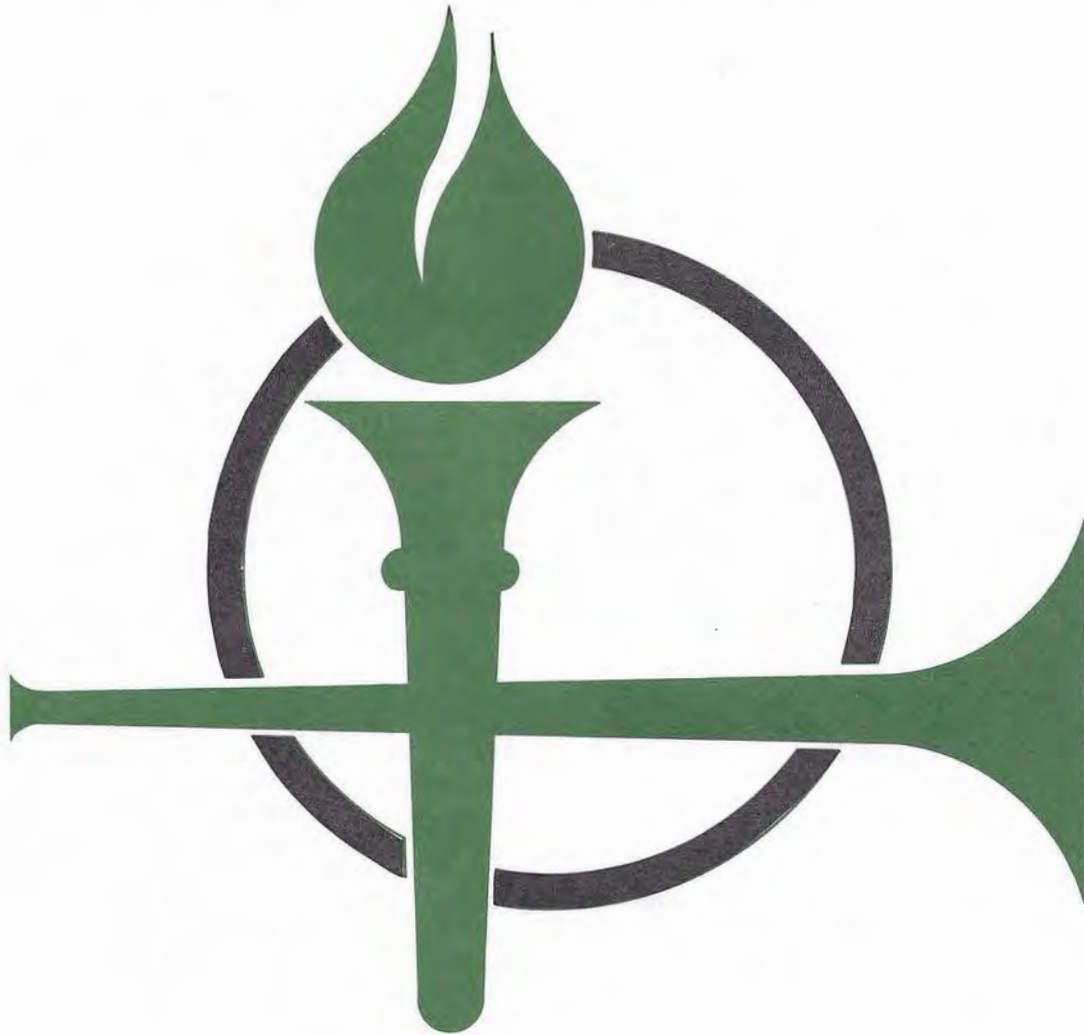


# THE OUTLOOK

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DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

- AUGUST 1981



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**REFORMED JOURNALISM**

**C. R. SYNOD**

**WHY BAPTIZE INFANTS?**

# Reformed Journalism

J. P. De Vries

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*Mr. J. P. De Vries in this article speaks from the unique point of view of one who is the editor-in-chief of a successful Christian daily newspaper. (A half century ago an effort was made in the Chicago area to begin such an enterprise, but it soon failed.) His observations about the motivation, problems, policies and opportunities for Christian journalism should interest many of our readers as well as those involved in producing THE OUTLOOK. Mr. De Vries visited and spoke in Canada with a view to encouraging the development of a Reformed news magazine among the (Liberated) Reformed people in Canada. The requirements and objectives suggested for such an enterprise in some ways remarkably parallel those of THE OUTLOOK. He suggests, for example, the need for at least 5000 subscribers—we have a little more than that. Only the financial requirement, (\$150,000 required to begin) is several times our annual budget. The article is reprinted from Clarion, The Canadian Reformed Magazine, published at Winnipeg, Manitoba.*

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I notice that there is great interest in Canada in Reformed life in the Netherlands and particularly so in our Reformed newspaper: *Nederlands Dagblad*.

This close bond, prompts me to tell you something about reformed journalism as we practice it by means of *Nederlands Dagblad*. What is our intention with that paper?

