from my own observation, *the pre-eminent failing in the evangelical pulpit is a misunderstanding of the nature of preaching.* Whatever else may be alleged against the Barthian school, at least this has to be said in its favour: Karl Barth and those who ranked themselves with him had a clear conception of the sermon as 'event.' I know, of course, that this idea of the sermon as 'event' was related to the Barthian view of the Word of God; but I would insist that the idea itself is to be found plainly in Calvin and in many others in the Augustinian and Reformed tradition. What is it that happens when the Word of God is preached? That is the question. Is the sermon also — as the Second Helvetic Confession declares — the Word of God? If it is, then in what sense is this the case? Here Romans 10.14, 15 must be cited as of great importance. Prof. John Murray, in his commentary, speaks on this point with no uncertain voice. If we regard the sermon as the vehicle through which the Lord Jesus Christ himself speaks — if, that is to say, we hold that preaching in the biblical sense of the word is the principal means by which God addresses himself to sinners — this conviction cannot help but exercise a transforming influence on what we who are ministers do in the pulpit, and on how we do it. It does not seem to me that many evangelical ministers, whether Reformed or

not, have any firm understanding of the truth in this area.

(2) Something else that has troubled me a great deal is what I may perhaps be permitted to call a *want of ministerial earnestness.* There are, it is true, serious preachers about; but their number is too few. And I think that problem is one which characterizes many who stand in the Reformed tradition. Ministers should be able to say, with Richard Baxter, 'I preached as never sure to preach again, And as a dying man to dying men.'

The reasons for this lack of ministerial earnestness need to be explored. I have a few ideas on the subject. Perhaps part of the problem is due to certain conclusions drawn from the doctrine of the covenant about the spiritual position of those in the congregation to which a man preaches. Another factor here is possibly a failure to hold in tension the biblical teachings on divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Still another factor is the influence of the age in which we live with its general want of seriousness and with its tendency to undervalue the awful consequences of sin and impenitence.

(3) I have also been disturbed by *contemporary trends in communication.* In his excellent volume *Preaching and Preachers*, Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones has some comments on this point. I recognize, of course, that men should use different styles in different situations and that what is appropriate in one setting may be quite inappropriate in another. One speaks differently, for example, over the radio from what is the case in a worship service on the Lord's Day. However, the idea that a minister should never raise his voice — that, in fact, it is improper and undignified to raise one's voice — has tended to reduce the intensity of the sermon experience. It would be quite wrong to insist that every man must preach in the same way and that all ministers should adopt the same vehement style. But it is equally wrong to teach that enthusiasm, vehemence, and the employment of whatever rhetorical skills are available are foreign to the Christian minister. *There is a sense, I think, in which the so-called 'conversational style' has brought death to the pulpit.*

(4) It seems to me that there is a problem among many of the younger Reformed ministers at the point of the *redemptive-historical approach to the Scriptures.* I have read Sidney Greidanus's *Sola Scriptura* and some of the other books on the sub-

This article by Dr. John R. De Witt of the Reformed Theological Seminary at Jackson, Miss., was a letter, written in answer to a request of Samuel T. Logan, Jr. of Westminster Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, Pa., for a statement of his views on this important subject. It appeared in *The Banner of Truth* of March, 1981.

ject, but I have yet to find in any of them a way of bringing together the redemptive-historical conception of Scripture and warm, pointed, applicatory preaching. I do not, it should be said, question the validity of the insights of the redemptive-historical method. But to warn off ministers from the exemplary and the moralistic methods of a former time and of other schools is not as yet to have shown them how to be personal and applicatory without doing injustice to the scope and intent of the Word of God. We need some solid, helpful work here, and we need it soon. If the redemptive-historical interpretative principle robs men of power in the pulpit there is something radically wrong with it. And I fear that it has done just this in not a few instances.

(5) My observation is that in terms of their preaching many ministers might as well not have gone to seminary — and this is true in the Reformed churches as well as in those of a broader background and tradition. We stress the value of Hebrew and Greek, of careful and painstaking exegesis, of reverent interpretation of the biblical text, with the end before us of making as certain as possible that what is said is based on the Scriptures. But as soon as men complete their seminary training and are under the necessity of writing sermons — often several sermons per week — they cast about for help in ways that are sometimes startling and unsettling. And the result is that all the discipline and instruction of the seminary classroom are lost to view in the actual work of preaching from week to week. We may expect this in quarters where the approach taken to the exegesis of the Bible is not so responsible as we claim it to be. But what are we to say when the same sort of thing crops up in case after case within the Reformed churches themselves? One can pick up example after example of allegory, of spiritualization, of moralism, of an ignoring of the real teaching of the text, in pulpit after pulpit. Why is this so? I have already indicated that perhaps a part of the reason for it is to be found in the pressure of having to prepare many sermons. And it has to be conceded that a minister can be very busy with other work than preparation for the pulpit. But mere busyness can never excuse a minister of the gospel where the most important thing he is called to do is concerned. Moreover, *careless handling of the Scriptures* breeds incredulity among the hearers. It certainly does in me.

(6) I have often thought in recent years that a great failing in the evangelical pulpit is the inability of many ministers to speak of anything beyond that which bears upon the individual and his/her family and their relationship to God in Christ. *The individualism and the exclusively soteriological orientation of much evangelical preaching* are apparent on every side. My comment has to be qualified, of course. We need to concede that evangelicals in the past couple of decades have been interested in the broader application of the gospel. And one does now hear a good deal of political preaching, mostly of a very right-wing variety. However, there also the same accusation applies, though in a different way and to a somewhat different degree. The perimeters

of what the gospel means for individuals are drawn in such a way as to teach that what matters is one's own relationship to Christ and one's responsibilities in a few, usually very restricted, areas beyond that. The corrective to this misconception is found in the Bible and in the Reformed theological tradition. One thinks here of the great breadth of Calvin's vision; of the Puritan concern to apply the gospel down the line in every sphere; of Abraham Kuyper's noble grasp of the implications of Christian responsibility. But attention needs to be given to making these things known afresh. Preaching should certainly be directed to persons and should speak of personal salvation; but with the same intensity and with the same dynamic it should also speak of many other things.

(7) My next observation is related to the one preceding, but it is rather on the other side. I would say that in many Reformed churches preaching is *insufficiently direct*. Perhaps the problem is that too many ministers regard their congregations as consisting of those, and those only, who have already come to know what it means to be a Christian and a disciple of Jesus Christ. There is a failure here of ministerial boldness and directions. The gospel should be preached regularly to every congregation. Covenant children must be told what their own covenant position means for them, what its implications are. They have to know that they dare not take their position for granted. Those born in Christian families are to come to Christ. My own great homiletics teacher, Dr. Henry Bast, used to tell us that we were to assume nothing with respect to the spiritual situation in our congregations. And the longer I live and the more I preach the greater is the degree of my agreement with him.

(8) It seems to me that many ministers — particularly the younger ministers who love and are committed to the Reformed faith — tend to *despise the form of the sermon*. It may be that this fact results from so high a view of the divine sovereignty as to imply that whatever God intends to accomplish through the preaching will come to pass no matter what the form of the sermon may be. I believe that indifference to form and style is disastrous and intolerable. While I do not much like to speak of the sermon as an 'art form,' at the same time I think that we are justified in speaking of that side of sermon preparation. Surely, if preaching is vital and dynamic and if our object is to persuade men, then we must preach in the most effective way possible. Not everyone will have the same skill in this respect, but all ministers must work very hard to write clear, interesting, gripping, well-organized, and persuasive sermons. A sub-point here is the question of sermon illustrations. I find it very difficult to come upon good illustrations; but I believe that apt and illuminating illustrations are almost indispensable to powerful preaching. These need not be anecdotal in form. And they should not detract from the central thrust of the sermon itself. But the faculty of imagination, so essential to all effective communication, ought to be cultivated by ministers, too. Perhaps the best sermon illustrators I have ever heard were Dr.



Harry J. Hager, of the Reformed Church in America; Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse, of the Presbyterian Church; and Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, also of the Reformed Church in America. One need not be in agreement with a preacher to learn from him and to appreciate his special skills. I am coming increasingly to think that one of the worst things of which a preacher can be guilty is dullness! We are presently confronted with fierce competition from television, radio, and the like. But I myself believe that biblical preaching has very little to fear from any of these and that it can hold its own if it does what it is supposed to do.

(9) Related to the above is the observation that an increasing proportion of evangelical ministers *lack the broad liberal arts training* that used to be a prerequisite for admission to the seminary. In the old view a minister was to be a man of broad general culture, who knew the arts, history, philosophy, who read many books (though his one great book was the Bible), and who therefore had the whole spectrum of culture and society at his disposal in preaching the gospel. The great preachers of the past certainly displayed such an education; and even the written sermons we have from them exhibit a kind of background many of the ministers of our generation do not have. Men now come to the seminary from Bible colleges, or from a background of science or engineering. Some of them have never had good courses in history, in English grammar, in philosophy, in literature. And as a consequence they are not in touch with culture and the social order. It is also true that virtually every younger minister, and seminary student, is seriously disadvantaged so far as his education is concerned. *The general decay in education* is reflected in the quality of the men entering the ministry. Sermons are rendered irrelevant, unattractive, and ineffectual on this account. How are we to remedy such a situation? We need to think about this. I hardly need to say that we cannot begin to re-educate every minister of whom all this is true; but surely we can do something to help him. But what? How can a man be put in touch with all the things he should know and experience in order to preach pointedly and effectively?

