

THE OUTLOOK

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

MAY 1981



**REFORMED PEOPLE IN HUNGARY
INFLATION A MORAL PROBLEM
WHAT WILL SYNOD SAY TO GOD?**

REFORMED PEOPLE IN HUNGARY

Julius Vigh

A Family Visit

"Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners" (Hebrews 13:3, NIV). "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them, and them that suffer adversity" (Hebrews 13:3, KJV). A few months ago these words of the Scripture took on new meaning for me. No, I did not visit a high security federal prison, nor did I become involved in a local prison-visiting ministry. Through the generosity of some Christian Reformed friends, my wife and I spent three weeks in Hungary. After the editor of this publication saw my slide presentation, he asked me to write about conditions in that land, to help us remember. Located in Eastern Europe, Hungary is a nation of some 10 million in bonds, it is a country imprisoned, isolated from the West by rows of barbed wires, minefields, guns and a state religion of Communism.

We visited relatives, friends, ministers, we worshipped with Reformed and Lutheran Christians and we realized that we had not remembered "them that are in bonds . . . and them that suffer adversity." Although both of us are natives of Hungary, our living in comfort, enjoying freedom, worshipping freely and exercising our Christian faith in the U.S.A. has dulled our sensitivity to the adversity of our Reformed and other Christian brothers and sisters. If this can happen to one who has his roots there, then how can others remember? To remember, we have to be informed. I hope that these lines will help the reader to catch at least a glimpse of the adversity of Reformed Christians in Hungary. (Of course thousands of other Christians in many parts of the world suffer hardships and even persecution — many much more severe than those in Hungary — and we need to remember them as well. Think of those in China, Russia, Cuba, Cambodia, Viet Nam, etc.)

History

Hungary was one of the first countries in Europe where the Reformation became a vital force beginning in the 1540's and 50's. Hungarian reformers were in close contact with Luther, Melancton and Calvin. The Reformed Church in Hungary during the next four hundred years was strong and vibrant. (It also had close ties with the Reformed Church in the Netherlands. Around 1670 an Admiral M. Ruyter was instrumental in freeing two dozen galley-slaves who were Hungarian pastors. Through the

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years ministerial students were exchanged between Hungary and the Netherlands. Many Hungarian children spent summers in the Netherlands 50-60 years ago. Some of the readers might remember this.)

A Beleaguered Church

However, today the Reformed Church in Hungary is in difficulties. Living under a communist government for thirty-five years has taken its toll. (At least it appears so from our observations, brief as they may be.) For the first twenty-five years under communism there was a shortage of ministers, one seminary was closed, confiscated, and repression was the order of the day. In the last ten years conditions improved somewhat, but with a change in government policies anything can happen. And according to communist doctrine (which always controls the policies) the church is not only unnecessary, but is considered an opposing entity to socialist-communism. Any concession which the church enjoys, such as that in Poland, is only temporary, and is allowed only if in the long run it helps to reach the goals of communism. The people in Hungary know this and understand its implications — as well as the workers and Catholics do in Poland. Contrary to whatever propaganda we might hear, communist Paradise is *not* a paradise. It is a destructive, de-humanizing dictatorship/tyranny by the ruthless, faithful few — and they are the only ones who benefit from it.

Church Attendance

On the three Sundays we were in the country we worshipped with three small town congregations. In smaller towns or cities there is only one Reformed Church, regardless of the number of Reformed people. Each of the buildings had a seating capacity of about 200-250. The membership of these congregations is about 500, at least that many belonged to the parish. Yet, on a Sunday morning there were only about 45 worshippers. Of these only 7-10 were men, the rest women, and of the total only about 5-10 were under 60 years old. Only once did we see three children — one teenager and two younger ones. None of the congregations had Sunday School. One Sunday we observed an older lady who was teaching two children for about half an hour before the service started. They were sitting close to the front — not in a classroom. She told a Bible story, quizzed the two youngsters about last week's lesson, drilled them in the Apostles' Creed and Lord's Prayer and tried to sing a couple of songs with them. There

were no teacher manuals, student workbooks, or the latest in audio-visual aids such as we are blessed with. The time of our visit was in the late fall and the buildings were cold. Nearly everyone was wrapped in an overcoat, our fingers and feet were cold. They cannot afford to heat the buildings, and some have no heating facilities at all. (Another small Reformed congregation installed heat by receiving help from two or three congregations in the Netherlands.) Keep in mind that we are looking at typical Sunday activities.

Few Bibles

The sermons we heard were sound, Biblical, evangelical. The call to repentance and faith, and the promise of eternal life is no threat to the system, especially if the majority of the hearers are already old and established Christians. There were no song-books in the pews, the worshippers have to take along their own if they have one. Bibles are scarce, again, none in the pews. Bibles can be bought from the local pastors and the *one* religious bookstore in Budapest (population around 1 million). But the pastors do not have too many copies on hand, they cannot afford to buy a box-ful and there are not that many copies available. One copy of the modern translation costs 180 Forint, for which an average worker needs to work a full day of nine hours. (Compare that to a Bible we can buy in a supermarket for \$8-9 or less.) Consequently not many Bibles are being sold. (After we found out the situation about the Bibles we tried to buy four from a rather large Reformed Church office. But in spite of the talk about Bibles being freely available, they had only two copies. So, some of our relatives still don't have Bibles.)

At the evening services only one half or less of the morning attendants were present.

Little Christian Education

There are no adult study groups or classes at the churches. Whatever Bible study there is, takes place in homes, outside of the official program of the churches, led by volunteer lay leaders. Once a year there is a pre-confession class, but very few youngsters attend. (A mother told us how she sent her daughter to one of these classes, how the girl made profession of faith — but the mother was unable to be there fearing political reprisals and problems at her job.) At the same time in Budapest there are Reformed churches where weekly, hundreds of young people attend rallies and Bible studies, but always away from their own neighborhoods.

Intimidation

It is interesting — sad is a better word — how the people are actually afraid to attend church services. Several people described the situation this way. If someone is known to be a regular church-goer, he or she will be harassed on the job (not for going to church but for supposedly other reasons), chances are good that there will be no promotions, the children will not be able to attend college, and even in

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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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high school they will face discrimination. At union or party meetings they will be embarrassed publicly as they will have to explain why they go to church — and you can be sure they are not asking for a testimony! One man, a member of the Reformed Church for sixty years actually travels across town six miles on streetcars, though he belongs to a church three blocks from home. As a high-school teacher the principal would call him on the carpet at faculty meetings and his fairly good pension in 2-5 years would be in jeopardy, if the principal and others would know that he worships regularly. Others related similar stories, only the details are different.

Religious "Freedom"?

Freedom of religion? Officially, yes. It is in the constitution. However, a person cannot really exercise it, unless he is old, lame, a moron, or does not care how he will support his family. Since every business, store and factory is state-owned and controlled, and hiring and firing is directed by the government bureaucracy and overshadowed by the party, working, earning a living is used as a powerful lever. Coupled with this is the pressure of the economic conditions which force a family to devote roughly eighty percent of their time and energy just to provide the daily necessities (working, daily shopping, washing by hand, etc.) Considering all of this we can begin to understand the plight of these people.

An Official View

However, when I talked to a minister and a bishop (the Reformed Church there has a modified episcopal church government) they claimed there were no such problems, no one is threatened, no one faces losing his job or any such things anymore than in America where individuals might discriminate against a Christian. When asked about the obvious low attendance and the age of the worshippers their answer was that all of that is due to the apathy of the people, their chasing after things, and their laziness. Now, I had to conclude that these men were naive, or spokesmen for the system, or afraid to level with me. When the government pays the salary of the minister, maintains the parsonage and decides who can be promoted to bishop, the reader can draw his own conclusions. Their answer is partly true. There is apathy as much as in our country. The people do chase after things, even more than in the U.S.A. The people are tired out after working 5½-6 days a week. But on all scores the communist political system, the socialist economy and atheist philosophy/religion are to be blamed to a large extent.

Economic and Social Pressures

We could talk about the poor economic conditions in which an average worker has to work forty-five hours to buy a pair of leather shoes, more than an hour to buy a dozen of eggs and has to wait four to five years for a car even if he can afford it. We could mention the housing shortage, so that a young couple waits five to ten years for a two-room apartment.

We could talk about the ongoing barrage of propaganda, the presence of the hated Russian occupation troops, the government system with an almost paranoiac fear of anyone trying to leave the country, the corruption, cheating, under-the-table dealings at almost every level of living and working, the subtle and not-so-subtle pressures to conform and the hypocritical adherence of thousands to the party line. All of this would help us to better understand the conditions of Hungary, especially the struggle of the church, and help us remember our Christian brothers and sisters.

The Lord's Victory

Despite communist doctrine which states that the class-struggle and the victory of communist-socialism is inevitable, it can be observed in many parts of the world that after more than sixty years communism failed. It can conquer — but it cannot prosper. The economy is heavily dependent on the infusion of "capitalist," western currency and capital. Wars between communist countries have not ceased as communist doctrine and propaganda maintains that they would. The workers have not been translated to paradise — witness Poland. And the Church of Jesus Christ has not been erased. Though Christians are pressed on every side, though the education for the past thirty-five years in Hungary (three generations educated from kindergarten to grade twelve) has been unashamedly communist and anti-Christian, though much of the church property has been confiscated ("bought" and "reimbursed for" — in the language of double-talk), though preaching of the gospel has been curtailed and though the church has been infiltrated — yet, the church still exists! Christians are meeting informally, books and literature are being passed along, informal Bible studies are held and many Christians find ways to outsmart the system. That system for the present is considered quite lenient. But inherent in it is the ability to crack down ruthlessly at any time — depending on who is at the top — as it did in the 1950's.

Yes, these Christians in Hungary and in many other places need us who live in freedom. We cannot forget, we must not forget them. We need to be better informed. We need to sift through the propaganda that paints rosy pictures of the church in communist captivity, and we need to withhold judgment on the church's attempt to co-exist with the communist system. We need to pray for these Christians and we need to encourage them as conditions permit. We need to support them as much as we can. We need to "remember them that suffer adversity." But above all, we need to remember Him who purchased the church with His blood and who now owns the church, who promised never to forsake His own, and who is mightier than any political, economic or religious system. He has already conquered! He is the victor even over the decaying and dying system of communism and His church will be more than conquerors with Him. Our brothers and sisters in Hungary and other communist countries are looking for a visible demonstration of that with outstretched necks. ●

THE "GREAT DEBATE" ON EDUCATION

J. J. Harding

The *Newsletter* of the Christian Parent-Teacher League represents and promotes the comparatively new Christian school movement in Great Britain. Its editor is Mr. David Silver-sides, 71 Beechwood Rd., EAGLESCLIFFE, Stockton TS16 0AS. We reprint this article from the January, 1978, issue, written by Rev. J. J. Harding. Although addressing the British situation, its clear analysis of the present need for Christian education applies equally well to our own country. Our own usually larger and older Christian schools, often taken for granted, need to recapture the vision of the God-ordained purpose for which they were established.