In the fifties, when most of you emigrated from Holland to Canada, there was only a *Gereformeerd Gezinsblad* (Reformed Family paper), which appeared three times a week, consisted of four pages, and was written by three editors. At the present time we publish a daily paper with an average of ten pages and with an editorial staff of fourteen persons. Compared with other daily papers we are still small. However, we are now recognized by the Dutch press. In this we may experience the hand of God over us, Who still gives us this instrument to propagate the Reformed point of view on matters of

church, state, and society, in order to be built up internally and to bear witness to outsiders.

Since 1968 we have done this under the name *Nederlands Dagblad*.

After we had become a daily newspaper, it proved to be necessary for technical reasons, especially because we were so small, to choose a name which would clearly show that "daily" character. The old name *Gereformeerd Gezinsblad* did not express this. On the other hand, we did not want to drop this name. It is still on the paper as a subtitle to indicate our character. For the new name of the paper we referred back to Groen van Prinsterer, the father of Reformed journalism in the Netherlands. In the previous century Groen first published the magazine, *Nederlandse Gedachten* (Thoughts of the Netherlands), and later the daily newspaper, *De Nederlander* (The Netherlander). Both names express the same thing: the Dutch nation emerged as a result of the battle for reformation of the church. The Reformed doctrine, as summarized in the Belgic Confession, and expressed in the Dutch national anthem, is the historical, spiritual mark of our country.

Especially in a time in which we run the danger of losing that mark, we want to remind the Dutch nation of its origin and of the duties it imposes. At the same time we express with our name that we do not practice journalism for only a specific group, the Reformed people, but that we have a message for the entire Dutch nation. We expressed Groen's intention by calling our paper *Nederlands Dagblad*. And that Dutch heritage with its Christian-historical emphasis is also of value for Canada.

That we as Reformed people in the Netherlands, with less than 100,000 members, are allowed to have such a medium, may be seen as a miracle from God. A great deal of Reformed activities, from schools to politics, would have been virtually impossible without this means of communication which reaches 80 to 90 percent of the Reformed homes. The solitary task of the one and only GPVer (member of the Reformed political party) in Parliament is made considerably lighter by a newspaper that directs the political opinions in support of his political activity. Many other political parties in The Netherlands, often much larger than our own, tend to envy us, be-

cause they miss a newspaper that supports their work. Experts in the field of journalism say that, strictly speaking, it is impossible to do what we do. No daily newspaper, and certainly not a national one, can exist without at least 150,000 subscribers. And yet we do exist. The large Labour Party, with 53 seats in the house, does not have a national newspaper any longer. Some years ago a committee attempted to start such a paper, but it did not succeed. From this committee's report it appeared that it had taken *Nederlands Dabglad* as a model for the set-up of such a paper.

With the growth of the paper, editorial interest broadened. In the fifties *Gereformeerd Gezinsblad* addressed itself almost exclusively to the Reformed (Liberated) readers. It covered the events in our churches extensively, but very little of what happened in other churches, except in the editorials in a critical sense. And church news was brought in such a way that a non-Liberated reader would get the feeling that it was not meant for him; he was an outsider.

This kind of journalism can be very meaningful for a community newspaper such as a church bulletin. But it is less fitting for a newspaper that has a message for the whole nation. Therefore we have altered our course somewhat on this point. Mind you, news from our Reformed Churches still has a prominent place on our church news page, but it is written more objectively. Moreover, attention is paid also to what happens elsewhere, nearby and far off, not only geographically but especially with regard to principles.

It is important to know what the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches are doing, because they influence the thinking of millions of people, and not least of all the thinking of those whose words carry a lot of weight. And it is exactly in those subjects that we notice the shortcomings of the general press bureaus as a source of news for the Reformed paper. He, who wants to test the development in the ecumenical movement with the Bible, has to start with selecting from a report or a meeting what he considers to be newsworthy. Therefore we consider it very important that a Reformed journalist attends such events personally, even when they occur on the other side of the globe. Fortunately, we have the financial means to do so. While other papers spend huge amounts to cover world championships and the Olympic Games, we use the money to watch the battle of the spirits.

It is, of course, understood that such a coverage forms the basis for a critical analysis based on the Bible and the Reformed Confession, although this is often unnecessary, since the report itself speaks clear language for the mature reader.

In addition we pay close attention to what happens in the orthodox Reformed world, both national and international. Also in this aspect the press bureaus are of little use to us, for they do not consider this news important enough. Consequently, also in this field we have to do the work ourselves. Although this news is not passed on without critical commentary either, we thankfully emphasize what

# THE OUTLOOK

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

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## Contents:

August 1981	Volume XXXI	No. 8
REFORMED JOURNALISM .....		2
J. P. De Vries		
CHRISTIAN REFORMED SYNOD OF 1981 .....		6
Henry Vanden Heuvel		
A STRANGE KIND OF INTEGRITY .....		11
Jelle Tuininga		
WHY BAPTIZE INFANTS? .....		12
Peter De Jong		
THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH		
THE CHURCH: GOOD OR BAD .....		16
Lubbertus Oostendorp		
D. MARTYN LLOYD-JONES ON THE		
STATE OF THE CHURCH .....		18
THE MORAL MAJORITY INC. ....		19
Simon C. Walburg		
THE PILGRIM'S EXPERIMENT		
WITH COMMUNISM .....		21
William Bradford		
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR .....		22

is good, being aware of the norm that all those who are sincere Christians belong together. Toward that unity we also want to use the paper, in the first place, by getting better acquainted (after all, unknown is unloved), and, secondly, by searching out whether we are growing toward each other or drifting further apart. Are the past obstructions towards unity still there? Are they becoming larger or smaller?