(10) One of the great problems many men face in the ministry is the gap between their own understanding of what they are called to do — namely, to preach — and what their congregations expect of them. We say, congregations and ministers alike, that ministers are chiefly to be preachers of the everlasting gospel; but as a matter of fact, *most congregations are largely indifferent to preaching*. Perhaps my own experience has tended to magnify this consideration, and it is possible that others, in more conservative denominations, may have a different perspective. However, I believe that most congregations are satisfied with mediocrity in the pulpit, provided the minister is inoffensive and does not trespass too much on their time. A cursory survey of the situation in many congregations would, I am confident, tend to confirm this. Excellence in the pulpit is not a primary demand of vast numbers of professing Christians. Listen to what is said on the radio, for

example — said by men of considerable reputation and influence; or observe what is done in churches throughout the country. The conclusion is that the biblical idea of preaching is not that that is to be picked up in a very broad circle. In a sense we do not adequately prepare our students in the seminary for the true state of affairs in the church at large. We train men to think of themselves primarily as preachers, only to have them sorely and sometimes bitterly disillusioned by what they find to be the case in the congregations to which they are called. This gap needs to be bridged. And ministers must be helped if that bridging is to take place.

(11) One of the sad features of the times is the marked *absence of what I may call the prophetic element* in preaching. No doubt this idea is related to what I have already said about the sermon as event; however, it does at the same time represent a different aspect of the truth. And bound up with it is the whole matter of the *authority* of preaching. I grow weary as I think about the number of times, for example, when I have heard a minister begin his sermon by saying that there was something he wanted to 'share' with us from the Word of God. I believe that the word 'share' in this context is singularly inappropriate. It is, in fact, what I have called 'one of the despicable platitudes that have entered the ministerial vocabulary in the twentieth century.' The minister must come from God, bearing God's message, speaking God's Word, standing in a sense even in God's place, addressing us with that which in no way rests on his own authority. The minister is a herald, and his sermon is that Word which he speaks in behalf of the One who sent him. That, after all, is the meaning of the word 'to preach.' The relational, psychologizing, soul-baring so-called preaching of the present time is in no way reflective of the biblical concept of the sermon.

(12) The final area of weakness which I want to list here is that of the connection between character and sermon: that is to say, between the minister and what he is before God, on the one hand, and his preaching, on the other. The older books on homiletics establish this link very distinctly. For example, Robert L. Dabney, in his *Lectures on Sacred Rhetoric*, has a chapter on the 'Preacher's Character with Hearers.' That, I think, is a very important emphasis, and one of which we do not hear nearly enough now. The minister is to be a holy man, and he is to speak from a heart that beats in the awful apprehension of the presence of God. The stress of our time is on the fact that the minister is a Christian among Christians; and that, of course, is quite true. But he is also a man of God, called to give his whole life and all his time to the service of God. A great part of his power, therefore, is in the credibility lent to his ministry by his *holy, godly character* and by his ability to say, as the Apostle Paul did, 'Brethren, be followers together of me' (*Phil 3.17*).

I suppose that the list could be expanded; but I have already gone beyond the number of ten; and perhaps I have said enough. ●

*(Italics Added, Editor)*

July, 1981/nine

# The Doctrine of the Church

Lubbertus Oostendorp

## THE CHURCH IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

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**With this article, Dr. L. Oostendorp, retired Christian Reformed pastor and Reformed Bible College professor, of Grand Rapids, Michigan, begins a new series of studies on the Doctrine of the Church.**

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Nowhere have more theories been modified to support practice than in church polity. A surprising number of strange practices have been justified by appeals to Scripture, and when Scripture seemed to forbid others there was always the appeal to extra-Scriptural tradition. And where even this fails, one has only to declare Scripture irrelevant. Thus a kind of modern pragmatism seems to have become the basis of determining what the church should be or do. If this still leaves unanswered questions, one can take the next step (which for many is the first step). We can forget all about any theoretical basis, and just do what seems good, no questions asked!

Like a mighty army, moves the church of God! Who knows why or where it is moving. We don't know where we are going, but we are sure we are on the way. One experimental worship follows another. Minister and members are exposed to "how

to" seminars. There are house churches, alcoholic churches, gay churches, college churches and children's churches. If there is any other group that needs a church, that too no doubt could be formed. Who knows what man's media is doing for and to the church? Whatever one wishes to call it, there seems to be a "church of the air" or rather "churches of the air."

Only in our modern TV age could one person influence so many people. The result has been unprecedented personality cults. Never, moreover, have there been so many denominations and independent churches. Thus in many areas reality sweeps us along before we can stop to analyze the rights and wrongs. Practice pushes principles aside. There are so many parts to the ecclesiastical puzzle, that no one seems able to put it together.

Just because Christ's church is sailing in new and unknown seas, does not mean that we should plunge onward without chart or compass. We still have our Pilot and had better listen to him! With Calvin we must still hold that all of the worship and works of the Church have been prescribed in the Word. It may be increasingly difficult to apply the Scriptural principles to situations in our modern world. But we

must not give up the basic, Biblical foundations. The Apostle Paul wanted Timothy to know "how men should behave in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (I Timothy 3:15). What was good enough for Timothy, ought to be good enough for us.

### Needed Definition

This means that the church must be the church. Let the church be the church! What does this mean? The word "church" covers many concepts. In the popular way we say: "We have been to church" or "That's an expensive church." The term covers congregations or denominations as well as the universal body of Christ. It may be used loosely to include sects. Calvin had questions about calling the Roman Catholics a church, but decided to do so. We have today little or no problem in using the word loosely to cover all kinds of groups. What then do we mean when we say "Let the church be the church!"

The English word church does not convey an essential element in the Greek word "ekklesia." Originally this word described a convocation or group called together. Efforts have been made to retain this meaning by using the English word "the community" for church. Since chances of effecting such a change are slim, we will have to work with the word "church." Nor is there any vital reason why we cannot do so. Only let us find out from Scripture what we mean by church.

The New Testament most frequently uses the word for church to apply to a local congregation, sometimes as assembled (Acts 5:11, I Cor. 11:18) or as a body (Rom. 16:4, I Cor. 1). Sometimes it is used for a church in a house (Col. 4:15, I Cor. 16:19). At other times Paul uses the term "the saints" in place of the church at a local place (Eph. 1:1). Church is, however, also used for the whole body of believers in the world (I Cor. 10:32). More often it extends to the whole concept of the redeemed by Christ. Thus Christ uses it in Matt. 16:18, and Paul in many passages such as Col. 7:18 and Eph. 5:23 ff. To these might be added the rich meaning of many symbolic names. If only the church could recognize itself as the "body of Christ" or the "temple of the Holy Spirit," what a great revelation that would be. Nor would it hurt to be reminded that we are to be the "pillar and ground of the truth." If only every Sunday the congregation could become aware that we are "God's possession," a "holy priesthood," what a different worship we would enjoy. Undoubtedly we would have greater mission zeal if we could really believe that we are "the light of the world."

The church today is experiencing an identity crisis. The Reformers were also disturbed by this in their day. They were much concerned about the marks of the true church. This concern led the author of the Belgic Confession in article 29 to describe a sharp contrast between the true and the

false church. He sums it all up with the rather astonishing conclusion (at least for our day), "These two churches are easily known from each other. But that was said when things were more black and white and not so much endless gray! Recently several rather simplistic efforts have been made to go back to the church of the Acts — the primitive church.

### The Bible as Norm

Perhaps we have disposed too quickly of living up to the New Testament pattern. One thing is sure. The New Testament pattern is the normative pattern of the church. We really have no other!

One of the greatest tasks of the Reformers was to establish the legitimacy of their churches. Rome disowned them because they were not in the historical succession. Anabaptists accused them of not being literally close enough to the New Testament pattern.

On the one hand this meant that there were lessons for the church in both the Old and New Testaments which were not to be taken literally. Especially the charismatic and communistic structure of Acts was considered a passing phenomenon. Luther was much opposed to the spirituals who tried to introduce radical reforms into Germany. Calvin no less repudiated an ongoing prophecy and considered some of the New Testament offices as definitely limited to the Apostolic age.

On the other hand, every effort was made to describe and govern the church according to the Word. Calvin never tires of stressing that God has fully revealed how He wishes to be worshipped. To arrive at a contemporary application of the will of God called for a sober analysis of the Scriptural givens. This really meant that he saw the principles behind the practices of the New Testament and tried to apply them in new ways to his day.

Small wonder that Reformed Church polity finds itself under attack from both sides. For the charismatics it is not radically Scriptural enough. Some time ago a sermon on Scriptural worship was criticized because it did not include dancing as an element of the services. The attack from those who consider all the rules of Scripture dated and socially conditioned, however, is much more common and insistent. To steer a safe and scriptural course requires some clear principles. Only thus will we be able to let the church be the church.

Perhaps we should close this introductory article on the doctrine of the church with a warning. The temptation to stand aloof from the actual struggle is indeed great. How easy it is to become critical! Therefore this is one doctrine that should be accompanied with prayer — not only a prayer for the study, but especially much prayer for the object of our study — the church! ●

# Job's First Triumph Of Faith

John Blankespoor

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**"At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said, Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised. In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing."**  
Job 1:20-22

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The Lord will demonstrate to the devil and the world, and of course to the entire Christian church, what genuine faith and piety really are. That is the basic meaning of the book of Job. And that is one of the Divine purposes, perhaps the main purpose, of the suffering of many Christians.