Education in Britain, like many other things, is entrusted to the hands of a huge, clumsy, state-owned machine. It is customary to speak of "state-controlled" education; but perhaps "state-financed" or "state-promoted" would be more apt. Schools have been absorbed into a huge near monopoly, administered by hordes of bureaucrats, officials, and salaried "experts." It is all a huge unmanageable affair, self-perpetuating, and as demanding to its harassed patrons as an insatiable cuckoo-chick. It is an unwieldy juggernaut trundling downhill without brakes: and after all expectations, it has not begun to produce the wondrous results predicted for it as the instrument of social and economic revival.

A state-ordinated education system, given "the tools to do the job," would, we were told, be the most worthwhile national investment. As everyone supporting the idealistic great leap forward so movingly said, and still do say, the young, after all, are our most valuable asset. How could money, time and human effort be better spent than on nurturing the next generation, and so helping to leave behind the ills of the past? So the argument has gone for longer than we care to remember; but where is the wonderfully-educated generation marching in to rejuvenate industry, commerce and the whole of the national life? Is it really true, for instance, that employers

are preferring old-age pensioners to work for them as more reliable than the new breed of super educated Britons?

After countless millions of pounds poured irrecoverably into the system, after the recent experiment — should one not say "gamble?" — of the comprehensive upheaval, alarm at the apparently uncontrollable decline of British education has even touched those least willing to acknowledge that something is amiss: our rulers. A re-examination of our aims and methods has been called for, and the Great Debate initiated. To some, the Great Debate comes like discussion to perfect one's battle plan as the news of defeat is coming in. But if refraining calling failure by its proper name is a fault of politicians, it seems not less so in educational pundits. No doubt but they are the people, and wisdom shall die with them. Rash innovation and tinkering has been more and more frequent. Proved practice has been scorned and jettisoned in favour of drastic experimental methods, causing disruption and the lack of continuity and stability that an accepted standard and procedure bring. Confusion is rife; and many can say "we told you so."

Is it too pessimistic to predict that the Great Debate will be as much a confused failure as the recent era of educational "advance" itself? Portions that one reads seem to show that it is unlikely that a remedy can be generally agreed when strident voices are calling for different objectives in education. The old pressure-groups with their old slogans, myths and shibboleths continue to agitate, without, apparently seriously examining what has happened. One sympathizes with the call by representatives of industry for simple competence in writing and counting; and perhaps, by a concerted effort, this might be somewhat regained. But an educational system needs a clean and powerful view of life to guide it. The clear and powerful view of life that our civilization gives us, however, is that life is meaningless, nothing is really good or bad, and that nobody can erect standards and values that have relevance to anyone but himself. Our society is doggedly agnostic; and so no God can be allowed to give us a frame of reference to guide our social aims and structures. We feel that we have outgrown the need to be dependent; and one sees the children given over to suffer for the arrogant blindness of their parents. An agreement on a clear standard is simply impossible at present. The Great Debate is as much blind-man's bluff as child-centered education. Having exhausted its capital, British education nears the end of its run. The Christian must grimly acknowledge the signs of the inevitable breakdown of an apostate system.

In the light of this, a new biblical re-examination of education and its aims can be of value not only to those of our children who may benefit from it in schools run on Christian principles, but also in beginning to relight lamps which advanced educators have long been striving to put out. Perhaps positive Christian action along a new line will give a lead to those confused and demoralized teachers so pathetically jammed in the dark tunnel into which humanistic thought has led British education. ●

INFLATION IS A MORAL PROBLEM

Peter De Jong

Corroborating the point of this article is an editorial by Marvin Stone on the concluding page of the March 23, 1981, *U.S. News and World Report* entitled "A Nation of Thieves?" Mr. Stone quotes the observation of William M. Werber, retired business executive, that "economists are on the wrong track in treating inflation as an economic problem. He says: 'Inflation is more a basic moral issue than one of economics. And it all begins with the moral corruption in government.'

"Werber insists that inflation cannot be controlled by controlling the money supply. He says: 'You could raise the interest rate to 40 percent, but this would not get the job done.'

"The only way we are going to get a handle on ballooning prices is through a complete change in national attitudes. And this change must begin with government. When our leadership is honest, intelligent, frugal, fair and acts indiscriminately, with guts, you'll see some changes. Until then, it makes no difference how you manipulate money.'

"Economists surely will quarrel with Werber's prescription for halting inflation. But it is hard to quarrel with his plea for more honesty — from the government on down."

An Expert Speaks

Herman Kahn, introduced by *U.S. News and World Report* (Dec. 2, 1974, p. 53), as "a noted analyst of world affairs" and "an authority on national trends" was being interviewed regarding his opinions on the state of the economy. Asked for suggestions to deal with the haffling problem of inflation, Mr. Kahn prescribed "first and foremost" "that the Government doesn't spend more than it has available. Any government that does so — except in very special circumstances — ought to be thought of as immoral. We've got to turn this whole fight against easy deficits and inflation into a moral issue, not just a matter of some economists' or politician's calculations. The economists think it's dumb to look at such things in terms of moral issues — as a matter of the-

In view of general concern about the economic problem we reprint this article from THE OUTLOOK of March, 1975.

ology — but it's the only realistic way to balance the many pressures and inducements to lax behavior and unrealistic estimates."

It is a bit surprising and gratifying to find a business consultant saying so bluntly what many of us have long sensed and felt should be said, that the whole current economic crisis with its runaway inflation is not just an economic problem, but one that really has a moral and religious origin. To say this is not to deny that there are all kinds of economic factors at work, but it recognizes that underneath them are moral and spiritual considerations that determine how people spend their money and manage their businesses — and their governments.

Pages from History

Some years ago in a university course, we had to study a number of books that attempted to analyze the French Revolution. Among them was Alfred Cobban's analysis of the financial crisis in the old monarchy which he saw helping to bring on the revolution (*A History of Modern France*, Vol. 1). The author pointed out that the nobility who had power in the old regime insisted that the successive finance ministers continue deficit financing rather than curtail expenses and raise taxes. This policy pushed the nation into bankruptcy, and in that chaotic situation the revolutionary leaders found their opportunity to seize control. This financial policy was, of course, a matter of economics, but it was not merely economics.

When people refuse to pay their bills or to tolerate equitable taxes, they reveal their moral degeneracy. And the chaos that overtakes them ought to be seen by Christians, at least, as the kind of judgment that God brings, also in an economic way, on breaking His laws.

In more recent history it is likely that few people in this part of the world realize the role of currency inflation in the Nationalist collapse and the Communist take-over of mainland China. When we arrived there in 1947 (as CRC missionaries) one paid about \$10,000 for a hamburger or hot dog. And those dollars had at one time been worth one third of ours. In our first six months in the country, prices increased at an average rate of 46% per month and after that they rose even more rapidly. In the summer of 1948 we paid \$3,000,000 for a silver teaspoon, for by that time the exchange rate had reached \$12,000,000 Chinese to \$1 U.S. How much this financial collapse

contributed to the political take-over may be difficult to determine, but of its importance in influencing the course of events there can be little doubt.

When the money a government issues becomes worthless, how much confidence can its citizens have in its ability to deal with other matters? After all, the value of that money depends upon a government's ability or willingness to keep its promises.

Our Present Crisis

As all of us are increasingly troubled by the economic crisis which is beginning to claim first place in our concern, must we not as Christians see and speak of it in moral and religious rather than only in economic terms?

Some time ago a Dutch political leader was cited in the *Calvinist-Contact* as observing how remarkably our present energy — and other natural resources — problems parallel the story of the Prodigal Son. Having "wasted his substance with riotous living" he presently "began to be in want!" We will have to face our responsibility to God who brings us

to account for everything we do with what He has entrusted to us.

Our responsibility in the U.S. as the commonly acknowledged wealthiest country in the world is considerably greater than that of a Chinese government which had been bankrupted by twenty years of war. When we habitually live beyond our means, when we become so accustomed to deficits that we borrow with no intention of repaying, whether we do that as individuals or collectively as a country, can we expect to escape the economic punishments with which God repays theft and other misuse of His gifts?

Regarding our present problems in this light would dispel much of the confusion which today seems to have overcome many of our nation's political and economic leaders. It might also lead to some different decisions than many currently being made. The Lord still calls us to repentance and to return to Him both through His word and His government of the world, including its economics. As these economic judgments overtake us, are we going to listen to Him, mend our ways, and seek to move others and our nation to do the same? ●

REPORT ON CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Ronald J. Meyer

A. Report 29 (Capital Punishment) in the 1979 Acts of Synod was received by Synod and referred to all of our churches for study, reflection and response to the Study Committee. All of our consistories are urged to study the report and to submit their response or suggestions to the Study Committee by Oct. 15, 1980. (Acts, Art. 39, p. 45).

B. The study committee recommended:

1. That the synod refer this report to the churches for study and guidance.

2. That the Synod declare:

a) that the Scriptures lay no mandate on modern states to exercise capital punishment;

b) that the Scriptures do permit modern states to inflict capital punishment;

c) that according to the spirit of Scripture capital punishment is prudently exercised only under extreme conditions and not as a general rule. In summary, it is the position of the study committee that the Biblical data a) do *not* require the administration of capital punishment for murder; b) do *permit* the administration of capital punishment for murder; but c) that the administration of capital punishment for murder is *not desirable*. Or, put yet another way, capital punishment for murder is a) not mandatory;

b) permissible; but c) not prudent. A summary of their argumentation and reasoning follows:

a) The state is not unconditionally required to execute a person found guilty of murder in the first degree. Though the tradition of Reformed theology and ethics has affirmed the mandatory nature of capital punishment the committee concludes that neither the Old Testament, New Testament, Creeds, nor any fixed principle (such as "Justice" or the "sanctity of Life") obligate the modern state to institute or practice capital punishment.

b) The state, under appropriate conditions, is authorized or licensed to deprive a citizen, not merely of his liberty, but also of his life. The sword (Romans 13:4) may be interpreted to embrace capital punishment. In agreement with this, our creeds also permit modern states to execute first degree murderers (L.D. 40, Q & A #105; Belgic Conf. Art. #36). Moreover, both the ideas of retributive justice and the right of the state to defend itself *allow* for the exercise of capital punishment.

c) It is not advisable that the death penalty be attached to the crime of murder under the circumstance prevailing in contemporary western society, and in view of our knowl-

edge about criminal pathology. In practice, though capital punishment should not be abolished, its use should be severely restrained. The state's permission or freedom to spare or take life must cause us to seriously consider the consequences, as well as the grounds, of such action. The ends of justice and the safety and stability of the state are best served by a sparing use of the destroying sword. Humane considerations point in the direction of judicial restraint, toward the minimal use of the sword, toward the bracketing of capital punishment as a rarely used weapon of last resort, namely, only when the very existence of the state is threatened.