With this information we have in mind, first of all, our Reformed readers. But we also hope that our extensive information of the ecclesiastical world will draw the attention of others to our paper as a good and responsible source of information. That is of importance for the paper, and for a better understanding of each other.

Thus in this respect the paper has clearly undergone a development. It now offers the reader more than before, but it also demands more from him. He has to use his own judgment more often. For it is simply impossible to accompany each news item with a critical comment; that has to be restricted to the main lines and to obvious examples. The same applies to fields other than that of the church, albeit less pronounced. We also want to inform our readers of what is thought and said outside our Reformed circle. We are called to live in this world, and we cannot withdraw from it.

However, one thing has remained the same throughout the years, and that is the Reformed basis of this paper. We try to observe the world around us with Reformed ears and eyes, and to pass judgment from a Reformed point of view. The Confession remains our guide, also in what it says about the church. The sad consequence is often that many who profess to adhere to the Bible become disappointed and turn away because the call to reformation in church and life sounds too harsh in their ears. To establish and to retain a Reformed paper and to reach with it as many people as possible, often seems like pursuing a square circle. But we may not do otherwise.

Nevertheless, one of the means of overcoming this is to make as good a paper as possible, a paper that gives the reader everything he may expect from a responsible daily newspaper: news, background, commentary, and also relaxation. I won't go into that last point, but I would like to say more about the other three, because they, in particular, portray our specific position as a small, Reformed paper.

Regarding the news, we realize that our possibilities are limited, in space as well as in manpower. I pointed out already that ecclesiastical news receives special attention since the general press deserts us there. Also news from parliament enjoys our attention, for without our own reporters we would never know what Reformed politicians were doing there. However, for other news we have to rely almost completely on the press bureaus. Of course, selection is required here. The editors' and correspondents' job consists mainly of supplementing it. Whenever it concerns matters of principle, we go ourselves.

Real scoops, news items which other papers and the radio haven't received, the N.D. hardly ever has. To hunt for such items requires a lot more personnel than we can afford. The news shows our character mainly in the selection. We consciously try to promote the norms of a Christian life-style, and do not pursue the taste of the general public. The weal and woe of people in show business or crime does not interest us, but what does interest us is how the government does or does not apply the norms of God's law, how the politicians apply their principles in concrete situations, and what power is exercised by pressure groups. Such matters, as a rule, are not as exciting as the front pages of the sensational press, but only in this way is the time the reader spends on his paper well-spent with equipping him for his task as Christian in this world.

Perhaps you think, news is news, and that it doesn't make any difference in which paper you read it. Nothing is farther from the truth. Every paper approaches the news from its own presupposition as to what is important and what is not. For us it means much attention for ecclesiastical matters, and, for example, no attention for the major sports, which, in our eyes, is more a matter of amusement than socially relevant. Also in other matters we are on the lookout for items which in the general news are underexposed, sometimes for political reasons (think of the position of the Christians in communistic countries). In those cases we try to fill the gap.

But no matter how hard we try to show the paper's character in the news, we have to acknowledge that our possibilities are limited here. Our readers already know the most important news items from the radio, before the paper can relate it to them. Therefore we should not seek our strength there. But we can, however, serve our readers by giving them the background of the news. A Christian, who may not stand in this world with his eyes closed, but must have them wide open, must learn to see the connections between and recognize the roots of, the daily events. Here the printed medium has a task which radio and television are unable to perform. Here a Reformed paper has a specific task, for it must show the world events in the light of Scripture, which teaches us that Jesus Christ, seated at the right hand of His Heavenly Father, governs all things and makes them subservient to the gathering of His church. In what happens on earth we see, on the one hand, the attack of the dragon, thrown from heaven, against God's people, and, on the other hand, the protecting hand of God, Who shields His people in the desert and for that purpose calls the earth to assist.

When we show the background of the news in this light, it cannot be completely separated from our third task: to give commentary. When we relate the background of an event we are to let the facts speak, be it in the light of God's Word. In the commentary the purpose is to formulate an opinion about those facts. Such a commentary is never very short in the *Nederlands Dagblad*. As a matter of fact, we allow ample room for this commentary, more than other papers — not because we want to be long-winded,

but to serve the readers. It is not of much use to the readers if they only read in a couple of sentences that something is right or wrong. They should also know *why* it is right or wrong. In order to explain that, it is often necessary that one first shows what the issue is all about. If you challenge the opinion of another, that opinion must first be carefully quoted. The ninth commandment is relevant also for journalists. A journalist has to oppose the opinions of those who think otherwise, but he has to do justice to that opinion and may not turn it into a caricature.