For this purpose, the Lord uses one of the most pious people that has ever lived, the man Job. There was none like him in all the earth, in his day, and perhaps in all of history. What a pious man he was! The devil says that Job feared God because it paid for him. Perhaps he also made the silly and superficial observation that Job fears God "because it pays to serve Jesus." But the Lord will answer, that Job fears the Lord with an entirely different motive, that he does so with a deep love for his sovereign Lord, and genuine faith of submission. Of course, all this we see perfectly in Jesus Christ years later.

And so we have unfolded before us the drama of this part of the life of Job. At this time we want to see the second scene and the first amazing triumph of faith of this great man of God.

The history we know. The Lord "allows" the devil to deprive the millionaire Job of all his possessions. And that all in one day. Remember also, incidentally, that all of this history shows us how the Lord is always in complete control. The devil can do no more than what God allows him to do. This is always true, also in our lives. Job becomes poor "over-

night." Satan, however, is allowed to do more. He takes away from Mr. and Mrs. Job all their children in one day, in one great catastrophe. And the parents are informed of this greatest of all calamities.

The first question is, "How will these parents react to this dealing of God's Providence?" Interestingly, we read very little of Job's wife. From subsequent history it appears that she was more of a liability than an asset to him. Normally husband and wife can be a strong support to each other in times like these. But Job apparently does not have the support of his wife. He must walk this way of deep sorrow alone.

Here we again see what kind of spiritual "metal" Job is made of. This is always true when adversities overtake us. Do we rebel, become bitter and insubordinate? How do we react? Wouldn't we expect him to become terribly depressed and bitter?

Job is human. Very much so. He has great sorrow. He is not a stoic. He rent his robe and shaved his head. These were the common expressions of great sorrow in those days. No doubt, he was simply overwhelmed! What parent would not be with such news! But notice, in his sorrow he worshipped God. This is very important, not only for him, but also for all Christians. We don't read of any self-pity in this hour of trial, nor that he reacts with resentment asking, "Why, Lord, why?" That does come later.

In his flood of tears (which we may assume he had) he fell to the ground and in humility worshipped the Lord. And two thoughts come to the foreground. First of all he came into this world without anything, naked, with not even one stitch of clothing. So he can claim nothing for himself. And he will depart without owning anything of his own. So what he did have or will have "in between those stations of life" are pure gifts. Following this thought he realizes that he did "possess" much, but it had all been given. Job had earned nothing of it. The Lord gave. This same sovereign Lord therefore also has the right to

take it away. That's His prerogative. But notice that he uses the name Lord here, or as translated in some versions, Jehovah. As Jehovah, God is the faithful, covenant God. The God of love in His everlasting faithfulness. It is this God who had given to Job so much. And it is He, in the same love and faithfulness who took it all away. He is still the same Jehovah for Job, still faithful in love. And this is real to Job. And so he even thanks the Lord for having given to him what he had received. Then, in summary, we read those "big words" that in all of the overwhelming, traumatic, and saddest experience of his life he in no way accused God of any wrongdoing. What a man of faith and piety!

Here one feels that human, earthly language is so inadequate to give expression to the work of the Spirit and the tremendous realities of faith. The best we can do is stammer and falter in our attempts to express it.

Well do I remember a fellow-Christian, an elder in the church, who once said to me, "Pastor, I can hardly believe there ever was a man like Job. He felt that he had to believe it because we find it in the Word. But to him it all sounded almost too great to have been possible. In our discussion he tried to picture what it must have been like for Job. His children healthy and well in the morning and when evening had come there were ten coffins lined up in the funeral home, as it were. All of his children gone. What a sad funeral that must have been!

It all can be summarized in one expression, *he accepted the ways of the Lord*. The word "accept" is one of the biggest words in the Christian's vocabulary. Here is total submission and surrender. Here is faith that surpasses all understanding of the human mind. Here we see in practice what Paul spoke later, that God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask or think. In it all we see the work of Jesus Christ, who practiced this perfectly.

What we see here is the real *triumph* of faith. The Scriptures frequently speak of the victory of faith and of overcoming. Overcoming all natural reactions of insubordination and the waves of unbelief. Real faith gives us the victory not first of all when we have passed through the heavenly portals, but while we are still *in* the midst of afflictions and difficulties. The first real triumph over adversity is *in* it. There is something very captivating in the sight of a person burdened with many tribulations and yet showing real Christian faith, character and endurance *in the midst* of these particular circumstances. What an impact it makes upon us when we see a burdened pilgrim, even broken in body, showing a splendor of child-like faith and trust, with peace in his soul. Such is the first real victory of the Christian. And that we see in the reaction of this great Old Testament saint, Job. We find the same expression of triumphant faith in the words of Paul when he says, "But thanks be unto God, who always leadeth us to triumph in Christ . . ."

The question is bound to arise in our minds, "How could Job have such faith in this hour of trial?" We ask this kind of question not just because we are wondering how Job did it, but to learn how we can do it in such circumstances. It is extremely important to remember that Job was a very godly man before all this happened. And in the measure that we fear the Lord in the ordinary way of life, in that measure He gives grace when the adversities come. Normally such faith does not just come "overnight." Also notice the confession of Job, that he was poor in himself, having come naked into the world, and that he would leave in the same way. And it is Jehovah, the faithful, merciful God who gave him all that he did have. In New Testament language this means that he confessed his unworthiness and poverty on the one hand, and on the other, recognized that it was only by the mercy of God in Christ that he received what he did have. All credit goes to the mercy of God. This thought cannot be over-emphasized in describing the faith and godliness of Job. He was deeply conscious that all he had was by the free grace of God. This was real to him in his mind and soul! And if Job had this with the "limited" Old Testament revelation, how much more we should see this, in the light of the Christ having come to this earth, with the cross, resurrection, ascension and the full revelation. From all this we may conclude that where there is with us such a real awareness of unworthiness and that all we have is only by the free sovereign grace of God in our wonderful Savior, and this faith is evidenced in godly living as with Job, the Lord will also give our faith to "come through" in the hours of great need.

What triumphs of faith when, by that same grace, we can accept the ways of this sovereign, gracious Lord and be resigned to Him. The greatest blessings and the greatest enjoyments of life with accompanying peace and patience surely are not found in material things, or even in how long we live, but in such victories of faith. This is what James has in mind when he writes, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance."

The devil says that Job fears God because it pays, implying that Job is basically still selfish. Selfishness and pride are characteristic of all the works of the devil and the heart of all of the sinner's life. Satan does not know what true fear of God is. He has no idea of what it means for man to lose himself, to deny himself and to submit to the ways of His heavenly Father in whom he trusts. Neither the devil nor the world have any knowledge of what it means to be conformed to Christ and that our wills become blended into that of our sovereign God of love. And that's what true fear of God finally is. Consequently the devil does not know that when man exercises such faith, or even sincerely tries to do so, the Lord gives a sense of victory and sweet peace, even in tears. That was the first triumph of Job. And what a testimony it was!

# Is the Gospel a Mere “Announcement”?

Jelle Tuininga

Having read Neal Punt's book, *Unconditional Good News*, I have so many question marks and disagreements, it's hard to know where to begin in trying to analyze and critique it. (As an aside, I find it hard to believe that Dr. A. C. De Jong, who wrote a foreword to the book, should be able to say — according to what the Rev. Punt told me in some correspondence I have had with him — that he could find no wrong turn which Punt had made in his book, either exegetically or theologically. It seems we must read with different glasses.) I expressed some of my disagreements in a letter to the “Voices” in a recent *Banner*. In this article I want to focus mainly on one item: the nature of gospel-proclamation. I hope later to call attention to some other points in another article, D.V.

Before beginning, I want to make a general comment about the book. I cannot avoid the impression that Punt is, unintentionally no doubt, trying to fit the message of Scripture into a straight-jacket where it doesn't belong and, consequently, doesn't fit. By and large, I believe, he makes problems where there ought not to be any. Arminians and Calvinists may not always have avoided that temptation in the past, but Punt avoids it even less as far as I can see. His approach is far too “logical” and simplistic. It simply doesn't do justice to the richness and majesty and fullness of the Word. Time and again I felt a sense of frustration in the “easy” way Punt tries to solve difficult problems. It leaves one dissatisfied, to say the least. Later I hope to illustrate this more fully.

I believe Punt makes one of his more major errors in the way he describes the gospel. To him it is first of all simply an *announcement* of good news that

must be told to all men. “Thus the church must *announce* the *good news* to all persons, preaching ‘the necessity of faith, and (doing) it with an urgency which is existential to the core’” (p. 108). The last part of this sentence is a quotation from Berkouwer, and actually is a bit confusing, since Punt disagrees with Berkouwer on this point. Berkouwer takes issue with Barth “for making gospel proclamation an announcement about a given state of affairs.” Berkouwer says the Scriptures “do not offer us a *note of information*; they come with an importunate message demanding an answer of faith.” And thus there is an “insoluble relation” between “the sovereignty of grace and the earnestness of the call to faith” (cf. p. 101 of Punt). Though Berkouwer wishes to uphold undiluted the sovereignty of God in our salvation, and though he denies any meritoriousness to our act of faith, he nevertheless states that “we will in any case have to take as our point of departure the seriousness with which the New Testament takes the human response to the proclamation.” And in this connection Berkouwer does not hesitate to speak of “an essential correlation between faith and salvation.”