- C. The report is not above criticism. In fact, I believe its conclusions should be severely criticized.
1. "To reach these conclusions, the study committee was obliged, of course, to dilute the force of Genesis 9:6 which reads, bluntly, 'Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in His own image.' " (Editorial, *Banner*, March 14, 1980.) The committee spent most of its time and pages in the first part of its report in the study of Genesis 9:6 to conclude that capital punishment is *not mandatory*, though it admits (in the first sentence) "On its face this text does indeed seem to provide a clear mandate for the imposition of the death penalty upon murders" p. 475. For society's protections, the murderer need only be suitably restrained or rendered docile today like a dangerous animal. The text, it is suggested, is more like a proverb than a categorical imperative. A text, which appears quite straightforward and understandable, is now clouded with suspicion and uncertainty. The committee never uses this text to support the permissibility of capital punishment; instead it "dilutes" its obvious meaning to conclude that capital punishment is not mandatory!
 2. The section on the permissibility of capital punishment is very good and worth the time it takes to consider all of its evidence and arguments. On this question, the committee admits that it "joins the vast majority of Christians who throughout the ages have held that capital punishment is in accord with the Scriptures and, by that token, with the highest moral principles" (p. 496). Its blatant omission, however, is its failure to even mention Genesis 9:6, in this section of its report.
 3. The final section of the report which deals with the desirability or the prudentiality of capital punishment is so very brief — out of all proportion to the weight of their argument which it is designed to carry. Without mentioning a single Biblical passage, the committee simply asserts that capital punishment today is not desirable, not prudent, and overridden by human considerations which impressed the committee! Though it disputes those who would abolish

capital punishment, it virtually denies the possibility that the death sentence should ever be permitted. It seems to place the existence of the state far above the value to justice and the human lives which the murderer disregards. The extreme conditions which warrant capital punishment according to the report, are virtually non-existent, thus removing, in effect, even its permissibility.

D. The humane considerations with which the report concludes bring up four important issues. The reasoning of the committee, however, is far from convincing. Each of them are open to criticism, and should be looked at, I believe, from a different point of view.

1. The sixth commandment teaches that human life is sacred. Who can argue with that? The life of the murderer is also sacred. The death penalty, however, should not be regarded as a last resort — to prevent only the demise of the state, or even to protect its citizens — but as a testimony and deterrent to the citizens of the state and especially to would-be murderers. A state which practices capital punishment testifies that it regards the life of *its citizens as sacred*. This is not irony, but justice and obedience to the command of God.
2. The judgments of human magistrates are fallible. This too is true. It may happen that innocent persons are put to death. Such a mistake of justice cannot be reversed. But murderers are never convicted on mere suspicion, but on the basis of abundant evidence and a unanimous jury. If there exists any doubt concerning their guilt, a conviction is impossible. However, I would rather mourn the death of one innocent man, put to death because of mistaken justice, and by capital punishment, than mourn the deaths of a hundred others who died at the cruel hands of murderers who have been set free by a society that was too "humane" to carry out the justice which God commands of the state.
3. Capital punishment shortens the time in which the murderer can repent. This is obvious, but perhaps cuts both ways. I would take exception to what the committee implies — that the longer the time, the more likely the repentance. It strikes me that if a murderer does not confess his sin and find peace with God with the sentence of death over his head, these wholesome things are not more likely to occur if the murderer faces a 15 year or life sentence. The threat and approach of certain death may be the most effective incentive for sincere repentance.
4. Justice alone does not require the death of the murderer. Most will agree with this statement as well. The report goes on to suggest, however, that "justice will be served when the murderer is appropriately incarcerated" (p. 507). Only when this imprisonment causes others to kill or causes himself to kill again should capital punishment be considered, it im-

plies. How many other deaths would finally warrant capital punishment? Certainly, justice alone does not require the murderer's death — there are many other factors which also require it, among the greatest of which is that murder is unique among crimes. The victim is dead — the crime of not only of degree; his life cannot be restored; and he cannot forgive the one who killed him. The only appropriate response of a state toward those who willfully murder one of its citizens is to obey the God-given command, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in His own image."

E. Using the study committee's recommendations as a guide, I offer my recommendations for your adoption — recommendations which are Scrip-

tural, I believe, and more in line with traditional Reformed theology and ethics:

1. The Scriptures permit modern states to inflict capital punishment.
2. The Scriptures mandate modern states to exercise capital punishment in cases of first degree murder.
3. Capital punishment for first degree murder ought to be judiciously applied as a general rule, but prudently restrained in warranting circumstances. ●

(The above report was prepared by Rev. Ronald Meyer, pastor of North Blendon CRC and sent to the consistories of Classis Zeeland and Holland. It is being reproduced here with his permission.)



Reformed Women Speak

LIFE'S HIGHLIGHTS

Shirley W. Madany

It was a rare occasion. We were flying to Utah for a weekend, and I had been included in the plans! Plans that had been in the making for months. In the next three days we were going to be very busy. My husband was scheduled to speak in Ogden the first night at an open meeting on THE CHALLENGE OF ISLAM. Saturday would be our day at Utah State University in Logan, where he was advertised to lecture on the awesome subject of THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE WEST: FROM CONFRONTATION TO MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING. Sunday morning he would take the service at Brigham City and Sunday evening preach at a combined Reformation Rally in Salt Lake City.

On Friday morning it was my turn. I spoke to a group of ladies who gathered at the Anderson's house for a special coffee time. They came from Logan, Brigham City and Ogden. They were generously responsive and easy to talk to. We had decided earlier that the title of my talk should be "The Exciting Potential for Women as Christians Today."

Mrs. Shirley Madany is the wife of Rev. Bassam M. Madany, Minister of Arabic Broadcasting of the Back-to-God Hour. They live at South Holland, Ill. The editor of this department is Mrs. Laurie Vanden Heuvel, 207 Kansas Ave., N.W., Orange City, Iowa 51041. Readers who would like to contribute to it are invited to write her.

It was based on our need to love one another "fervently" as expressed in I Peter 1:22. Some versions use the word "earnestly," others "deeply." Certainly our need to love one another more intensely is worth thinking about. It fits so well with that other verse which ought to be written on our hearts by now: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength and all your mind . . ." Luke 10:27.

It appeared that after all these years there was something I could share with them. What could have been more rewarding or demanding than to be a Christian mother and to be able to demonstrate love to God and love to husband in such a way that the children had no doubts about it. Having had six children and then been preoccupied with them for more than twenty years, now my energies were being directed towards my husband's ministry. I was a part of the team in a very active way.

The ladies seemed to catch the obvious encouragement, even excitement over the fact that talents don't disappear. For me there had always been a compelling urge to write, even to speak. And now my work with our Arabic broadcast gave me unlimited material upon which to draw, and a sense of great urgency.

We considered the joyfulness of the New Testament message in the face of darkness and persecu-

tion. We looked at the rapidly increasing and changing population which when projected will give us possibly a one in four ratio of Muslims at the turn of the century. In the face of cults and false religions (you need to live in Utah to understand this better, with that overwhelming Mormon population) what can Christian mothers do to help? The exciting potential for any woman is simply to be utterly true to her faith and to shine from whatever corner she finds herself placed in. The life of a Christian is the life of adventure.

The fact that we were introduced as "Mike and John's parents" and that all these folk knew our sons, must have added something to what I was saying. They knew that the whole schedule of activities planned for us was a result of our boys' involvement in Inter-Varsity work on the university campus and their concern for the growth of the Brigham City church which they love. We praise God for this awesome blessing.

* * *

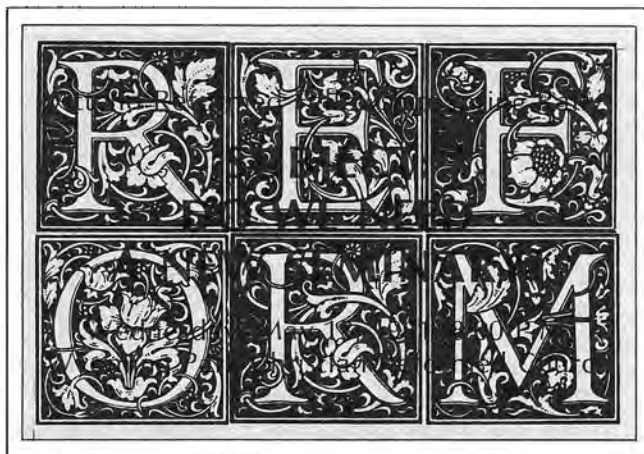
Saturday, then, was our day for Logan, Utah, when we would meet our sons' friends and my husband would lecture to a uniquely mixed group of Middle Eastern students, Mormons and ex-Mormons and Christians. At noon a Persian and an Afghani student prepared a delicious Persian repast for us. After the lecture twelve of us were guests at the home of a Syrian family, who in turn treated us to a Middle Eastern feast. At both meals it was heartwarming to have the hosts say, "Usually Mike asks the blessing for us, but today we will have his father do so."

The highlight of that weekend was meeting people from so many different countries. At that lecture there were Iraqis, Iranians, Syrians, Libyans, Palestinians, Saudi Arabians, Eritreans and Afghans. Church time in Brigham City saw this pattern continued. Mike's friend Haile, from Eritrea, brought a Ghanian and a Persian student with him, adding to the usual balance of Navaho and Cherokee Christians. We worshipped together. After the service we shared our blessings.