Further, the readers have a right to the arguments on which the opinions of the paper are based. Then they themselves can test these arguments and also use them. When they speak at work about a certain subject, it is not good enough to know that the paper disagreed with it. But, if the arguments against it have been given too, then they can work with them and try to convince others. Only in this way is it upbuilding.

A paper is to build up its readers, to strengthen and influence their conclusions and opinions, to teach them to discern what the issues are, as well as to discern true and false prophecy. This is the opinion-forming task of a newspaper. I wonder whether Reformed Holland has always realized the value and responsibility that comes with this work. That there is such a general agreement about many matters, be they ecclesiastical or political or social matters, is to a large extent due to the opinion-forming task of that one paper, which is read in nearly every family of the church, and in which capable editors give their commentaries. Without such a daily paper there would probably be no one in the Reformed Liberated community whose daily work task it would be to investigate international events. The danger would be great — if such a paper did not exist — that we would simply repeat what unbelievers say, without having tested the spirits.

But besides having a task to form opinions within the circle of its readers, the paper also has a task to explain matters to the world outside. *Nederlands Dagblad* is, as it were, the "sound-system" of the Liberated people in the Netherlands, and although we are small in number, one nevertheless takes notice of us. Articles from *Nederlands Dagblad* find their way into parliamentary and ministerial files on a variety of subjects. The effect of this work is seldom noticeable, but even if there is no effect, it still is significant. It means that persons in the highest places are regularly confronted with the message of God's Word for concrete matters for which they carry the responsibility. In this way we accomplish an important task which God's people have in this world. It is significant how often the Bible stresses that God's Word has to be proclaimed especially to the magistrates. When Paul was baptized the Lord said: "... he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry My name before the gentiles and kings and sons of Israel." One of the first persons to whom Paul speaks on his first missionary journey is the proconsul of Cyprus, Sergius Paul.

*Nederlands Dagblad* is no evangelism paper; the meditations take up very little space. But exactly by

doing what every paper does — guided, however, by the light of Scripture — we show clearly that the Christian faith is not a matter for Sundays only, or for the inner room, but that this faith should penetrate and control every aspect of life. A newspaper is a unique means of expressing this in a concrete manner, and we in the Netherlands are thankful that it pleases the Lord to give this to us. You in Canada must fulfill your calling as Christians in this world without such an instrument.

It has, however, come to my attention that you definitely feel the need for Reformed guidance beyond your church life. *Nederlands Dagblad* can do only very little to fill this need: the high cost and the language form a barrier for many. But there might be other ways through which you in Canada can still profit from the work we do in the Netherlands. In response to a request from a few brethren out of your midst the director of *Nederlands Dagblad* and I have come to Canada to investigate whether or not it would be possible to start an internationally-oriented magazine in the English language, using not only translated material from the Reformed press in Holland, but also contributions from Canada — a magazine that would give information about the broad scene of life from a Reformed perspective. Possibly you could then do without *Time* magazine because you have something better to offer your children.

It will be a difficult undertaking, and *Nederlands Dagblad* itself could certainly not realize such a plan. We can help, but you have to do it. Much is needed: at least one capable man here in Canada who can concentrate on this work 100%; at least 5000 subscribers after about two years in order to keep the magazine going financially, which means: subscribers from outside the Canadian Reformed Churches as well, ideally from all over the English-speaking world. And finally, before starting this project, a sum of money will have to be brought together, in both North America and Holland, by all those who see the necessity of such a paper. I myself think we need about \$150,000 to get it off the ground.

What I wish to ask you this evening is this: Are you prepared to set your shoulders under this endeavour?

For if with God's help this venture would succeed, it could be of great significance for the continuation of Christ's church-gathering work. We as board of *Nederlands Dagblad* would consider it a privilege if we could serve you with the fruit of our labours. Although we know that there is an ocean between us, is it not true that there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, Who is above all and through all and in all. The Church of God is not confined, bound or limited to a certain place; therefore Reformed journalism isn't either. Our purpose in life is to use the talents He has given us when and wherever we can so that the light He has granted us is not hidden under a bushel but is put on a stand to give light to all in the house; i.e., for everyone whom we hope to reach with our word. ●

# Christian Reformed Synod of 1981

Henry Vanden Heuvel

Synod met on the campus of Calvin College beginning on Tuesday morning, June 9. As usual the accommodations for synod were delightful, everything being arranged for an orderly and comfortable environment in which to carry on the business of the Christian Reformed Church. The first session of synod was in charge of the pastor of the host church, Rev. John Bergsma, of the Alpine Ave. CRC of Grand Rapids. After opening with Scripture reading and the prayer for the opening of ecclesiastical assemblies from the liturgical section of the Psalter Hymnal, Rev. Bergsma proceeded to call for the election of officers for the Synod of 1981. This is always an emotional time, of course, with all the delegates wondering who will be elected for these offices. The outcome showed that Rev. John De Kruyter was elected president, Rev. John Bergsma, vice-president; Rev. Milton Doornbos, first clerk; and Rev. Martin Geleynse, second clerk. So ended the first session of synod. All the delegates were recessed to their various committees.