Now it is with this concept of faith that Punt takes issue. Punt says Berkouwer has “contaminated” the Reformed concept of faith, since “he inserts an active human element which is unacceptable” (p. 102). And in this connection Punt says that Barth “recognizes *correctly* (ital. mine, J.T.) that the gospel is the *announcement* of an objective state of affairs for the elect informing them of what God has done for them in Christ” (p. 108). The *response* of the person comes *later*: “We have stressed that no human activity is needed in *establishing* a person in the state of grace” (p. 109). The response of “costly obedience”

comes later, in order to enjoy the benefits of grace. According to Punt, the only real decision which man can make is a negative one — the decision to disregard or disbelieve. This is an “instrumental cause” in the damnation of man, causing God’s wrath to come on him. “There is, however, no human act or attitude of faith which is *essential* for the miracle of grace to occur” (p. 106).

I have tried to give a rather full and fair description of Punt’s viewpoint here. What it boils down to is that faith is not essential in establishing us in God’s grace. The gospel is first of all simply an *announcement* of what God has done. And this announcement must be made to *all men*, since all are elect except those who reject the gospel (that in itself is a statement needing some comment sooner or later).

What we have here is essentially a repeat of the “love of God” controversy in 1967. (Punt discusses this in the last chapter of his book, and endorses the view that it is proper to say to all men: God loves you and Christ died for you.) What was said then ought to be said again: The gospel is not a mere *announcement* of some objective state of affairs, but always an *urgent appeal to repent and believe*. Let’s take a look at the biblical record for a moment: When John the Baptist and Jesus came on the scene, they both preached the gospel of *repentance* (Matt. 3:2; 4:17); Jesus told his disciples “that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations (Luke 24:47; cf. Mark 6:12); in the book of *Acts* (the mission-book of the Bible) we find Peter telling the crowds to repent of their sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38); we find this throughout the book: 3:19, 17:30, 26:30. In the book of *Revelation* we find God’s judgments upon an unrepentant world — 9:20, 21, 16:9, 16:11. The gospel never comes as a “neutral” announcement, but as an urgent appeal to come and drink of the waters of life — Isa. 55:1,2; Rev. 22:17. Cf. further Luke 13:3, 5; 15:7. Enough to make the point and make it well.

Punt says the Reformers did not agree with Berkouwer’s view of faith, and then tries to prove that with reference to the creeds. But when we check the creeds, we find again that though they studiously avoid making faith a “good work” that contributes to our salvation, they do nevertheless insist upon the necessity of faith for obtaining salvation. A. 20 of the H.C. says that only those are saved who are ingrafted into Christ by a true faith; Q. 65 repeats the same thing; Q. & A. 60 teach that I am righteous before God only by a true faith in Jesus Christ; The Canons of Dort, Chap. III/IV, Art. 8 states that God “seriously promises rest of soul and eternal life to all who come to Him and believe.” Art. 12 of the same chapter says that though salvation is completely the work of God’s Spirit, that same Spirit, nevertheless, actuates and influences our will. “Wherefore also man himself is rightly said to believe and repent by virtue of that grace received.” So here is that “act of man” and that “human activ-

ity” which Punt appears to negate or reject in our salvation. Therefore Art. 16 rightly states that God does not deal with us as senseless stocks and blocks, nor does he take away our will, but quickens, corrects and bends it. But because such an act of faith does not fit in with Punt’s concept of the gospel, nor with his concept of “universalism,” he has to do away with it. He quotes Daane approvingly at one point, but apparently fails to get the gist of what Daane says, namely that “preaching . . . presents the truth of the gospel . . . as something to be believed, accepted — the preacher must even persuade him to do so — on pain of being damned if he does not.” That’s something quite different than a mere “announcement.”

(to be continued)

### Response by Punt

The crucial question is whether the universalistic texts support the premise of biblical universalism. There are two parallel, 400-year-old patterns of exegesis by equally competent persons; one demonstrating that the universalistic texts relate to actual (not potential) salvation; the other establishing the fact that these texts speak of all persons. For 400 years neither has been able to effectively demonstrate that the other is in basic error. I doubt that the Rev. Jelle Tuininga will be able to do so in his lifetime.

These texts say, “As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (I Cor. 15:22). This obvious reading of these texts devastates Arminian theology. Calvinists can accept these texts just as we find them in every version of the Bible: expressing the genius of Reformed theology; establishing the premise “All persons are elect in Christ except those who the Bible declares (in its broader context) will be lost.”

Berkouwer, for the sake of urgency, teaches a human response *essential* to grace and a gospel that is not an announcement for the elect. If the gospel is essentially something other than an announcement of a given state of affairs for the elect, then the gospel is a good suggestion or good idea, but it is no longer good news.

Every human response “is imperfect and stained with sin” (Heid. Cat. Q. 62), and therefore cannot be *essential* “for the miracle of grace to occur.” For this reason the Reformers insisted that in the precise matter of establishing us in the state of grace, “faith is inactive, entirely negative, empty or completely passive” (p. 102, my book). Berkouwer’s view is a serious departure from the truth that “salvation is of the Lord.”

For the biblical basis for the urgency of proclamation see Chapter IX (my book) or ask the editor to give Punt a little more space on these pages. ●

Cordially, Neal Punt

# When is Church Discipline Faithfully Exercised

Jelle Tuininga

This question cannot be answered in a simplistic manner. It's not a matter that can be determined by statistics *only*, e.g. how many "cases" come to Classis (though everyone knows in today's world that when large congregations seldom or never come to Classis with a discipline case, there is something drastically wrong — either discipline is not being exercised faithfully [most likely] or the Church Order is not being followed). But what I mean is that discipline is first of all a matter of the constant and diligent supervision of the congregation. Where there is good discipline in the sense of "discipling" (making better disciples), a lot of "formal" discipline (discipline in the narrow sense) can be prevented. Schaver, in his *The Polity of the Churches*, Vol. I says:

Faithful oversight of a congregation prevents many evils which otherwise afflict a church through negligence. It is better constantly to watch the whole flock carefully than to have to spend time later in trying to reclaim the wandering. A church as well as a house is kept well-ordered only through constant effort. Elders have their opinion about a housekeeper who allows the dirt and the filth to accumulate until it is a stench to the nostrils. They should also consider how their own congregational house looks to the discerning and exacting eye of their Lord. (p. 201)

Elsewhere he says:

When the Church permits open defiance to the ordinances of Christ to pass without rebuke, and open abuse to remain without reform, it digs its own grave and becomes chargeable to its Lord for negligence toward a most solemn task. (p. 195)

Discipline is of one piece with the total care of the church, including the preaching. Preaching itself, said our fathers, is an exercise of the power of the keys of the kingdom (cf. L.D. 31 of Heidelberg Catechism). Art. 17 of Heading III/IV of the Canons of Dort speaks the same language: As the apostles and teachers did not neglect to keep their people "under the influence of the Word, the sacraments and ecclesiastical discipline," so we ought also to do. "For grace is conferred by means of admonitions; and the more readily we perform our duty, the more clearly this favor of God, working in us, usually manifests itself, and the more directly His work is advanced." Art. 14 of the fifth Heading speaks similarly:

And as it has pleased God, by the preaching of the gospel, to begin this work of grace in us, so

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He preserves, continues and perfects it by the hearing and reading of His Word, by meditation thereon, and by the exhortations, threatenings and promises thereof, and by the use of the sacraments.

From this it becomes clear that preaching itself is disciplinary in nature. Formal discipline is only a "backing up" of the preaching.

In brief, discipline is first of all being faithfully exercised through the preaching and constant care of the congregation.

There is more, far more, to discipline than the final phases of it. It is most lamentable that to the popular mind, and even to the office bearers of the Church, the word "discipline" commonly connotes only the idea of a cutting-off process. That is however not even the fundamental idea of discipline. The basic meaning of discipline is to train. The word discipline and the word disciple not only appear to be similar but they are also similar in meaning. Discipline is the training that is suited to a disciple. It includes instruction, training, admonition, and correction, as well as excommunication (p. 200).

But now to come more to the point and be more direct: What about "formal discipline," — when is it being faithfully exercised? (This was the main focus in the mind of Classis, I am sure.)

In brief I would say: When wayward or delinquent members are *faithfully* visited and admonished, and those admonitions are backed up with the actual steps of formal discipline outlined in the Church Order. Each case, of course, is a case on its own, and the consistory has to decide in each individual case (considering age, response, circumstances, etc.) how much patience must be exercised, and how much time must elapse between each of the steps. But if the steps are *never taken*, admonitions lose their effectiveness, and discipline tends to become a farce. Already in his day (1947) Schaver wrote that "Classes from time to time also approve the expulsion of members, but these by their absence from church services for a long time have already in effect erased themselves, and they have manifested the contempt in which they held the claim of discipline. Even in the CRC, said Schaver, "the part that is played by the doctor as the patient is about to die and the part that is played by the funeral director after death" — that part is still played in the CRC. "In fact," he says, "but comparatively few disciplinary funerals even are held; for, by permitting easy transference of membership to less strict denominations, this unpleasant task of burial is frequently left for other Churches to perform, or it is avoided by accepting the resignation of members under discipline."