When you only have a moment's notice before you know you are going to be on your feet saying something to a group, thoughts race through your head. There were things I wanted to say, but how to express them? As I looked over that group of smiling faces I thought how beautiful "people" are.

We make so much of the beauties of God's creation. Every country has its famous natural beauty spots. Every season has its charm. We watch travelogues and take our own pictures hoping to capture a sunset or a snowfall, a bird in flight or a waterfall, so that we can look at them again. But how do we look at people — God's greatest creation?

We need new eyes with which to see that all people of the world are potentially beautiful when they come to know the Lord as Savior. As the apostle Peter said: "Having purified your souls by your obedience to truth for a sincere love of the brethren, love one another earnestly from the heart." (I Peter 1:22)



WOMEN IN OFFICE

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WHAT WILL SYNOD 1981 SAY — TO GOD?

Edward Heerema

"It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us . . ." (Acts 15:28). With these words the apostles and elders who gathered at Jerusalem for the first general assembly or synod of the Christian church characterized the decisions they had reached. What the conferees at Jerusalem were saying was that the decisions they had made were pleasing to God.

These words used by the apostles and elders (we'll call them the Jerusalem formula) have often been used at assemblies and synods of the church of Christ. Although we must be careful in the use of these words lest we appeal to the Holy Spirit in support of a questionable decision, this Jerusalem formula should always be kept in view as a goal as we do the business of Christ's church. Surely church assemblies do not gather for the purpose of pleasing the galleries or some pressure group in the church. Quite in the spirit of the Jerusalem formula the synods of the Christian Reformed Church commonly begin their annual session, with a prayer that contains this petition: "We beseech Thee, therefore, faithful God and Father, that, in accordance with Thy promise, Thou wilt abide in the midst of the present assembly through Thy Holy Spirit, and that He may lead us into all the truth." Light is cast on just what this request means by another petition of the prayer, namely, "Grant that Thy Word may be our only rule and standard . . ." (See "Opening Prayer For Ecclesiastical Assemblies," *Psalter Hymnal*, liturgical section).

In 1978 synod arrived at a decision that opened the office of deacon to women. It seems to me there was some reference made to the presence of the Holy Spirit at the time this decision was reached. It is not for me to presume to judge how the Holy Spirit may or may not have been present in the pro-

cess of arriving at that decision. But one also has to ask whether the Holy Spirit had anything to do with the unprecedented number of communications taking exception to that decision that came to Synod 1979, communications coming for the most part from official assemblies of the Christian Reformed Church. Was the Holy Spirit pleased with the 1978 decision and was He also pleased with those actions of consistories and classes that challenged the 1978 synodical decision?

Synod 1981 will face the issue of women in office again. May the delegates to Synod humbly keep the Jerusalem formula in view as they deal with an issue that has stirred the church. In the spirit of the Jerusalem formula this article asks the question, What will Synod 1981 say — to God? That after all is the question of highest concern. This means that when all has been said and done each delegate to synod is answerable to God himself as he wrestles with a matter that has been before our church for more than a decade.

In asking the question as to what Synod 1981 will say to God, I shall seek to honor the above call for care in entering upon this sensitive domain. I should like to specify certain areas of concern that I trust will also be the concerns of the delegates to Synod 1981.

Obeying God's Word

At the very center of this debate on women in office is the Bible. Do we submit to its teaching? This is what the issue boils down to in all communions in which the question of women in office has been raised. In previous articles I have sought to point out that those favoring opening the special offices to women have not come forward with a strong biblical case in support of their position. The Synod of 1975 properly called for "compelling biblical evidence" if the practice of the church since its founding is to be

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changed. No such convincing biblical evidence has been adduced.

That there is very strong opposition in the Christian Reformed Church to the opening of the special offices to women is obvious. And it seems incontrovertible that the largest share of the opposition (on the part of women as well as men) stems from the belief that the Bible does not support the position that calls for change in the church's practice. Assuming that this assessment is correct, and noting the fact that those favoring women in office have not brought forward convincing evidence for their stand, what will the result be if, in spite of these considerations, Synod 1981 upholds the decision of 1978 to open the office of deacon to women as that office is presently maintained in the Christian Reformed Church? Will our denomination's allegiance to the Word of God be enhanced? Let our church exercise great care lest it go down the road taken by other communions which make important decisions in matters of doctrine or life without real regard to the biblical evidence on the subject, as the Gereformeerds Kerken in Nederland did recently on the issue of homosexuality. And let Synod 1981 give no encouragement to the notion that the Bible is a time-bound book (as Kuitert and others teach) which is restricted in its relevance to today's problems because of the cultural limitations of the age in which it was written. Let Synod 1981 say plainly what it asked in its opening prayer, namely, that its decisions are based on the Bible as its "only rule and standard."

Was God's Son Time-Bound?

Among Christ's close friends and followers when He was on earth were a number of devoted women. Our Savior enjoyed a beautiful and open relationship with these women. It is often observed that Jesus did much to liberate women from age-old traditions and taboos. In spite of all that, it is noteworthy that Jesus did not select one woman to serve in a position of authority and leadership in the church. There was not one woman among the twelve. There was not one woman among the apostles who established and exercised governing authority in the New Testament church. And the apostles, following the teaching and example of their Master, also did not appoint or choose a woman to exercise authority in the church.

In thus choosing the leadership of the church from among men only, were Christ and his apostles blindly following the cultural and social practices and prejudices of their day? Was God's own Son, "the way, and the truth, and the life," a willing servant of His time, bound by the cultural conditions that prevailed then? That is not the way the Christ of the Bible comes through to us. He forthrightly set His correct teaching over against that which had been said of old and which was the accepted dogma of His day. Let Synod 1981 say nothing on the issue of women in office that would put cultural blinders on the very Son of God. We confess God's Son to be the Head of the church, today and throughout the centuries. That living Head is the Christ we meet in the Scriptures, the Christ who held women in high

esteem, counted them among His dear friends and devoted followers, and who did not deem it proper to appoint even one of them to a position of headship in the church. The Head of the church today is that same Christ, and not one reconstructed according to some people's notions as to how He would adjust His attitudes and principles to meet modern conditions. To subject Christ to such reconstruction is to say to God that the church has no real Head, and the church will follow its own inclinations according to its latest cultural or sociological or psychological insights.

The Living Covenant

The Christian Reformed Church has been richly endowed with an understanding of the Covenant of Grace that has been a source of great blessing to the church. This core teaching of Scripture has been more than a dogmatic fixture in the church's theological library. It has also been more than the channel in which personal salvation is found. The teaching of the covenant has enabled the members of the church not only to see the rich character of their living relationship to God in Christ, but also to realize and honor the obligations which this covenant relationship places upon them with respect to their God-given children. God's covenant is with believers and their offspring.

What are these obligations? They add up to a great responsibility for the total nurture of the children to the end that they may come to experience the very real presence of God in the totality of their lives. Does this total nurture or education of the child begin when the child enters kindergarten in the Christian School? Of course not. That total nurture begins just as soon as the child is born. Perhaps we should say that this total nurture is already at work in subtle ways as the child develops in the mother's womb. Total nurture or education of a child is much more than putting intellectual items on the expanding shelves of a growing child's mind. There are terribly important factors bearing on the growing child's capacity to cope effectively with life in God's world that are at work in the forming of a person from the very beginning. Of utmost importance in such development of responsible and effective personhood under God is a firm and permeating sense of emotional security. And that is developed as the child from the time of conception is deeply loved and after birth is lovingly disciplined, all in obedience to God and in the context of His abiding love in Christ.

Both parents have an important role in such total nurture of covenant children. At the same time it should be evident that the mother has an especially crucial role here. She is closest to the new life that has come from her very body and she enjoys a communion with the child that is one of the high wonders of human existence. It is in this communion, cradled in a mother's love which is fed by a devoted husband's Christ-like love, that a solid foundation is laid for that inner stability and strength that are at the heart of Christian nurture. When a woman willingly devotes herself to the making of a home in which these special responsibilities toward the grow-

ing children are effectively carried out by thoughtful, loving attention to the myriad details involved, and when she also seeks to make a home in which the entire family can find daily renewal of strength and love and zest for life, then she has a calling beside which all other careers for women are of secondary importance. Her special place in the day-to-day actualities of covenant living calls for a large measure of resourcefulness, intelligence, faith and love — yes, the very best her whole being can give.

At this point we must exercise care so as to make sure that our lines of thought do not become entangled. What is said in the last three paragraphs can hardly *by itself* stand as a convincing biblical argument against having women serve in the special offices of the church. After all, there are women whose obligations at home are minimal for one reason or another. Also, there are women who seem capable of giving due attention to their home responsibilities even as they enter upon a job or other activities outside the home. At the same time I would point out that it is one thing for a woman of her own choice to opt to assume responsibilities outside the home; it is another thing for the church officially to place such responsibilities upon a woman.

But there is a solid biblical principle which, when combined with respect for woman's place in God's living covenant, makes for a strong case against opening the offices of the church to women. That biblical principle is *headship*, as succinctly stated in I Corinthians 11:3, "... the head of the woman is man..." In our denomination occupying any one of the ordained offices means the exercise of headship in the government of the church. And the exercise of headship in the church by women raises urgent questions concerning headship in their homes. Therefore let Synod 1981 say plainly to God that our church continues to honor these prominent elements in the stream of covenant life that He has graciously ordained.

"I Love Thy Church, O God!"

God loves the church. It is the apple of His eye. He gave His own Son to die a horrible death for it. From the praise of Zion in the Psalms to the representations of the victorious church in Revelation we see the church as also the object of the believer's love and devotion. The church is the family of God, of which we are members by His amazing and matchless grace. Surely no member of the church, keenly aware of God's gracious love in Christ, can fail to hold the body of Christ in deepest affection and respect. Surely no member of synod, busy with the affairs of the church at a point where he touches the lives of many of God's people, can fail to realize sharply that what he does affects significantly the well-being of that which God and His people dearly love. In dealing with that which will most likely be the leading item on its agenda let Synod 1981 say to God, "We deeply love your church, O God."

Here are some suggestions on how Synod 1981 can say to God that it loves His church.

1. Let every facet of synod's operation reflect determination on the part of the delegates that the

prayer for the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit shall beget a mind of sincerity and integrity under "our only rule and standard."

2. The mind of sincerity and integrity under the Word and Spirit must involve the realization that every previous synod of the church has sought to do the Lord's business in the same manner. Therefore what the church has decided in the past must be dealt with most respectfully. The church cannot, therefore, change a significant element in its government, an element that is as old as the denomination, without having compelling biblical grounds for making such a change.