## Wednesday, June 10

During the first few days of synod, most of the work is carried on in the meetings of various advisory committees. This means that not too much activity goes on in plenary sessions of synod. This is primarily true because everything that is handled by synod in an official capacity is first considered by a committee which has been appointed from the delegates to that particular synod. In recent years these committees are appointed by the officers of the previous synod, together with the Stated Clerk of the CRC. The real work in a sense, is carried on in these advisory committees. It is there that issues are discussed, debated, and finally brought to the floor of synod by way of recommendation. Often it

happens that when a committee begins its work, there are sharp differences of opinion based on different understanding of issues, and different interpretations of Scripture. This difference simply reflects the division within the Christian Reformed Church. In a very real sense synod, and thus also the delegates to synod, are a microcosm of the CRC at large. This explains the nature of these advisory committees.

A matter of some significance was handled by synod on the first Wednesday. Synod of 1980 had approved the organization of a separate classis for the churches in the Indian mission field. Now the implementation of that decision was before Synod 1981. It was a time of rejoicing when synod approved the recommendations to authorize the organization of Classis Red Mesa of the Christian Reformed Church. Rev. Paul Redhouse spoke words of appreciation to the synod for this encouragement. One of the elder delegates from Classis Rocky Mountain, Mr. Herbert Thomas Jr., a member of the Navajo Indian tribe, also spoke of this new step in our mission endeavor.

## Thursday, June 11

On Thursday the report of the committee to review the work of the Synodical Interim Committee was presented to synod. This was Report 35 in the *Agenda* for Synod. Of special interest was the recommendation dealing with "Interim Functions" of the SIC. The third recommendation of the Study Committee was that "The Synodical Interim Committee shall identify, analyze, and make recommendations to synod with respect to matters of denominational concern, which do not fall within the mandate of existing denominational agencies." The note attached to this recommendation in the *Agenda* of Synod states "the third function is new and reflects our belief that the SIC has been too timid in tackling new concerns. It would encourage the SIC to analyze issues and present proposals to synod regard-

*Rev. Henry Vanden Heuvel is pastor of the Bethel Church of Zeeland, Mich., and was one of the delegates representing Classis Zeeland at the synod sessions.*

ing matters which now either go untouched or require the appointment of study committees." There was a good deal of discussion regarding this. Rev. Geleynse said that in his opinion, the SIC has not been too timid in the past in dealing with issues and presenting them to synod. Rev. James Howerzyl, delegate from Classis California South, made a motion to delete that third recommendation. In the first roll-call vote it was found that synod endorsed the thinking of those who felt that the SIC did not need to be encouraged to "identify, analyze, and make recommendations to synod." The recommendation was deleted from the report.

### Clayton Libolt

Also on Thursday synod recommended and approved the candidacy of 28 men for the Ministry of the Word in the CRC. Synod also approved the candidacy of 9 others who were finishing up their requirements in the Seminary. At a later synod session, many of these candidates were presented to synod, and in a specially moving service, they were addressed by the president of synod and offered the congratulations of the delegates. The procedure has certainly improved in recent years over previous synods when few if any candidates were even present at synod.

One of the more important events involving candidacy was the case of Clayton Libolt. Mr. Libolt is a graduate of Calvin Seminary, a doctoral candidate at the University of Michigan in Mid-Eastern Studies. He was also seeking candidacy in the CRC. The advisory committee took note of the fact that even though he was endorsed by the faculty of Calvin Seminary, and by the Board of Trustees of Calvin College and Seminary, there was significant opposition to his candidacy both by one member of the faculty and by several board members. So the advisory committee interviewed Mr. Libolt in its committee sessions. The result of those interviews was that the committee recommended that a full interview be conducted on the floor of synod.

The interview was conducted by Rev. John Vriend, delegate from Classis Grand Rapids East. He was given about 30 minutes of interview time, followed by another 30 minutes for delegates to ask questions. It became apparent almost at once that the problem regarding Mr. Libolt's candidacy had to do with his view of the opening chapters of Genesis, and particularly, with his conception of the factuality of Adam and Eve, the serpent and the fall. He was asked, "Was Adam a historical person?" Libolt refused to answer in a yes or no way. He would only say that in his opinion it was possible that he was a historical person. The chairman of the advisory committee, Rev. Peter Brouwer, asked Libolt several questions to bring out his views of the opening chapters of Genesis. "Was there a real serpent? Was there a real tree? Was there a real voice speaking?" To each of these questions there was the ambiguous response that these things were not transparent to the historian. At the end of the interview, synod went into its only executive session for deliberation and decision.