If that was true then, I am convinced it is more so today. Elders have told me that they have members on their rolls who have not darkened the inside of a church building for twenty or more years, but who are still members "in good standing." Of this Dr. Klaas Runia, in his booklet *Reformation Today*, says:

"The second area in which discipline has been neglected is... (that) people's names have been *retained on the church roll* even when they clearly show themselves to have no interest in the Gospel. They attend the church services either irregularly or not at all. Often these same people openly hold views which are contrary to the confession of the church and engage in activities which are condemned by the Word of God." (p. 104)

In similar fashion Schaver writes:

The cause of ecclesiastical discipline suffers also because it is not prosecuted with sufficient vigor. The Bible says "because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccl. 8:11). People tend to lose respect for a disciplinary process that drags on almost interminably. In the exercise of discipline the virtue of patience should not be emphasized to the point where it becomes a vice. (p. 194)

This has another bad effect: A consistory cannot start disciplining more recent cases when those of long standing have not been dealt with. The exercise of discipline becomes paralyzed this way. There must be *progress* in our disciplinary procedures, either in the way of repentance and amendment or in the way of further discipline. The procedure must not become a "stalemate." And we ought to keep clearly in mind the *three-fold* purpose of discipline as outlined in Art. 79 of the Church Order. Not only is the welfare of the sinner at stake, but also the honor of God and the welfare of the congregation. I think that too often we tend to lose sight of the latter two. Discipline is very *healthful* for the entire congregation. *Public* announcements from the pulpit make the congregation aware of the seriousness of the matter, and also serve notice that the consistory takes its task seriously. Remember Paul's admonition: "Those who sin are to be rebuked *publicly*, so that the others may take warning" (I Tim. 5:20). We read that this is precisely what took place in the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:11).

I happen to think that the main cause for laxity and neglect in carrying out discipline today in our churches is simply: It's a difficult and unpleasant task, and therefore we would just as soon not tackle it. It's difficult because wayward members are often hard to get hold of; sometimes it means trying again and again. This takes time and effort, and sometimes we don't really want to take the time and effort it requires. It's unpleasant because of the very nature of the work: Who likes to rebuke and admonish? What is more, parents and/or other relatives often don't take kindly to disciplinary meas-

ures, especially if they affect their children. So the easy way out is not to do it, or to do it in a "token" way, without ever really "taking the bull by the horns." That's the *easy* way, but it's also the wrong and unbiblical way. Here too, we must seek to please God rather than men, knowing that He will bless what is done faithfully in His Name. Even the final step of erasure or excommunication must be seen as medicine, drastic surgery for what will, we hope, be a good result.

Whatever else the apostle meant by "deliver... to Satan," (Cf. I Cor. 5:5; I Tim. 1:20, J.T.) I am sure he meant the guilty party had to be expelled from the church. There is an indispensable place in the church for discipline, and this man had to be disciplined, for his own sake as well as the church's. . . .

This is a much-needed lesson in these days of easy tolerance of sin in the church. A gentle, charitable spirit is a mark of true Christlikeness, but a spirit of compromise and capitulation to evil brings no help to man nor glory to God. We betray our brethren if we encourage them to permit sin to reign in their lives.

(Wilbur E. Nelson in *Believe and Behave*)

Remember the Dutch saying: "Zachte heelemeesters maken stinkende wonden." ("Easy doctors make festering wounds.")

It is important that both pastors and elders perform this task, and there must be frequent reminders concerning this. Visits *must* be made, and progress reports given. We must keep tabs on all our members.

Such a discipline is the task of the *whole* eldership. It is definitely not the proper thing for the elders to leave it to the minister. . . . The whole session, that is, the minister *together with the elders*, should accept the responsibility and act as a corporate body.

(Runia, p. 104)

In the same vein Schaver says:

Not only the pastor but also the other religious leaders of a church have the calling to exercise discipline in its broader sense. They should ever be on the alert to train or discipline the members intrusted to their care. The edification of the body of Christ is their solemn obligation. (p. 200)

Again, there is no exact "timetable" by which to measure whether or not discipline is being faithfully exercised. But the general pattern is clear, and the above indications give some guidelines. Each consistory can then judge for itself whether discipline is being carried out faithfully.

There is then according to the Word of God a great need of exercising discipline faithfully. How can anyone question this need? . . . The whole Church should still be filled with fear, for God does not look on indifferently today as the religious husbandmen of his vineyard allow it to become all overgrown with nettles and briars.

(Schaver, p. 199) ●

# The Christian and World Hunger (2)

John E. Franken

## A Possible Biblical Solution:

More troubled than helped after reading "And He Had Compassion On Them," I struggled even more intensely. I did not try to reach a predetermined position; I just wanted to know God's will, no matter where that led me. Why could I not find any positive guidance in the Scriptures in my search for God's will in relation to world hunger? Was my compassion for the starving non-Christians in far away countries merely the result of "guilt feelings" created by today's culture or was it the Holy Spirit prompting me? If it was the latter, why couldn't I find the guiding Biblical principles without violating my understanding of the Scripture texts that other Christians offered to prove that we must feed the starving non-Christians in faraway countries?

Not long ago, God in His Sovereign mercy cooped me up in a hotel room for a couple of days with much time for reading, searching and prayer: answered prayer and a new perspective! Keenly aware of my total lack of formal theological schooling, I hesitated to put my thinking down in an article, yet I knew of many others struggling like me, as they have told me.

This, then, is the insight I believe I received: When the Lord led his people into the land flowing with milk and honey, He, in effect, created what in today's terminology may be called a "model"; one that the world could behold and out of which the Savior would come. He gave His people three kinds of laws, each with a different termination point:

1. The so-called "moral laws" are the laws of His eternal Kingdom. These laws always appear to be preceded or followed by a reference to Himself, such as "for I am the Lord."

2. The "religious laws," which governed all sacrifices and cleansings. All these pointed to the Lord Jesus and His sacrificial death. After Calvary, these laws had been fulfilled. The "picture" of the slain lamb had been replaced by the Lamb of God Himself and because of that, the religious laws had served their purpose and became obsolete.

3. "Civil or social laws" were needed for God's people to live together as a nation. These laws were based on the moral laws as far as their righteousness and justice were concerned; an example is the

instruction as to what to do with a goring ox (Exodus 21:28-36). However, righteous and just as these commandments were, the need for them ceased when the nation of Israel was dissolved.

From the very beginning, the Israelites rebelled against God's law, especially against the moral laws. Rabbis and Scribes dissected these deep laws of God into a series of do's and don'ts. God sent one prophet after another to call His people back to the righteousness and justice He wanted to prevail in His "model." We all know what happened: some were beaten up, some were driven away, some killed. And when God finally sent His Son to expose their hypocrisy and their superficial faith they crucified the very one who had come to restore all things and to fulfill the Law.

What seemed to be utter defeat proved to be ultimate victory! Not only for God's "model," but for the whole world! Finally God's promise to Abraham as recorded in Genesis 12:3 was going to be fulfilled: "and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

When, during His earthly ministry, Jesus sent out His twelve apostles to preach the gospel, to heal the sick and raise the dead, He instructed them as follows: "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:5-6). Less than three years later there was a totally different command: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Why that total change in direction?

That same change in direction once again becomes apparent when comparing the following passages. Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that the Samaritans did not know what they worshipped and that only the Jews knew that which they worshipped, adding "for salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22). Later, Paul described it this way: "they (the Jews) were entrusted with the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2). Yet, after Jesus' ascension, we get a totally different picture; salvation is given regardless of race. Guided by the Holy Spirit, Paul writes: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to every one who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16).

Although God had promised Abraham that in him all nations of the earth were going to be blest, nobody

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had understood the scope of that promise. The Jews had smugly lived their protected lives as God's chosen people, and God's promise to Abraham was all but forgotten. Although God preserved for Himself the seven thousand who had not bowed down before Baal (the Simeon's and Anna's, the Mary's and Joseph's), God's "model" was run by a totally corrupt regime of hypocrites, who had invalidated the commandments of God and exchanged them for the tradition of man (Mark 7:8) and who had taken away the key of knowledge and had hindered those who wanted to enter (Luke 11:52). It was for this reason that Jesus proclaimed: "therefore I say to you that the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you . . ." (Matt. 21:43).

Ah, perhaps this is the key to the mystery! The Kingdom has been taken away from them; or to say it in modern language: the "model" had served its purpose and has been scrapped; the "model" with its geographical boundaries and racial limitation has been disposed of. Geographically, it had been replaced by the whole world ("even to the remotest parts of the earth"); racially, the Jews had been replaced by people from all nations, who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, would show their "circumcision of heart" (Rom. 2:29) by: "doing justice, by loving kindness and by walking humbly with their God" (Micah 6:8). God's "model" was no longer the nation of Israel, nor were God's people any longer the descendants of Abraham according to the flesh. God's "model" now encompasses the whole world and God's people are those who before the foundation of the world were chosen from every nation and tribe and tongue and people.

And what about those moral laws, those eternal laws of the Kingdom? Yes, they too have since become known in all the earth. No longer are they the privileged knowledge of the Israelites; that is why God's people, whether Jew or Gentile, are now addressed as: "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" (I Peter 2:9). That is why Peter could say: ". . . remember the words spoken beforehand by the Holy prophets . . ." (II Peter 3:2); and the apostle John could say: "Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have heard" (I John 2:7). So we see that also as far as the moral laws are concerned, God removed the isolating geographic boundaries which for centuries had limited the knowledge of these laws to the land of Israel. Now these laws have become known to all God's elect.