3. The good order of the church must be honored and maintained at all times. The good order of the church is for the preservation and well-being of the church as a whole and for the protection of the individual members of the church. Punctual regard for the stipulations of the Church Order and for the rules of proper procedure is called for. The will of the church may not be thwarted or side-tracked by shrewd procedural maneuvering or by rulings which fail to satisfy the clear intent of the Church Order. Delegates to synod should always pray that strong love and respect for the church shall overcome any momentary pressure to win a point by any means other than open, straightforward discussion and procedure.

4. The peace of the church should hold high priority among us. Let it be disturbed only for reasons that have clear and urgent biblical warrant. Our church has experienced unrest on the issues of women in office, an unrest that is not without some strong currents. This unrest is not unrelated to a broader wave of social disturbance caused by the agitation of the radical feminist movement against the traditional role of women. When winds of controversy and their attendant unrest blow upon us, peace can be found only in humble obedience to the Word of the sovereign God who rules all things. A main thrust of these articles has been that no strong biblical case has been put forward by those who favor opening the ordained offices in the church to women. On the other hand it is apparent that a large majority in the church are opposed to women in office, opposed because they firmly believe the Bible is clearly on their side. Under these circumstances what course of action should love for the church and its peace dictate? It seems to me the answer is clear.

* * *

An hour of decision for the Christian Reformed Church is due at Synod 1981. In these articles I have sought to point out what synod by its decision in the matter of women in office will be saying to society in general, to women, to the church, and to God, the great Head of the church in Christ. Let the church be much in prayer that synod may so decide that blessings will be forthcoming for our troubled society, for women and for the church. Above all may earnest prayers be lifted up that synod may demonstrate by its decision that the Christian Reformed Church most genuinely loves and honors our great God — His Word, His Son, His covenant and His church. ●

"POSTPONEMENT OF EXECUTION?"

Johan D. Tangelder

Postponement of execution. This was the startling title of an article written by Dr. J. Plomp in the *Gereformeerde Weekblad* (Reformed Weekly), August 1, 1980, commenting on the meeting of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod in Nimes, France. Dr. Plomp's observations raise some fundamental questions about the continuation of the RCN (Gereformeerde Kerken in the Netherlands) membership within the RES.

(1) Dr. H. Wiersinga and Prof. Dr. H. Kuitert.

The RES agreed that the RCN had exercised discipline in the case of Dr. H. Wiersinga, whose views on the atonement were found to be without Biblical warrant. This decision, which was based on information given by the RCN, greatly surprised Dr. Plomp. Why? Because, according to him, the general synod of the RCN did not exercise discipline. The synod didn't have the authority to do so. The Kuitert case presented no difficulties. The RES took note that it is still under study. The only possible position the RES can take at this time is — wait and see.

(2) The World Council of Churches.

Dr. Plomp complains that this was not the first time that the RES called the RCN on the carpet to defend their dual membership in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod and the World Council of Churches (The RES holds to the incompatibility of dual membership). A committee was appointed to study "the Reformed concept of the church and its implications for current and future ecumenical relationships." This study must be ready for the RES meeting of 1984. And this was, according to Dr. Plomp, a "postponement of execution." Why should the RCN give up membership in the WCC for the sake of the RES?

(3) Homosexuality.

The RES had expressed its "grave concern about the ambiguous nature of the 1979 decision of the GKN" on homosexuality. A committee was appointed to study the Biblical data and hermeneutical questions related to the problems of "homophilia" (homosexuality). But Dr. Plomp feels that one can also speak of a postponement of execution. And he remarks: "I don't just think this because I know my own Dutch customers. They walk somewhat faster than many foreign Reformed; they are somewhat more progressive, or whatever one may want to call

it. But I think this specially because an enormous difference has arisen between them and most other Reformed in the RES. That is a difference in the view of Scripture (Schriftbeschouwing)."

Dr. Plomp thinks that in Nimes this issue didn't get the attention it deserved, no — actually demanded. Many member churches give the impression of being sure and steadfast on a host of issues. But they are so sure and steadfast because they have hardly any problem with the text of the confessions and even less with Scripture. When the RES says that according to the traditional Reformed view homosexuality is a sin, a number of Bible texts are added to the pronouncement.

Dr. Plomp puts his finger on the real problem the RCN has with the RES. He says that Scriptures, and most likely the confessions, are treated in a manner to which we were once accustomed in Holland. But many Reformed scholars no longer treat them so, and neither does their synod. He claims that they now have a feeling for the whole of the hermeneutical problem; what it is that the Lord wants to say to us in these old texts which originated in a totally different world and in a historical situation completely different from ours. Dr. Plomp believes that it is too bad that the RES didn't decide to study this problem in all openness and quietness for the next few years. And he concludes his article by saying that since this question of hermeneutics was not on the agenda; the execution of the sentence, for which the words were already present at Nimes, will take place at the next Synod.

Since Nimes, an eighty-four page report on the "Nature of Biblical Authority" has been approved by the RCN. The report's view of truth is similar to that of dialectical theology — "truth as encounter." Bible writers did make mistakes in their writings. As norm for life, the Bible must be seen as having many time-related commands. The report departs from the historic organic view of Scripture as taught by Dr. A. Kuyper and Dr. Herman Bavinck.

Recently the RCN have stated that they will not withdraw from the RES. But why do the RCN stay within the RES? Why didn't the — otherwise so outspoken — Dutch say in Nimes: "Brothers you are wasting your time; your view of Scripture is no longer ours; we are not on the same wavelength." An expression of such an opinion would have saddened the Reformed churches around the world, but it would have been treated with respect. Now I get the feeling that we have been taken. We have been told that the Dutch have progressed too far to ever return to the traditional Reformed position. ●

Rev. Johan D. Tangelder is the pastor of the East Christian Reformed Church of Strathroy, Ontario.

CHURCH GROWTH AND THE WORK OF THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH MISSION IN MEXICO (PART III)

Neal Hegeman

The work of Christian Reformed missionaries in Mexico has recently been going through a crisis. Especially in this concluding article on Missions in Mexico, Rev. Neal Hegeman helps us to better understand the problems of our mission there. The Hegemans are at present at Apartado 100, San Francisco de Dos Rios, San Jose, Costa Rica, Central America.

In the 2 preceding articles on Mexico we observed that the CRC mission entered Mexico upon contact with migrants in the late 50's. There was follow up work and an invitation to work with the IPC (Independent Presbyterian Church). After official arrangements were completed in 1963 the CRC mission developed its mission program in Mexico, largely in the context of the IPC. Development of education, evangelism, mission-church work, relief and development work and para-church programs were very encouraging. The discouragement was in the area of Church growth where the IPC showed very little growth. The CRC mission had neglected a major part of its mandate, that in the area of church planting and development. Even though courageous efforts were made, as recorded in Rev. Greenway's book, *An Urban Strategy For Latin America*, more work and working with the IPC was needed. The next phase of the CRC mission in Mexico can be called the readjustment stage. The CRC mission needed to redirect and readjust her focus toward the national church. If one of the main reasons for missions was for the Church to grow then the CRC mission work would have to be directly involved in that.

The Readjustment Stage (1974-1980)

By 1975, 5 out of the 8 original pioneer missionaries, who came during the years of '62-'67, and 5 of

the 19 follow-up missionaries who came during the years of '68-'73, were left on the field. In 1974 there was an influx of other missionary staff such as Dr. D. Oostendorp, Rev. Doyle, Rev. Hogan, Mr. Schuur, and Mrs. Silvai. The Seminary, CRWRC (World Relief), Christian School, the work in northern Mexico and the educational programs were reinforced by the entry of the new missionary personnel. The reinforced situation started to deteriorate by 1978 as Rev. Bergsma moved to Honduras to establish the new Theological Education by Extension program. Rev. Lagerwey, who was working with the Extension program in Mexico City returned to the USA. Miss Gritter took over leadership of the Extension programs which by now had developed into an international project called CITE. Rev. Doyle and Rev. Hogan left the northern Mexico work in '78 and Rev. Ruis returned to the USA in 1980, adding to the insecurity of the northern Mexican field. In 1976 the Christian school closed due to lack of interest and cooperation among missionaries. In 1979 Jack Roeda joined the Spanish BGH (Back-To-God Hour radio) team. At the beginning of 1980 there were 21 missionary personnel (including wives) in the Mexican field as compared to 31 in 1974.

The CRC mission was trying to make readjustments in its work with the IPC. The seminary was operated by a board on which nationals were represented and in leadership positions. Evangelism was done under the direction of local IPC churches. The missions encouraged the formation of the Synod in 1979. Unfortunately, the IPC did not think the CRC was adjusting enough. Not enough of the mission programs were under the direct authority of the IPC. There were questions about the seminary, the CITE program, the work of the CRC outside of the IPC. During the summer of 1980 the bombshell hit: The IPC synod asked that 6 missionaries leave the field. This would leave only 2 ordained and 2 unordained workers in the field: Rev. L. Roberts, Rev. J. Van Ee, Mr. J. P. Robert, and Mr. L. Korf.

What will happen to the work of the CRC mission in Mexico? Will the CRC face the same moratorium other North American Churches faced in 1972 with the National Presbyterian Church? Is this the reward of 17 years of hard work and dedicated service of the CRC in Mexico? Of course not, if one sees this crisis as part of the adjustment stage the CRC mission was going and has to go through. The IPC dramatic and irrational action serves to speed up this process. Unfortunately, the un-Christlike manner in which the mission was dealt with offended and hurt many missionaries and nationals alike and these actions of resentment and dominance will take many years to reconcile.

At the time of writing it was reported that many of the missionaries were making the necessary adjustments to continue their work in Mexico or pursue their calling elsewhere. Rev. Nyenhuis shifted his work to Intervarsity in the Mexican Universities, Miss Gritter plans to relocate the CITE office to another country, Dr. Oostendorp moved back to the USA, and of the others, definite plans are forthcoming. Within the IPC certain members of the Central Presbytery have disassociated themselves from the decisions of the Synod of 1980 and have separated themselves in hope of reconciliation.