During this time it became apparent that there was more going on than a candidate on "trial" for his candidacy. What was happening, in the opinion of this reporter, was that the Seminary was on trial. One delegate told me that if Clayton Libolt would be approved as a candidate, he would take a different position regarding the new seminary movement. However, the problem was not whether synod would approve this candidate; the problem was that to the delegates of synod, he was a product of our Seminary. It was my opinion that the "alternative seminary" weighed heavily on the minds and hearts of many at synod during the discussion that took place. And the responses of two of the seminary professors added to that opinion. One of the delegates asked about the endorsement of Mr. Libolt by the seminary faculty. Dr. John Kromminga, seminary president, answered that in the opinion of the majority of the faculty, his positions were within the Reformed confessions, particularly in light of "Report 44," (the 1972 synod report on the Bible's authority). Seminary professor, Rev. John Stek said that it was impossible for one who had not studied extensively the problems involved in the interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis to really understand the nature of those problems. In response to a question as to why one of the Seminary professors had taken exception to Mr. Libolt's candidacy the chairman of the advisory committee said that this exception was due to the candidate's denial of Mosaic authorship of the first five books of the Bible. Libolt's view, often associated with what is called the "Hypothesis Theory" of the origin of the Pentateuch, is that there were many different sources of this material, all of which was edited and put together by Ezra or someone like him in the post-exilic time of Israel's history. This is clearly a denial of what our confessions maintain as to the authorship of these books.

At the end of this executive session, synod voted by ballot and the result was that Clayton Libolt was rejected as a candidate in the Christian Reformed Church. Rejection is always a difficult thing to do. There is no doubt that it was a great disappointment for this man. But synod acted decisively, and in my opinion, with good reason.

### Friday, June 12

By this time in the work of synod, many of the decisions were rather routine. This very nature of advisory committees determined that those matters which did not involve difference of opinion were handled quickly and easily, and therefore brought to the floor of synod soon after these committees began their work. As a result, by this Friday a great many decisions were taken involving this kind of non-controversial, routine matter. However, one of the items dealt with on Friday was the appeal of the Dutton CRC regarding the "Verhey Case." This appeal had been made against the action of Synod 1979 which first had rejected the recommendation to "declare that it is persuaded that Dr. Allen Verhey clearly and unambiguously confesses the Bible to be the fully reliable and authoritative Word of God, and that he seeks through a careful method to avoid

arbitrariness in interpretation." Then Synod 1979 had adopted the recommendation "that synod accept with gratitude to God Dr. Verhey's confession that the Bible is the fully reliable and authoritative Word of God, and his intention to avoid arbitrariness in interpretation by means of a carefully articulated method." The Dutton consistory appealed to synod that Synod 1981 "rectify and complete the unfinished resolution" of the 1979 Dutton appeal on the grounds that the second recommendation adopted by Synod 1979 was substantially and verbally the same as the defeated recommendation. But Synod 1981 refused to reopen the case or to sustain the appeal of the Dutton Church. It did add by way of amendment that synod "expresses its appreciation to the Dutton Church."

### Saturday, June 13

At every Synod there are matters of particular importance. One of these was the overture from Classis Grand Rapids South requesting synod to sever relations with the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKN). The grounds for this overture are: "A. The decision of the GKN regarding practicing homosexuals, together with its clarification, in response to the request for clarification from the RES, is contrary to Scripture. B. The synod of the GKN has not heeded the concern expressed by our synod. C. The GKN has neglected the stipulations of ecclesiastical fellowship such as 'communication on major issues of joint concern' (Acts of Synod 1974, p. 57)."

Prior to synod's dealing with this overture, opportunity was given to the two fraternal delegates from the GKN to speak. They were the president of the Synod of GKN, Rev. A.C. Hofland, and the Stated Clerk of the GKN, Dr. Weijland. Both men spoke ably and with passion urging our synod not to sever relations with their church. Appeals were made to the common heritage of both our churches; to the fact that the GKN is our "mother" and that no separation should take place. We were urged to be tolerant of their situation in grappling with the difficult passages of Scripture that deal with the matter of homosexuals. Dr. Weijland referred to the movie based on the Battle of Arnhem called "A Bridge too Far." He said, Please do not do anything to make a "bridge too far" in our relationships.

It was, obviously, a charged atmosphere at synod in which now a discussion must take place regarding the overture to sever relations with the GKN. The advisory committee recommended "that synod once again formally request the GKN to reconsider, in light of what we believe to be the explicit witness of Scripture, its extremely controversial and regrettable statement of pastoral advice on the matter of homosexual disposition and experience ('beleving'). That synod, in view of the present position of the GKN on homosexual disposition and experience, redefine the terms of ecclesiastical fellowship with the GKN as follows: a. That we continue an exchange of fraternal delegates to major assemblies; joint action in areas of common concern; communication on major issues of joint concern; and the exercise of

mutual concern and admonition with a view to promoting the fundamentals of Christian unity."