Now things started falling into place like a jigsaw puzzle. Suddenly, it is not necessary any more to disregard a Bible verse here, or slant a couple of verses there, in order to get a desired explanation. Nor does one have to believe that we can improve upon God's sovereign rule by promoting the transfer of wealth from the rich to the poor; I Sam. 2:7 just cannot be improved upon: "The Lord maketh poor and the Lord maketh rich." Paul's words in Gal. 6:10 also fall into their places: "So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, but especially to those who are of the household of faith." And when

we begin to realize the full impact of this change-over, we bow our heads in reverence to God for His marvelous plan.

And what about feeding the non-Christian stranger in far away lands? When we reread those passages in Lev. 19:9, 10 and 23:22, we notice those awesome words "I am the Lord" that follow the commandments to care for the stranger and we realize we are dealing with a moral law. Then we begin to see the impact of the Lord's removal of the earthly boundaries of the Land of Israel. If God, geographically speaking, replaced Israel with the whole world, are we to maintain or create boundaries? Without geographical boundaries the non-Christian stranger in Bangladesh suddenly becomes the "stranger who resides with us," and we are commanded to help such a person when their need has become known to us. But in doing so, we'd better keep in mind what the Lord told us through the Apostle Paul: "So then, while we have opportunity let us do good to all men, but especially to those of the household of faith." Although the household of faith still has that favored position in God's sight that can be found over and over again in the Scriptures, we cannot shed ourselves from our responsibility for the starving non-Christians in far away lands. Paul's instruction though, requires a very delicate balance in our perspective: if we do not keep our eyes fixed on God's sovereignty, we soon will be influenced by contemporary philosophical ideas. We will begin to emphasize *the first part* of Paul's instruction to "*do good to all men,*" undoubtedly with the intention of presenting the Gospel after feeding the hungry. However, this is not in agreement with God's Word, which places the emphasis on *the second part* of Paul's instruction "*but especially to those of the household of faith.*" Paul's Gal. 6:10 statement appears to be a recap of Biblical truth found in the Old Testament and New Testament alike. As Reformed Christians we must realize that, because of the unity of the Scriptures, it hardly could be any other way. The words "but especially" certainly mean just that: especially help your brother and sister in Christ, regardless of whether they live in Uganda, Cambodia, the U.S.A. or Sierra Leone.

From the booklet "And He Had Compassion On Them" and from other articles, it appears that the CRC has fallen into the trap of striving to *indiscriminately* help the "poor," rather than trying to *especially help those of the household of faith*. One example is our Synod's decision to indiscriminately pour help into Sierra Leone, while apparently ignoring tens of thousands of brothers and sisters in Christ who, living in Uganda, are in dire need of help. This article is presented with the prayer that it may encourage every member of our church to search the Scriptures to see if these things are so; and to re-evaluate the road the CRC currently is following in this respect. If it proves to be true that instead of solely following Biblical principles the CRC has been misled by contemporary philosophical thought, then it must be the prayer of every member of our denomination that God may grant our leaders the courage to change course in midstream and to return to the guidelines He laid down in His Word. ●

# What Kind of Man Was Calvin?

Peter De Jong

July 10 was the birthday of John Calvin. (That's one of the few birthdays I easily remember because it happens to be identical to my own.) Born in 1509, the Reformer had and continues to an extraordinary degree to have to have a role in church history as the great teacher of the reformation. Rev. J. Van Harmelen in the May 12 *Wachter* called attention to the fact that the school which Calvin opened in Geneva attracted 900 students from many countries. In his lectures, as in his commentaries which were the student notes of those lectures, as well as in his *Institutes*, constantly reworked and amplified over 25 years, he simply tried to teach all who would listen how to study and apply the Holy Scriptures.

It is doubtful whether many historical figures have been more widely misunderstood and misrepresented, right down to the present day, than Calvin. He was and is charged with being stubborn, hard, opinionated and arrogant (sometimes portrayed as the ruthless dictator of Geneva). What kind of man was Calvin?

## Warfield's Insight

Benjamin B. Warfield in a remarkable little 5-page essay on "John Calvin the Theologian" (in the Appendix to the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company's volume of Warfield's writings on *Calvin and Augustine*, pp. 481 ff.) corrected some basic misunderstandings about the Reformer. He pointed out that Calvin's work was widely described as being (1) speculative and (2) rationalistic, whereas it actually was the exact opposite. Instead of indulging in speculative guesswork or cold deductive reasoning, "In one word, he was distinctly a Biblical theologian, or, let us say it frankly, by way of eminence, *the Biblical theologian of his age*. Whither the Bible took him, thither he went: where scriptural declarations failed him, there he stopped short."

"It is this which imparts to Calvin's theological teaching the quality which is its prime characteristic and its real offense in the eyes of his critics — I mean its positiveness. There is no mistaking the note of confidence in his teaching, and it is perhaps not surprising that this note of confidence irritates his critics. They resent the air of finality he gives to his declarations, not staying to consider that he

gives them this air of finality because he presents them, not as his teachings, but as the teachings of the Holy Spirit in his inspired Word." "Calvin refused to go beyond 'what is written' — written plainly in the book of nature or in the book of revelation. He insisted that we can know nothing of God, for example, except what He has chosen to make known to us in His works and Word: all beyond this is but empty fancy, which merely 'flutters' in the brain. And it was just because he refused to go one step beyond what is written that he felt so sure of his steps. He could not present the dictates of the Holy Ghost as a series of debatable propositions."<sup>1</sup>

This perceptive observation of Warfield can be very helpful to us who in our day have to take and uncompromisingly hold positions on matters that concern the inerrancy and authority of God's Word. We are, at times called, and can expect to be called stubborn, opinionated and arrogant — "Won't you ever quit?" "Why do you have to stir up trouble?" "You think everybody has to agree with you!" "If some churches want or 'need' women deacons, or elders, or preachers, why can't you just let them free?" What the critics fail to see and do not want to see is that these present controversies are not just matters of personal inclinations, likes and dislikes, "cultural" conditioning, temperament, etc. They concern what God's Word clearly says. That may not be negotiated away in political compromises as though it only involved personal tastes or the rigidity or flexibility of personalities. Calvin's own importance and enormous influence arose, as Warfield aptly observed, not out of his personality, but out of the fact that he so singlemindedly labored to teach only what God said. To the extent that he was permitted to succeed in this effort, if somebody didn't like that, it was unfortunate for him. His quarrel was not with Calvin, it was with God.

But what kind of man was Calvin, the man so engrossed in teaching the Word of God? In the large volumes of his writings, there is little information of a personal or private character. He was usually very reticent about such matters. Only in his introduction to his commentary on the Psalms is there an exception to his general reticence, and it gives us in his own words a fascinating glimpse of the life of Calvin as he saw it.

## Calvin's Comments on His Own Life

In this introductory essay to the psalms he observes that the many controversies into which the Lord had led the course of his life and "in no ordinary degree" helped him both to understand and to apply "to present use whatever instruction could be gathered from these divine compositions." Although he did not want to compare himself with David, he had endured many of the same kind of things that David had at the hands of the "domestic enemies of the Church." He saw "that whatever that most illustrious king and prophet suffered, was exhibited to me by God as an example for imitation. My condition, no doubt, is much inferior to his. . . . But as he was taken from the sheepfold, and elevated to the rank of supreme authority; so God having taken me from my originally obscure and humble condition, has reckoned me worthy of being invested with the honourable office of a preacher and minister of the gospel. When I was as yet a very little boy, my father had destined me for the study of theology. But afterwards, when he considered that the legal profession commonly raised those who followed it to wealth, this prospect induced him suddenly to change his purpose." And so, in obedience to his father, he devoted himself to the study of law. But God had something else in view for him. "And first, since I was too obstinately devoted to the superstitions of Popery to be easily extricated from so profound an abyss of mire, God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame, which was more hardened in such matters than might have been expected at my early period of life."

"I was quite surprised to find that before a year had elapsed, all who had any desire after purer doctrine were continually coming to me to learn, although I myself was as yet but a mere novice. . . . Being of a disposition somewhat unpolished and bashful, which led me always to love the shade and retirement . . . to live in seclusion without being known, God so led me about through different turnings and changes, that he never permitted me to rest in any place, until, in spite of my natural disposition, he brought me forth to public notice." He went on to relate that when he fled from France in search of quiet "in some obscure corner," "many faithful and holy persons were burnt alive in France" and in order to excuse this atrocity, reports were being circulated that the persecuted were only "Anabaptists and seditious persons, who, by their perverse ravings and false opinions, were overthrowing not only religion but also all civil order." A sense of the urgent need that the Reformed be vindicated against the outrageous charge that they were only anarchistic guerillas drove Calvin to publish his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. At first it was "only a small . . . summary of the principal truths of the Christian religion." So far was he from seeking fame as its writer, that he published it anonymously.