Even though the CRC mission is having difficulties serving the Church of Christ in Mexico, its work has not been in vain. During the 1970's the IPC began to grow in a marvelous way. It is reported that there are over 7,000 members and more than 10,000 possible adherents. The IPC is especially growing in the Central Presbytery and Southern Presbyteries. Rev. L. Roberts estimated that in 1978 there were 13 ordained ministers, 30 congregations, 17 missions, 5480 communicants and 2100 baptized members in the South East Presbytery alone. In 1979 the Tabasco Presbytery was established in Southern Mexico and it too is growing. In Mexico City the Central Presbytery had grown to 8 churches, 7 unorganized congregations and 1637 members by 1978. The work in northern Mexico was developing very slowly.

The CRC has workers in the Oaxaca Valley and other places which are not under the authority of the IPC. Church growth is also reported there by Dr. Weerstra. The community churches continue to develop in Oaxaca Valley, in Huave, in Chiapas and among the Mixe. Three CRWRC personnel are working with the CRWMB in agriculture and development, Clare De Boer, S. Vander Ende and Bill Vander Klippe.

In the Yucatan Jim and Hilda Visser are working in conjunction with the NPC, CRWRC and CRWMB and running a church camp.

The CRC mission picture in Mexico is rather complex yet the Lord has used the efforts of the CRC in a marvelous way. Even though the crisis of 1980 has not yet passed, the Church of Christ still stands. The following statistics show the church growth that has taken place in the 70's.

	1970	1976	1977	1979
Baptized	910	1535	2255	2255
Communicants	1120	1165	2280	4212

Organized Churches	9	9	16	34
Unorgan. Churches	24	71	92	100
Ordained		15	20	19
Unordained workers		10	50	50
Seminarians		24	25	25
Other Educ. programs				
missions	47	46	86	

As the IPC continues to grow and exerts its influence in Mexico how should the CRC mission respond? It seems necessary for the CRC to enter the nationalization stage, that is, all of the work associated with the IPC will be under the supervision of the IPC. The IPC feels it is ready to completely take over the work, and now these demands must be tested by reality. However, there still remains a question about the work which is not under the supervision of the IPC. There are missionaries working with para-church organizations and with the NPC (National Presbyterian Church). It seems that there, too, the missionaries should be under the supervision of the nationals, though it might not be the IPC. Whatever the outcome of the next stage of missions in Mexico, the CRC must show the same willingness, humility and vision as the pioneer missionaries had in adjusting to the national situation. The CRC came as guests and hopefully will remain in Mexico as not only guests but friends and brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Conclusion

The history of the CRC in Mexico would have been impossible without the creative, providential, saving and redemptive Spirit of the Almighty God. We can reflect back on the history of the CRC in Mexico and see the Lord's hand. Was it not, God's Providence that the CRC chose to work with the IPC rather than the NPC, who expelled their missionaries in the moratorium of 1972? Was it not part of God's Wisdom that the educational and theological strengths of the CRC could be used in Juan Calvino Seminario and various other educational institutions? Did not the Lord bless Mexican Christians with the para-church contributions of the World Home Bible League, the Back to God Hour, the Evangelical Literature League, Summer Training Session and various other organizations such as Wycliff Bible Translators with whom members of the CRC worked? Did God not show his mercy and love through the CRWRC programs in the Yucatan and Oaxaca Valley, as well as in other areas of Mexico? Has God not blessed the CRC with a mission board who had been responsible in handling the challenges of the mission mandate for Mexico? Yes, we must thank the Lord, not only for his blessings but also for His forgiving love as He pardons us for our mistakes in Mexico, our sins of commission and sins of omission. May the Lord continue to bless the CRC mission efforts in Mexico; may He bless and guide the young IPC and its many responsibilities; may the Lord bless the missionaries who have come, stayed and gone, and may the Church continue to work and grow in Mexico, as throughout the whole world. ●

BACH'S MUSICAL RESPONSE TO BIBLICAL CRITICISM

Peter De Jong

It is commonly assumed and sometimes expressly claimed that today's "higher" criticism of the Bible is really a new problem — the results of revolutionary scientific discoveries in our time. A little in-depth acquaintance with the history of the Christian church in any of a number of periods in its past plainly reveals the error of that claim.

A Remarkable Cantata

Jan Zwart, writing in the January 17 issue of the Dutch *De Reformatie*, called attention to the fact that over 250 years ago, in 1724, no one less than Johann Sebastian Bach, the most famous of musicians, had composed a cantata vigorously attacking the criticism of the Bible and sectarian strife in the church. Mr. Zwart observed that that was the time in which "the 'Enlightenment' was increasingly becoming the dominant movement" and "everything that did not conform to 'sound reason'" was reject-

ed. Human reason was the court before which everything must be called to account, including the God of the Word. The holiness of religion and the majesty of the law might not exempt themselves from the criticism of sound reason. Everything in the Bible that could not be harmonized with reason was scrapped, in particular the miracles including that of Christ's miraculous conception.

"During that time Bach came to compose a splendid cantata that can be designated as a song in praise of sound doctrine. In it he made use of a poem of Luther based on Psalm 12. This is not surprising because in Psalm 12 David was speaking against those who no longer took the Word of the Lord seriously. A situation which was also becoming painfully obvious in Bach's time."

The cantata begins (and ends) with the whole choir singing a chorale, evidently in the words of Martin Luther, which paraphrase the first verse of the psalm. Where the psalm reads (KJV) "Help, LORD, for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men," the choir sings:

O God, look down from Heaven
And let Thy mercy be aroused
How few are Thy saints
We poor ones are forsaken:
Thy Word is not acknowledged
Faith has become quite extinct
Among all mankind.

Thereupon a recitative sung by a tenor takes up verse two about the "vanity" which men speak "with flattering lips and with a double heart" applying it to the current church problem. As Zwart observed, "The cantata was not exaggerating when it exposed to ridicule those who take 'foolish reason as their compass.'"

They teach vain, false cunning
Which is against God and His Truth
And what their own wits have thought out —
O misery which grievously harms
the Church —

This must take the place of the Bible.
The one chooses this, the other that,
Foolish reason is their compass.

They are like those graves of the dead
Which, even though beautiful from outside
Contain only stench and decay
And have nothing but filth to show.

There follows an aria to which Zwart called special attention. The alto sings and reiterates a prayer which adapts and applies verses three and four of the psalm.

Destroy, O God, the doctrines
That pervert Thy Word!
Restrain heresy
And all the rabble spirits;
For they say without hesitation;
Defy Him who would be our master!

The bass soloist sings a recitative amplifying verse five

The poor ones are troubled,
Their sighs, their anxious lamenting
At so much affliction and distress,

Through which the enemies torment pious souls,
 Penetrates the gracious ear of the Most High.
 Therefore God speaks: I must be their Helper!
 I have heard their imploring,
 The dawn of help, The bright sunshine
 of pure truth
 Shall, with new strength that brings
 comfort and life,
 Revive and delight them.
 I will have mercy on their distress,
 My healing Word shall be the strength of
 the poor ones.

The tenor in an aria applies and repeats verse six:
 Silver is made pure through fire,
 The Word is proved true through the cross.
 Hence a Christian shall at all times
 Be patient in affliction and distress.

The whole choir in a final chorale, following again
 Luther's words, applies the last two verses:

This God, Thou wouldst preserve pure
 Before this wicked race;
 And let us be commended unto Thee
 That they do not mix among us.
 The godless mob is found all around
 Whenever such heretical persons are
 Exalted among Thy people.

A Song for Our Time

This is not a pretty song. But neither is that
 twelfth inspired Psalm. One is impressed by how far
 Bach, Luther, and David were removed from the
 spirit of the admonitions with which we are con-
 stantly confronted, that we must enter into continu-
 ing polite "dialog" with the better educated scholars
 who would show us more backward folk how to
 "struggle" with the problems of our time and try to
 salvage from the antiquities of Bible and ancient
 Christian confessions some "perspectives" that may
 still be acceptable and usable to people of our time.
 Instead, Bach, Luther, and David, were expressing
 in appropriate music the outrage which was and is
 being perpetrated upon God's Word and the faith,
 life, and message of His Church. Whether they real-
 ize it or not, those leading in this critical movement
 are engaged in a wicked business. Luther and Bach
 knew it and, following the inspired psalms, taught
 the church to sing its prayer and praise to God for
 deliverance from and victory over the enemies. While
 we need to deal lovingly and patiently as well as
 prayerfully with the many who are confused and
 misled in our time, we need an awareness, as we are
 in danger of losing it, of what the real issues are.
 Perhaps some of the fiercer music of the great Chris-
 tian composer Bach can help us recover that aware-
 ness. As Zwart observed, "Bach did not hesitate in
 opposition to the Bible criticism, to stand up for
 sound doctrine and also in his composing to call to
 the God who will preserve His people against the
 pride of His enemies."

Jan Zwart's comments about this Bach cantata
 were not original with him, but were taken from the
 somewhat fuller remarks in the annual historical

survey of Dr. W. G. De Vries in the 1980 *Handbook*
 of the (Liberated) Reformed Churches.

Some of De Vries' other observations and sugges-
 tions in the original yearbook essay from which
 Zwart was quoting, also merit attention. In that sur-
 vey of a year of the churches' history parts of Bach's
 cantata were quoted at both the beginning and the
 end, suggesting that it (and the 12th Psalm) furnish
 an appropriate standpoint from which to see and
 understand what is happening in the church in our
 time.

Noting that Bach's cantata can be called a *song*
about the doctrine, De Vries observed that those
 who today would strive for the health-giving doc-
 trine of the Bible definitely do not have the support
 of public opinion. Even in many so-called Christian
 circles they are regarded with suspicion. Those who
 are determined to cling to the doctrine are charged
 with lacking warmth and inspiration. And they will
 get plenty of ridicule. People talk about a "dying
 race" who still accept 17th Century doctrine. They
 are regarded as perhaps interesting museum-pieces,
 but not to be taken seriously in our time. One who
 lives in this climate of thought finds it difficult to im-
 agine that a song could be composed about sound
 doctrine and sung with enthusiasm. But that has
 happened through the centuries and we need to be
 reminded of it.

Calling attention to the much musical activity and
 the many choirs in their church circles, De Vries
 suggests that it might be desirable that they would
 sing fewer of the "pietistically-colored" songs, and,
 instead, accompany and stimulate the struggle of
 the church by presenting a cantata such as this.

Have you ever sung, or heard Psalm 12 (Psalter
 Hymnal number 17)?

Help Lord, for those who love Thee fail,
 Thy faithful ones fall from the ranks,
 And leave the liars to their tale,
 False gratitude and treacherous thanks.

Lord, may those flattering lips be lashed,
 The boasting mouths stripped of their pride
 Those tongues that murmur unabashed,
 Who is this God? We shall abide!