The committee further recommended "that we discontinue occasional pulpit fellowship and fellowships at the table of the Lord." The issue was clear to the advisory committee. It was that the GKN permitted practicing homosexuals to belong to the church and remain in good standing. It neither condemned nor condoned their behavior. In the meetings of the advisory committee, Rev. Hofland explained the position of his church. He told the committee that a distinction must be made between two individuals of the same sex living together in a relationship of trust and love on the one hand, and a homosexual who goes to the gay community and lives a promiscuous life. That, he said, is clearly wrong. But if two persons of the same sex live together in such a relationship of trust and love, that is beautiful. To say the least, this admission on the part of the president of the GKN synod came as a shock to most of the members of the advisory committee. And for that reason the committee came with the recommendations to discontinue occasional pulpit fellowship and fellowship at the table of the Lord. The grounds for such action were that the decision of the GKN allowing practicing homosexuals to be members of the church is clearly contrary to Scripture. Further the Scriptures forbid us to condone fellowship with those who live immorally. The committee felt it owed it both to ourselves and the GKN to take a definitive stand on this issue at this time lest by our failure to speak we inadvertently encourage a way of life that is contrary to the Word of God.

Even though the advisory committee recommended discontinuing occasional pulpit fellowship and fellowship at the table of the Lord, it did encourage such fellowship with those members of the GKN who did not endorse their church's stand on this matter. The matter now was before Synod. Rev. John Vriend objected to the word "explicit" in the recommendation of the committee. He felt that while it is certainly true that the decision of the GKN was controversial, it is not true that Scripture is "explicit" in its condemnation of practicing homosexuals. He recommended the deletion of the word. But synod by a vote of 65 to 85 defeated that amendment. He then urged that the decision of the GKN was not "regrettable" as stated in the recommendation. But again synod did not endorse his appeal. Synod adopted the first recommendation urging the GKN to reconsider its regrettable and controversial decision in the light of the explicit teaching of Scripture.

At this point synod adjourned for the week-end.

### Monday, June 15

The advisory committee's recommendations to discontinue fellowship at the table of the Lord and occasional pulpit fellowship was in sharp disagreement with the report of the InterChurch Relations Committee. This is a standing committee in the CRC which deals with the relationship between the CRC and other church bodies. Obviously the overture



from Classis Grand Rapids South regarding severing relations with the GKN was of great interest to this committee. Under the leadership of its chairman, Rev. Clarence Boomsma, this committee was given the privilege of presenting its views regarding the overture, and our relations with the GKN. As a standing committee, it had precedence over the advisory committee because its views were different from that of the advisory committee.

Rev. Boomsma urged that synod not sever relations with the GKN, even on these two matters of fellowship at the table and occasional pulpit fellowship. He noted that the GKN had finally answered the communication sent to it from our synod regarding our disappointment with its stand on homosexuals. And therefore, Boomsma said, we are finally speaking with each other. Let us give more time for that discussion. Rev. John Stek, one of the professors of our seminary, suggested that it is hardly justifiable to make a break with the GKN on merely an ethical matter. He went on to say that the issue of apartheid in the South African churches is something that merits separation, but not an ethical issue such as homosexuality. What was amazing to this reporter was that Professor Stek saw the issue as just an ethical matter, whereas the advisory committee and even the fraternal delegate knew it to be a matter of Scriptural interpretation. After more discussion, much of which was emotional on the part of delegates whose relatives are members of the GKN, the question was called resulting in the adoption of the recommendations of the InterChurch Relations Committee, and thus the rejection of the recommendations of the advisory committee. Synod will continue dialogue with the GKN, and if necessary at some later time, possible separation in pulpit and table fellowship can be considered.

### Capital Punishment

The second of the items of special importance coming to synod was that dealing with capital punishment. The study committee came to synod by way of the agenda with its recommendations "that synod declare that the Scriptures lay no general mandate on modern states to exercise capital punishment; that the Scriptures do permit modern states to inflict capital punishment; and that according to the spirit of Scripture, capital punishment is prudently exercised only under special circumstances and not as a general rule."

The advisory committee was split into three groups on this matter. The majority of the committee took the position of the study committee. A minority of two differed essentially with the majority in that it recommended that synod declare "that the Scriptures lay a general mandate on states to exercise capital punishment for murder." A third minority of one wanted synod to declare that "Scripture does not permit modern states to inflict capital punishment." This position was taken by elder delegate from Classis Kalamazoo, John Hofman, a defense attorney, who argued that capital punishment removes all opportunity for repentance and conversion from the murderer, and it takes the judgment

belonging only to God away from Him. The first minority position was taken by Rev. Ralph Pontier, delegate from Classis Florida. Rev. Pontier was an able speaker for his position, but synod adopted the majority recommendations. The most important aspect of this entire discussion on capital punishment was really not so much what synod says about it. For obviously synod does not exercise capital punishment. No recommendation was even made that this report be sent to the governments of the United States and Canada as the thinking of the CRC on this matter. The most important thing was the view of Scripture which was represented by the study committee report. The key passage in the Old Testament dealing with this issue is Genesis 9:6, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man." One would think that this clear passage of Scripture settles the matter. But the study committee said that this text must be taken as a kind of proverb. We cannot take it as a command of God, binding on modern states in all times. The fact that synod adopted its recommendations is unfortunate, to my mind, because those recommendations are based on that kind of Scriptural interpretation.