Still seeking privacy, Calvin recounts how he was en route to Strassburg, when he was compelled by the war situation to detour and spend a night in

Geneva. His presence there was reported to Farel, the Genevan Reformer, who sought him out. Calvin told how "Farel, who burned with an extraordinary zeal to advance the gospel, immediately strained every nerve to detain me. And after having learned that my heart was set upon devoting myself to private studies, for which I wished to keep myself free from other pursuits, and finding that he gained nothing by entreaties, he proceeded to utter an imprecation that God would curse my retirement, and the tranquillity of the studies which I sought, if I should withdraw and refuse to give assistance, when the necessity was so urgent." "Stricken with terror" by this imprecation, Calvin stayed. He, as he said, felt it "to be as if God had from heaven laid his mighty hand upon me to arrest me." After some four months in the tumultuous city, "being, as I acknowledge, naturally of a timid, soft, and pusillanimous disposition, I was compelled to encounter these violent tempests as part of my early training; and although I did not sink under them, yet I was not sustained by such greatness of mind, as not to rejoice more than it became me, when, in consequence of certain commotions, I was banished from Geneva."

He describes how, relieved from the unwelcome burdens of Geneva, he again sought rest in Strassburg, resolving "to live in a private station, free from the burden and cares of any public charge," only to experience that "that most excellent servant of Christ, Martin Bucer, employing a similar kind of remonstrance and protestation as that to which Farel had recourse before, drew me back to a new station. Alarmed by the example of Jonas which he set before me, I still continued in the work of teaching. And although I always continued . . . studiously avoiding celebrity; yet I was carried, I know not how, as it were by force to the Imperial assemblies, where, willing or unwilling, I was under the necessity of appearing before the eyes of many."

He tells how some time later, again contrary to his "desire and inclination," he had to return to Geneva. "The welfare of this church, it is true, lay so near my heart, that for its sake I would not have hesitated to lay down my life; but my timidity nevertheless suggested to me many reasons for excusing myself from again willingly taking upon my shoulders so heavy a burden."

Loving quiet privacy, Calvin describes how he was thrown into one conflict after another. Against the libertines, he said, "I was under the necessity of fighting without ceasing to defend and maintain the discipline of the Church." "Because I affirm and maintain that the world is managed and governed by the secret providence of God, a multitude of presumptuous men rise up against me, and allege that I represent God as the author of sin. This is so foolish a calumny, that it would of itself quickly come to nothing, did it not meet with persons who have tickled ears, and who take pleasure in feeding upon such discourse." "Others endeavour to overthrow God's eternal purpose of predestination, by which he distinguishes between the reprobate and the elect; others take upon them to defend free will. . . . If they were open and avowed enemies, who brought these

troubles upon me, the thing might in some way be borne. But when those who shroud themselves under the name of brethren, . . . those, in short, who loudly boast of being preachers of the gospel, should wage such nefarious war against me, how detestable is it?" He deplores the way in which those who opposed his teaching about the Lord's Supper attacked him more vehemently than they did the enemies of the church even though they served a common cause with him. He concluded this unusual biographical reflection with the terse observation, "This knowledge and experience have been of much service in enabling me to understand the Psalms, so that in my meditations upon them, I did not wander, as it were, in an unknown region."

Could anything show more clearly than this personal account of Calvin's experience how far the fiction of Calvin, the arrogant, power-hungry dictator of Geneva is from the facts of history? Many men, captives to the materialistic and humanistic prejudices of our time which rule out any recognition of either God's providential government or the work of His Spirit and Word, misinterpret the history of the Christian church in much the same way that they do the Scriptures, and therefore attribute to personal oddities or genius what is really not the work of the men at all but the work of God with ordinary people. Recall the Apostle Paul's observations about that fact in 1 Cor. 1:26-3:7, "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things that are strong." "Neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth."

Although Calvin had remarkable gifts and used them with unusual diligence, he, like the Apostle,

stressed the fact that what was being accomplished was not his work but the Lord's.

A closer acquaintance with Calvin's experience as well as with his writings may encourage many a burdened Christian in our time who is engaged in one way or another in the same struggle as he was for the gospel and for the church against what seem overwhelming and discouraging odds. The story of God's work is not the story of extraordinary human genius, but of ordinary people, sometimes even unusually timid ones, who by God's gracious calling "from weakness were made strong" and so "by faith conquered kingdoms" (Heb. 11: 33, 34).<sup>2</sup> That is the way in which the Lord worked with men in the past — and still does. ●

*Notes:*

<sup>1</sup> It is a disturbing fact, increasingly evident, that many who today call themselves Calvinists regard and treat their beliefs as a philosophical system, derived from tradition, and accordingly susceptible to alteration to adjust to changing times. They do not see those beliefs as simply the teachings of God's Word, as Calvin did. They did not arrive at these beliefs by study of the Bible and accordingly, do not seriously try to ground them in the Bible either. Although they may for the sake of argument occasionally try to find some texts to support their views, when pressed they may retort, "You can prove anything from the Bible," or "The Bible doesn't teach us everything." Their way of dealing with these matters shows little acquaintance and less sympathy with Calvin's Biblical approach to them, and they would likely have dismissed Calvin as a "Biblicist" or "Fundamentalist." This failure to ground their faith in God's Word appears to be basic and perhaps fatal weakness of many traditionally "Calvinist" churches in our time.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther's temperament was substantially different from Calvin's, but it is significant that A. Skevington Wood in his biography of Luther, *Captive to the Word*, shows that Luther, too, was no "self-confident enthusiast," but may be described as "a somewhat reluctant reformer." "It was . . . the Bible that made him a reformer." (p. 61).



**GEORGE WHITEFIELD: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE GREAT EVANGELIST OF THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY REVIVAL, Vol. 2, by Arnold A. Dallimore.** Westchester, Illinois: Cornerstone Books, 1979; first edition, 1980. 602 pages. \$22.50. Reviewed by Rev. Jerome M. Julien, minister of the First Christian Reformed Church of Pella Iowa.

A wait of nearly ten years for Dallimore's second volume on Whitefield has been more than amply rewarded. The fin-

ished product is a superb, completed, definitive biography. Historical accuracy and careful scholarship mark this work. Now, I know, to say this about a book is to make some feel that it is not for them. To dispel these fears, let me say that it is not a dry, technical, plodding work. While Dallimore has not, of course, written in the style of fiction, he has given a lively, interesting work which should warm the hearts of all who want to know how God has worked in His Church. It is lively and interesting but not froth.

George Whitefield, the fountain-head of Calvinistic Methodism, is a personage we cannot pass by if we are to learn of the development of the Church in the eighteenth century. His spiritual influence was great since he rubbed shoulders with the great and the relatively unknown in both Great Britain and America. He was a man singularly blessed of God and mightily used of Him. Nevertheless, he was beset by trials — persecution, misunderstanding, financial, physical. Dallimore deals with all of these carefully and, I do believe, not one-sidedly. His greatest grief was his difficulty with John and Charles Wesley. This Dallimore deals with by giving some new insights from historical sources. It is a mystery to me, however, why later in life

he seemed to compromise not on his beliefs in sovereign grace but on cooperation with the Wesleys with whom he still had major theological differences.

In his last chapter, Dallimore does a fine job of analyzing the importance of this great evangelist.

While the cost of this set is quite high we will do well to read this excellent work.

**WHAT SHOULD WE THINK OF "THE CARNAL CHRISTIAN?"** by Ernest C. Reisinger. Edinburg, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978. 24 pp. \$ .75 paper. Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien, minister of the First Christian Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa.

In this short pamphlet, the Rev. Reisinger ably shows the error of believing that there are three kinds of people: natural man (the non-Christian), carnal man (the Christian who believes on Jesus as Savior but trusts Him not as Lord) and the spiritual man. He shows that while this is taught in the notes of the *Scofield Reference Bible*, it is not taught in Scripture. In fact, it is contrary to the whole teaching of God's Word. Instead, there are only two kinds of men: Christian and non-Christian. He pleads for a return to the Biblical teaching of conversion.

This little work will not tax your mind but it will increase your Biblical knowledge and foster a new humility and joy in the Lord.

**HOW TO ESTABLISH A JAIL AND PRISON MINISTRY: A BASIC TRAINING GUIDE** by Duane Pederson. Foreword by Corrie Ten Boom. Published by Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, Tennessee, 1979. 126 pages, \$3.95. Reviewed by John Lamsma, Chaplain, Federal Correctional Institution, Milan, Michigan.

The last few years many individual Christians and churches have become interested in some form of ministry to prison or jail inmates but have often become frustrated because they did not know where to begin. Pederson's book has been written specifically to help overcome some of the frustrations in starting such a ministry. This book is short, but very readable and deals with some of the unique aspects in beginning a jail or prison ministry.

"The need for such ministry is tremendous: in 1979 the total inmates in state and federal prisons alone reached 314,083, up from 275,000 men and women in 1977. This number is greater than all the members of the Christian Reformed Church in the U.S. and Canada!" Add to that those incarcerated in local jails and their dependents and we are talking about three million men, women and children who are affected each year by imprisonment. The Scriptural mandate to minister to these men and women cannot be questioned (Matt. 25:39, 40; Heb. 13:3). Christ's Great Commission certainly is not meant to exclude prison inmates and their families.

The Christian volunteer is essential to any form of ministry to the incarcerated. If a prison does have one or more staff chaplains the volunteer will help minister to a larger number of inmates than would be possible by the chaplains alone. If a prison or jail has no staff chaplain the Christian volunteer may be the only one communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ to the inmates. The need for Christian volunteers is, of course, greatest in those institutions with no staff chaplains. This includes those institutions where there are only volunteer clergy. Volunteer clergy, no matter how many at a given institution, simply are no substitutes for well-trained staff chaplains (This, in my opinion, cannot be emphasized strongly enough).