Because the poor have been oppressed,
 And in their patience sigh alone,
 I will protect them in My breast
 The Lord has said, These are my own.

And what He saith is purified
 Like silver, sevenfold assayed.
 Though by this evil age defied,
 His word of truth shall be obeyed.

His promises shall stand secure,
 His saints are safe, though ill betide;
 He will protect His humble poor,
 Though rogues are honored far and wide.

Would this not be an appropriate song for a synod
 which at various points in its agenda confronts the
 challenge to the Bible's authority? ●

Note: This is Bach's second listed cantata, "Cantate BWV 2" recorded on Telefunken SKW 1/1-2. This is a current listing and is in the Calvin Library collection of records.

WHAT DOES GALATIANS 3:28 REALLY SAY?

Alfred Dykema

Much has been written in our church papers concerning "Women Office Bearers in the Christian Reformed Church" both pro and con, and some can bear repeating because it has such an important bearing on the future of our church denomination.

In the writings I notice especially a gross misuse and misinterpretation of Gal. 3:28 particularly by the study committee of 1973. Why does that committee cite just this one text when there are at least three or four other texts written in a similar context and with a similar meaning: Rom. 10:12, I Cor. 12:13, and Col. 3:11? Is it because Gal. 3:28 is the only one that mentions male or female? Gal. 3:28 it seems to me is taken completely out of context and is considered now as proof that woman is equal to man in every sense including that of office-bearer. I contend that this text cannot be so used. Paul is speaking of the fact that salvation by faith comes to all regardless of nationality, race, or individual status even as men and women — as many as were baptized in Christ (Rom. 6:3).

Commentary Explanations

I was interested to see what some of the commentators made of this text. First, I shall quote Lenski on Gal. 3:28, "In God's eyes they are all alike. During the time the Mosaic law was in force, this law itself recognizes and maintained differences." "When the faith and Christ came, these distinctions were abolished."

Lenski continues: "He (Paul) says: Since you Galatians are all sons of God by faith, clothed in Baptism with Christ's righteousness, all these and similar distinctions and differences are wiped out as to your spiritual standing. This does not involve a physical mutation. Christians of Jewish or of Greek descent retained their descent, free men and slaves kept their social positions, men and women kept their sex. The gospel changes nothing in the domain of

this world and this natural life" (although "it has driven out slavery and it has elevated the status of women.") "But here Paul speaks of the spiritual domain, of God's household, in which all believers are equally sons of God."

"Paul puts this in a striking way. 'for you are all one person in union with Christ Jesus.'" What union with Christ signifies, is that they are all alike in their spiritual standing — every one baptized, declared righteous, etc., none higher none lower, none richer none poorer . . . in every respect exactly as one person in Christ Jesus."

Barnes reasons much the same as Lenski: "The word Greek denotes the Gentiles generally: The Greeks being the foreign nation best known to them. The meaning is, that whatever was the birth, or rank, or nation, or color, or complexion, all under the gospel were on a level. They were admitted to the same privileges, and endowed with the same hopes of eternal life. This does not mean that all the civil distinctions among men are to be disregarded. It means only that all men are on a level in regard to religion. This is the sole point under discussion, and the interpretation should be limited to this. It is not a fact that the gospel designs to break down all the distinctions of society. Neither male nor female have any peculiar advantages for salvation. This does not mean, of course, that the sexes are to be regarded as in all respects equal; nor can it mean that the two sexes may not have peculiar duties and privileges in other respects. It does not prove that one of the sexes may not perform important offices in the church, which would not be proper for the other. It does not prove that the duties of the ministry are to be performed by the female sex, nor that the various duties of domestic life, nor the various offices of society, should be performed without distinction of sex. The interpretation should be confined to the matter under consideration; and the passage proves only that in regard to salvation they are on a level. One sex is not to be regarded as peculiarly the favorite of heaven, and the other excluded. Christianity thus elevates the female sex to an equality with the male, on most important of all interests and it has in

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this way made most important changes in the world wherever it has prevailed."

It cannot be denied that Christianity has elevated the place of woman in this world as compared to the heathen and uncivilized world. Christianity changes culture for the better. But it is a false assumption that Gen. 3:16 is no longer valid because of what Gal. 3:28 says. When sin came into the world God says in Gen. 3:16, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." And to the man God also said: "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life: thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee." And as for Adam, and this holds for Eve or the woman, too, he said: "For dust thou art and to dust shalt thou return." All of this God spoke and it still stands today and Gal. 3:28 does not in the least change this. This is not what Gal. 3:28 intends to say. It simply says that salvation is for everyone who believes regardless of whether man or woman, Greek or Jew.

Other Scriptures

It would seem that certain creation ordinances that were established by God and marred by sin cannot be set aside by man. The symbolic implications concerning Christ as head of the church as compared to the husband as the head of the wife still hold true today (I Cor. 11:3).

The '73 study committee admits that no conclusive argument can be deducted from the Old Testament data that (seem to favor) that women may serve in the ministry of special office of the New Testament Church. Significantly, it ignores the fact that during the Old Testament dispensation the office of elder was held by men only.

It seems the study committee based too much support on suppositions (that seem to favor women in office) and on misinterpretations of certain Scripture texts. For instance, the former study committee *thinks* that Paul in I Tim. 3:11-13 is speaking about women in "office" of deaconess. Such unfounded conjecture does not overthrow that which has been recognized as Biblical teaching for 1900 years.

The Bible speaks of the fact that the woman was created for man — a *help*, not the other way around. Note also what Paul says in I Cor. 11:8-9: "For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man." This was so before sin came into the world.

In I Cor. 9:5 we read: "Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife?" Has this not always been so even until this very day? Can you imagine it being turned completely around where the woman leads about a man? I Cor. 11:7b says man is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of the man.

It must be recognized that man has his peculiar role to play in life and the wife or woman hers. These are God-ordained and no matter what man's wishes and notions and desires may be they cannot be changed no matter what technical arguments may be used. The charge discrimination in this matter is

to ignore the many beautiful and honorable things which the Bible says about the woman. Consider the portrait of the capable godly woman which concludes the book of Proverbs (31:10-31).

I Cor. 12:13 and succeeding verses say about the same thing as Gal. 3:28, adding that we are not just one body but many members and each has a peculiar purpose and place in the body. Verse 18 says God set the members every one of them in that one body, as it hath pleased Him. There may be no difference in that they are of the same body, but each plays its own part. The hand, the eye, the feet, etc. — these are not interchangeable with one another, neither is one more important than another but each has a supporting role to the other parts and to the body as a whole.

The male and female relationship involves such a difference. There can be no discrimination for or against either, for the one is as important as the other, but each has his or her own particular role to play as God has appointed. As someone has said, there must be equality but not sameness.

The Authority of God's Word

Because the Bible teaches us that its writers wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit this power predominates over any influence of cultural environment. Therefore, the Bible is not like another ordinary book written by a man, in which the times and culture could determine what a man writes. This is God's Holy Word and when He wrote these words they hold for all generations until the end of time as well as for those at the time in which they were written.

Because of the Bible's authority as God's Word, we are warned against misinterpreting or re-writing it to suit anyone's own idea. The Lord was aware that there would be some who would try to change, add to, or take away from His Word. He sternly warned against this in Matt. 5:18 and Rev. 22:18-19 stating what the consequences will be.

As the Editor of the Banner so well said in the Sept. 6, 1974 issue: "Paul's words inspired by the Spirit transcend time. If the male, as male, has priority here, he did not seize it: Paul did not contrive it; God so ordained it. Let it be according to My word saith the Lord." And don't make Paul say now what he in fact never said or intended to say namely that Gal. 3:28 says there is now no difference between male and female, so now this means the way is open for women to be ordained ministers or elders and deacons.

The agitation for placing women in church offices suggests that the spirit of the age is infiltrating the church to a very damaging degree and that we are letting the world or the secular Women's Liberation Movement set the example for the Church.

The Synod of the Christian Reformed Church of 1975 declared that sufficient Biblical evidence has *not* been advanced to warrant a departure from our present practice of excluding women from being office bearers in the church and that much Biblical evidence *has* been advanced why women should not be

allowed to be office bearers, and that the real question is whether the Bible is wholly God's authoritative Word or not. Despite that decision, it seems that we may keep on bickering and arguing by human reasoning and twisting or misinterpreting certain Biblical passages to suit our own purposes. This may finally wear down the resistance to including women in ecclesiastical office in the church. Is this the way the Lord's church should deal with such important issues?

Shouldn't we rather follow Paul's procedure and appeal to God's creation order and the law or commandment of which the Lord spoke? If we truly believe that the Bible is God's inspired Word this

ought to settle the matter once and for all as it has in much of the church's history. These commands transcend all time and do not change with the changing of the cultures. Rather the Word of God should and did change these cultures for the better as was the intention of God by sending the Gospel into all the world by men who were committed to be faithful and able to teach others.

How can anyone argue with that unless he does not accept God's Word fully or chooses to pervert it for his own purposes?

Let us pray for the right insights to this problem that this may not be one of the things that may divide our denomination beyond repair. ●



Meditation

GOD'S DEMONSTRATION OF JOB'S GENUINE PIETY*

John Blankespoor

In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright. He feared God and shunned evil. He had seven sons and three daughters, and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred donkeys and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man of all the people of the East. Job 1:1-3.

That the world is full of suffering, physical, emotional and spiritual, no one would deny. Everybody knows something about it, and some people know a great deal. Hospitals throughout the country are full all of the time, and to see a doctor one often has to make an appointment weeks in advance. Then there is also the untold amount of suffering of the soul which the public does not see. In countries which

lack the advantages of modern medical science the amount of suffering is much greater. One gets the impression that in Jesus' time the world was full of sick people. Many thousands of sick people must have been brought to Him during His earthly ministry. Suffering is common throughout the world, and has been throughout all time. This prevalence of suffering perplexes people. Why does the Lord "allow" these things to happen? Unbelieving people have often denied the very existence of God, reasoning that such experiences of pain and sorrow surely cannot come from a loving God. With many people the question will not be put down, "Why me, Lord?" Also, "Why does God bring so much suffering upon His people? Why do good people suffer?" It doesn't seem right. And with many people it lasts so long, perhaps a life-time. How can God just leave His children in prisons and persecution camps for years and

*The first of several meditations on Job.

permit others to be tormented and persecuted even to death?