Pederson repeatedly encourages the volunteers to become familiar with the rules and regulations governing the particular institution in which they desire to minister, for the rules and procedures vary with each institution and level of security. That is the reason why working through the chaplain or the coordinator of religious services, if there is no chaplain, is so essential.

According to Pederson a volunteer must have three key qualities in order to be effective in prison or jail ministry: proper motivation, commitment and preparation. Only mature Christians are able to deal effectively with and give of themselves to the inmates. Inmates have been disappointed so often in their lives and Christian volunteers often promise much more than they are able to deliver, hoping that in this man-

ner the inmates will come to accept the claims of the gospel. To be prepared goes without saying, yet many volunteers feel that enthusiasm and a love for the Lord is enough. It is not.

The author helps the congregation assess its resources and search out the needs of the institution where it plans to minister. The process for the church is as follows: investigate, evaluate, pray, prepare and act. At the end of each chapter a number of questions for review and discussion are found covering the material of that chapter.

This book is a must for those who are seriously considering a ministry to those who are incarcerated. Pederson, I think, has accomplished what he set out to do: to develop a basic training guide. Much more can be learned and, perhaps, should be learned about jail and prison dynamics than is found in this book. A good bibliography is included.

**WOMEN AND THE WORD OF GOD** by Susan T. Foh. Published by Presbyterian and Reformed, c. 1979, 261 pp., paper, \$6.95. Reviewed by Paul Ingeneri.

This extensive and well-researched treatment of a burning issue in our denomination should be well received by those on both sides of the issue. Ms. Foh goes right to the heart of the debate . . . the authority of Scripture and how that authority affects our methods of interpreting the Bible. She sees two main problems with the Biblical feminists' concept of Scripture: (1) Once the possibility of inconsistency or cultural conditioning is admitted, how does one determine what parts or doctrines of Scripture are of abiding authority and value? What parts of Scripture constitute the analogy of faith which is to be the standard? (2) The Biblical feminists do not account for the interpreter's human limitations. According to their understanding of the Bible, human reason becomes the judge of what is really God's word and what is not. But human reason is finite and affected by sin. The appearance of contradiction may result from a deficiency in our understanding. (p. 7) Unless Biblical feminists or "progressives" are willing to answer these "charges" with clarity, the discussion of the issue will not progress. On the other side, the reasons why headship is not seen as cultural while slavery and other institutions are, *has been* clearly answered by "conservatives" and by the book under review.

Ms. Foh not only clearly reveals the presuppositions of Scanzoni, Hardesty, Mollenkott, Jewett et al (and often from their own books) but on the positive side supplies us with a clear statement of what headship does imply in marriage and the church and what women can be and are doing ecclesiastically. And it is in this last section, "what women can do in the Church," that is most thought provoking. Because of the differences between New Testament worship and our services today and because of the nuances that develop depending on where one sees the Biblical emphasis (ordination, headship, official teaching and preaching, office structure . . .?), airtight conclusions beyond forbidding elder-ship and the pastorate are difficult to arrive at. But here again Ms. Foh ventures her conclusions and Biblical rationale. All

in all the book fulfills admirably its subtitle, "a response to Biblical feminism," and it would be an excellent work to give to active feminists in the congregation, after you have read it yourself of course.

**GOD'S ETERNAL GOOD PLEASURE** by Herman Hoeksema. 371 pages. Reformed Free Publishing Association. Distributed by Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1979. \$9.95. Reviewed by John Vander Ploeg.

Whether agreeing or disagreeing with him, whoever heard the late Rev. Herman Hoeksema preach could not gainsay that he was endowed with superior ability. I can well recall seeing him in the pulpit in his heyday, an open Bible in his hand, with his large audience captivated by his every word. The man had charisma, and, human nature being what it is, it is not difficult to understand that he had such a large following when the break came with the Christian Reformed Church in 1924.

Hoeksema's sermon material, as is evident from the sermons in the book under review, was substantive, leaving no room for anyone to doubt that in his work he was an able and independent thinker. His sermons are such a far cry from today's pap and piffle being dished out to some long-suffering congregations doomed to a severe case of spiritual malnutrition. There is not a hint in Hoeksema's messages of any catering to "itching ears," the blight of so much sermonizing in our day.

Based on chapters 9, 10, and 11 of Romans, these sermons (part of a series on the entire epistle) were preached to "overflow audiences" at the First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan forty years ago. That sermons composed of such sturdy stuff could draw such a large attendance week after week is a tribute to the man who preached them as well as to the worshipers of that bygone day.

The repeated emphasis in these sermons by Hoeksema is God's absolute sovereignty in saving His people according to His "eternal good pleasure." This is indeed a welcome sound because it is the lost chord in so much of today's misguided theological orchestration and pulpit utterances. Too often, sermons do not rise above the horizontal level whereas Hoeksema is constantly teaching and preaching with a vertical reference. It is this emphasis that makes his message invigorating, challenging, and awe-inspiring.

Be all this as it may however, one soon discovers that Hoeksema unfortunately stares so much at the brilliance of God's absolute sovereignty that he becomes blind to other realities close at hand. To him there is no sincere offer of salvation to all who hear the gospel. As to those of us who do believe this he states:

"On the one hand, they claim to be Reformed and to believe the doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God; on the other hand, they teach that God earnestly seeks the salvation of all men and graciously offers them His salvation in the preaching of the gospel . . . this double-track theology is no mystery, but plain evasion and nonsense . . ." (p. 68).

"The well-known 'First Point' adopted by the Christian Reformed Churches in 1924" according to Hoeksema, "teaches

that through the preaching God is gracious to all who hear the gospel. And if then you still want to keep up the pretention of being Reformed, and maintain that God efficaciously calls unto salvation whomever he will, you are confronted with an insoluble problem. For how could God in grace direct His Word to any sinner without causing it to be efficacious unto repentance and faith?" (p. 201). Our reply is, of course, that the CRC position is less concerned about being *logical* in resolving an "insoluble problem" than it is about being *Scriptural* in accepting what we are convinced the Bible teaches.

Hoeksema's logic leaves no room for any grace whatsoever for the wicked. Thus we find him saying toward the close of his final sermon in this volume:

"He [God] always reaches His purpose, in time and in eternity. And the only result for the wicked, who stands awry in the midst of the divine scheme of things, is that all things work against him, work to his eternal destruction, crush him into everlasting desolation and outer darkness" (p. 370). It is not difficult to understand, highly gifted though he was, that there were those who were constrained to take issue with some of the conclusions to which Hoeksema clung so tenaciously to the end.

To read Herman Hoeksema's theology presents an interesting challenge; to read it profitably one must do so not only with appreciation but also with the necessary discernment and discrimination.

**MARRIAGE, DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE IN THE BIBLE** by Jay E. Adams. Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980. 99 pages. \$3.50. Reviewed by Rev. John R. Jackson, Pastor, Walker Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Mich.

"Because the issues of divorce and remarriage have been avoided in the recent past, there is very little substantive material available. . . . (F)undamentally, the church leadership has floundered and its members are floundering with them." (from the introduction) with this explanation, Dr. Jay E. Adams presents us with a short but very important book on a vital topic. It is to be expected that a study such as this will be somewhat controversial; there is little that may be said on this subject that will receive unanimous endorsement even within the Reformed community. But Adams certainly deserves a hearing in the light of his expressed desire" . . . to honor Christ by being as Scriptural as I can be."

Dr. Adams has done a remarkable job of presenting complex exegetical arguments in a clear and concise manner, so that the average layman will be able to follow the discussion with little difficulty. At the

same time, he covers the full range of questions that the church must deal with relative to this subject.

The most effective way of summarizing the contents is to refer to the principles listed near the end of the book:

**A. Marriage:**

1. is a divinely-ordained institution,
2. is the first and most fundamental institution,
3. is covenantal and binding,
4. is a covenant of companionship,
5. is the place for true intimacy,
6. is to conform to the model of Christ and His church.

**B. Divorce:**

1. always stems from sin,
2. is not necessarily sinful,
3. always breaks a marriage,
4. is never necessary among believers,
5. is legitimate on the grounds of sexual sin,
6. is legitimate when an unbeliever wishes to divorce a believer,
7. is forgivable when sinful.

**C. Remarriage:**

1. in general, is desirable,
2. is possible for a divorced person,
3. is possible for a sinfully-divorced person through forgiveness,
4. is possible only when all biblical obligations have been met,
5. is possible only when parties are prepared for marriage."

(pp. 97-98) Even if you find yourself in disagreement with Dr. Adams at some point, you will profit from the exercise in Biblical reflection provided by this study.

**IF**

If this were my last day on earth  
Would I do the things I'd  
planned?

Would I go about my busy way  
Or stop to lend a hand?

If this were my last day on earth  
Would my gifts for God  
increase?

Would I learn the joy of giving  
Just before my breath would  
cease?

If this were my last day on earth  
Would I speak out for the  
Lord?

Would my tongue no longer  
gossip  
But proclaim His blessed  
Word?

If this were my last day on earth  
Could I suddenly forgive?  
Would my bitterness of heart be  
gone  
With only hours to live?

O, may I live each day on earth  
In a pure, unselfish way;  
Lest I would hang my head in  
shame

If God should call today.

Annetta Jansen  
Dorr, Michigan

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