We find important answers to these questions in the Bible. In fact, there are several answers. We are assured that all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose. We learn also that the Lord chastises those whom He loves, and that chastening is for our profit. But the question remains; Why are some burdened more than others? Why are the "best" Christians sometimes heavily afflicted? These and related questions are addressed in the book and history of Job.

The land of Uz where Job lived may have been where the Edomites lived later. It is also quite possible that he lived while the Israelites were in captivity in Egypt. We do know that he had a big family, ten children, and was very rich. He was what we would call today, a millionaire. And most important, he was a very godly man. The Lord Himself says that there was nobody like Job in all the earth. So the Lord calls him the best living Christian of that day. What a rare thing, for a rich man, a millionaire to be so godly. He was blameless, having a reputation beyond reproach, he was upright, and he shunned evil, avoiding it constantly. When his children would have a party, he was aware that they *might have sinned* (which obviously was more probable at such a time) and he would get up *early in the morning* and bring a sacrifice for each one of them. This he did constantly.

According to chapters 29 and 30 he was a judge sitting in the gate of the city. He was a kind and hospitable man, helping the poor. Because of his wisdom his decisions were much respected and sought, he was a tower of strength to the weak. What an impressive person he must have been! A giant of faith. In all this he was only a shadow of Christ who was to come.

Then we read of the discourse between God and the devil. Satan makes the accusation that Job fears God because the Lord rewards him so lavishly. In words of our day, it paid Job to serve God. It would be foolish for Job to live differently. This implied that Job was selfish and was fearing God only for his own gain and benefit, not because he loved the Lord. Doesn't this come close to describing many nominal church people and in a measure all of us, if we aim to fear God because we want to go to heaven when we die and are scared of hell?

The rest of the book of Job is an answer to this accusation of the devil. The Lord shows why His people serve Him, and what true faith really is. He shows what "stuff" and "metal" His people are really made of. For Job this meant a period, who knows how long, of intense incredible struggle of soul with untold misery and pain. But in the end he "came out on top."

In his trouble Job never let go of God. Even in the depths he said, "Though He slay me, still will I trust

in Him." (We recall the fourth word of the cross, the Lord Jesus still calling God, "My God." God did "slay" Christ, but Christ never let go of Him.) It is in the end of the book of Job that we find him brought to humble submission and recognition of the sovereignty of God. The Lord leads us to trust in Him with and in all our sufferings and afflictions. What God really wants is total submission, and whole-hearted self-surrender. This *requires* persevering prayer. It is only possible through the grace of our faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. This kind of submission we find with Job in the end of the book. God demonstrated to the devil and all his hosts, to the church of all ages and the world, what true faith is, and what spiritual qualities His people are made of.

Often we find ourselves in the stream of suffering humanity. The suffering faces us with the question of what our attitude is towards it. How do we react when afflicted? Of course, we pray. And we learn to know what Paul means when he speaks of praying without ceasing. But, *how* do we pray and for *what* do we pray? Only for physical relief? Surely this is usually uppermost in our minds. But this suggests that we are interested in self first of all. And we are inclined to use the Lord when in need, and not to serve and fear Him with a heart of love and faith. And don't forget, the world of devils is always watching us closely, observing how we react. Remember the accusation of the devil about Job, that he was fearing God because it paid him well.

The Scriptures teach that all of our Christian life must be lived in the fear of the Lord. God's purpose in our adversities and sufferings is to train in such godly living. Everything must bring us closer to Him. The old saying goes, He often puts us on our backs in order that we will look up. From this consideration we may conclude that in afflictions we may pray for relief, but also that the entire experience and relief will serve to make us more dedicated. I'm sure Job was also interested in physical relief. But even that had to serve the spiritual. He wasn't just praying, Lord relieve me. He had questions and he needed answers to these important questions for his spiritual life. Paul, when in jail says that, whether he lives or dies, the important question is whether Christ is made great through it all. The Christian is a new creature in Christ, and must live for Him.

In the final analysis our lives must be totally submitted to Him. This requires surrender of self, for there is no room for our sinful self in the kingdom of heaven. With sublime language James describes mature and complete Christians, lacking nothing. They enjoy peace beyond human understanding, a calmness of soul, and give glory to God. Job had this in the end as did martyrs and other saints who triumphed over suffering. Observe such Christians. The devils may watch them closely but the devils are silenced. May we conclude from this that also the good angels are seeing all this with great joy and singing in gratitude? I believe we may. And the Lord says to and of such people, "Those people are mine." ●

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA CHAPTER NEWS

Bert Van Dyken

— Past History —

The Northern California Chapter, I believe, was the first chapter to be organized in 1960. Dr. Gilbert Den Dulk, who was then a board member of the national organization, encouraged the forming of local chapters. At an organizational meeting six men signed up as charter members: Rev. Jacob Weersing, Rev. John De Jong, Dr. Gilbert Den Dulk, Raymond Geerdes, Gordon Vander Ark and Bert Van Dyken. Dr. Gilbert Den Dulk was elected the first president.

The chapter grew to 14 members. Regular meetings were held about four times a year. One of the highlights of these meetings was the annual report on the actions of Synod by some person who had attended Synod and whom we felt would be able to give an informative report.

After a period of reduced interest a reorganization meeting was called in 1974. Rev. Simon Viss was elected the new president. Under Rev. Viss's able leadership the chapter grew in numbers. The reason for this was that many people in Central California were becoming concerned and even disturbed about the decisions of Synod, the new hermeneutics, and the issue coming before the churches of having women in office.

Today we have over 100 active members, most of whom live in the Ripon, Modesto, Escalon, Oakdale, and Manteca area.

Activities

We try to have four meetings a year. Our activities basically fall into two categories: Promotion and Information.

Under promotion, our chapter is growing in numbers due to a great extent to the work of our promotion and circulation chairman, Mr. Wm. Poot, Sr. He started a program of trial subscriptions. Three-month gift subscriptions would be sent out to 50 families in our area each year. These were paid for by the chapter. A three-month gift subscription costs \$2.00 each. After the subscription has run out each family is contacted by a letter asking them if they enjoyed the Outlook and if they would subscribe to it for the following year. They are also informed of the local chapter and are invited to become members.

The result of the program for the first year was about 12 new members and a number of new subscriptions for *The Outlook*.

Secondly, we try to keep the membership and the churches informed about what is taking place in our denominations and in our schools, and especially in what is happening at our Synods.

In January of each year we have our membership meeting. At this meeting new board members are elected, committees are appointed and plans are made for the new year's activities. Usually two or three public meetings are scheduled for the year. One of these meetings is in July when we obtain a speaker who has been at Synod. In this way we can get an eye-witness report on what actions were taken or not taken. This also gives an opportunity for discussion and helps to keep people informed.

For a Fall mass meeting we try to secure a speaker on some of the controversial matters which we are facing in our churches and issues on which we as members should take a stand. In the past we have had Dr. Lindsell, former editor of *Christianity Today*, speak for us on the inerrant Bible. Last year, Dr. Gary Parker, from the Institute for Creation Research, spoke on "Creation vs. Evolution."

This past year we tried a new venture. The last week in September Dr. Parker was here again for a two-day seminar on, "Whatever Happened to the Case for Evolution." This was held in the Christian High School. The Friday p.m. session was for the students. Over 300 high school and Jr. high school students attended the lecture and a film on the "Great Dinosaur Mystery." Eighty of the students who attended were from the local public school. After this a session was held for the teachers on how to teach Creationism in the schools. In the evening at the mass meeting the same film "The Dinosaur Mystery" was again shown, followed by a lecture on fossils and "Darwinism and False Religion." The Saturday sessions were designed more for the general public.

The response to the Seminar was good. One of the local Baptist pastors made a public statement that through the Seminar he was converted from theistic evolution to six day Creationism.*

After the 1980 Synod we had our editor of *The Outlook*, Rev. Peter De Jong, give us a report on Synod. He did this in a unique way, giving a birds-eye view of Synods, past and present.

There are other activities in which a chapter should take action: It might promote an overture to synod to change the rules to require a 2/3 vote of

Synod to change the "church order." (The existing rule is a simple majority.) A corporation, (our denomination), should not change its articles of incorporation, (the church order), with less than a 2/3 majority vote. Also consideration could be given to have ratification by 2/3 of the local church consistories for any major policy change made at the latest Synod. A chapter may appoint an action committee to encourage and help members to bring such overtures to church assemblies.

We hope this will interest and help other chapters to plan their activities. We hope others will report on their activities so we can all profit from them.

Just as a suggestion maybe we should have a "chapter page" in the *Outlook* magazine once in a while.

Northern Calif. Chapter Reformed Fellowship

Bert Van Dyken, president

Editor's Note: The OUTLOOK welcomes such news reports as this from our chapters and affiliates.

*A brochure is available for others who might wish to plan such a seminar. Write to 13328 West Ripon Road, Ripon CA 95366 or phone (209) 599-3780.

IRAN CLOSES THE DOOR ON CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

The radical Islamic forces unleashed by the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's revolution are putting a sudden end to 700 years of Christian missionary efforts in Iran.

The last three American Protestant missionaries in Iran were recently told to leave with their wives and children, 149 years after the first American Presbyterian minister came to preach the gospel in the Persian empire. They were the latest victims of a campaign by the government, spurred on by Moslem extremists, to drive all foreign Christian churches out of Iran.

The tiny 2,000-member Iranian Episcopal church has virtually been forced underground. One of its pastors has been killed, most of its property has been confiscated, and its leader, Iranian-born Bishop Hassan Dehghani-Taffi, has fled to England after several apparent attempts on his life.

A news item from Trowel & Sword, November 1980.

twenty-four/may, 1981

HELP ME TO LOVE THEM

There he was
disheveled, unclean, teetering
some laughed
others ignored
a few were afraid.

I saw
a man with a soul
destined for eternity
O God, help me
to reach out to him.

There they were
penniless, frustrated, arguing
a source of income
but no management
spending money foolishly
unable to meet their needs
O God, help me
to teach them
to help themselves.

There she was
desperate, lonely, bitter
forsaken by her husband
alone with her little ones
who irritated her
(poor little dears)
in need of peace and forgiveness
O God, help me to present
this truth to her.

Here am I
in a world of hurting people
but with Thee
all things are possible
May I see these
through the eyes of Christ
who had compassion
on the multitude
O God
strip me of my pride
remind me of your grace
use me
to bring these
to the foot of the cross.

Annetta Jansen
Dorr, Michigan