### Tuesday, June 16 — Women in Office

The issue that has been at the center of controversy within the CRC for nearly ten years finally came to the floor of synod. The question of women in church office was discussed before a house full of visitors. The chairman, Rev. John De Kruyter, began by welcoming the visitors, and informing them that whereas they were more than welcome to listen to the discussion, he would not tolerate any outbursts of applause. Rev. De Kruyter was at his best during this entire discussion.

The study committee had come to synod with one majority report, and two minority reports. The advisory committee likewise was divided, one majority and two minority recommendations. But the amazing thing to many at synod was that the majority of the advisory committee took essentially the position of the one-man minority of the study committee, Rev. Henry Vander Kam. The recommendation was that synod "postpone indefinitely the implementation of the decision of the Synod of 1978 regarding the ordination of women as deacons." The first minority recommendation of the advisory committee was essentially the same as the majority report of the study committee. It recommended "that synod allow consistories to ordain qualified women to the office of deacon, provided that their work is distinguished from that of elder." Then followed the proposed revisions of those articles in the Church Order that would have to be changed to coincide with that recommendation. The second minority recommendation asked that synod simply allow churches to ordain women as deacons, making no distinction between the office of elder and deacon.

The chairman ruled that since the first minority of the advisory committee report was substantially the same as the majority of the study committee report, it had the precedence on the floor of synod.

The recommendation would essentially change our concept of the office deacon. It would effectively put the deacon out of the consistory room as far as authority over the church is concerned. A lengthy study in the committee report by Dr. James De Jong showed that historically this was the position of the Presbyterian churches ever since Reformation times. But the discussion that followed soon showed that not very many were happy with this kind of compromise. Rev. John Vriend urged synod not to adopt this recommendation. He said it was a put-down to the office of deacon as well as to women. He said he hoped that if it were adopted, not one single woman in the CRC would allow her name to be placed on nomination for deacon. Rev. John Hellinga, delegate from Classis Huron, urged synod not to adopt this recommendation or that of the second minority because, he said, the unity of the church is more important than women in church office. The church is obviously not ready for women in church office. Rev. Jacob Kuntz of Classis Hamilton, took the opposite position. He said that women in church office is like the place of women in our homes. They do not stay in the kitchen, while the husband is in the living room. Together husband and wife make decisions. And the wife has the right to authority in the home as well. It should also be so in the church, he urged. "Why," he said, "even THE OUTLOOK had an article by a woman telling synodical delegates how they ought to vote on this issue. "When many of the delegates broke into laughter, he said, "And I like that! They ought to be allowed to speak and exercise authority."

And so the discussion went on. Then a motion was made to table this recommendation, and go to the second minority recommendation of the advisory committee. This recommendation was to allow churches to ordain qualified women as deacons with no distinction from that of elder. The motion to consider this recommendation was adopted by a very small majority. Now synod was dealing with the second minority recommendation. Then someone urged synod not to adopt this position because, said he, it would violate the concept of headship that is apparent especially in the authority that is granted to both the elder and deacon in Article 30 of the Belgic Confession. The introduction of the headship principle in the discussion turned deliberations toward this new angle. Rev. Douglas Warners of Classis Lake Erie said that if this recommendation is adopted, a door will be opened that cannot be shut. Even though the recommendation calls only for women to be ordained as deacons, it will lead to women as elders and ministers. Rev. James Howerzyl spoke on the perspicuity of Scripture. It is very clear, he said. And it is easy to understand that the Bible does not permit the woman to have authority over the man. At last the vote was called on the second minority recommendation and the motion was defeated.

Now our attention was directed back to the majority of the advisory committee which wanted to postpone the implementation of the 1978 synod decision regarding the ordination of women as deacons. Again there was a great deal of debate both pro and contra this recommendation. At last elder delegate

from Classis Toronto, George Vander Velde, asked if he could move to table the recommendation and to present a recommendation of his own. This was permitted. His recommendation was "that synod postpone the implementation of the decision of the Synod of 1978 regarding the ordination of women as deacons, pending the findings of a study committee on headship." He further recommended that synod appoint a study committee to examine "the meaning and scope of headship in the Bible as it pertains to the relationships of husband and wife and man and woman to ascertain: a) whether headship has implications for authority and leadership in marriage and family, church, business, educational institutions and government, and, if so, how? b) How these conclusions apply to the question of whether women may hold office in the church." After some discussion, a committee was appointed by the chairman to clarify these recommendations and present them later in the day. This was done, and synod quickly approved the recommendations. This study committee consists of Rev. John De Kruyter, convener; Dr. Anthony Hoekema, Mrs. Martheen Griffioen, Dr. David Holwerda, Rev. Wayne Kobes, Rev. Gordon Pols, and Mrs. Thea Van Halsema. It is to report to Synod of 1983. So ended a long day of discussion on the issue of women in church office.

### Wednesday, June 16

The work of synod was just about completed. There were still important items such as the budget matters to be taken up on this last day. One of the important decisions had to do with Christian care of retarded persons. Synod appointed the present committee on Christian care for retarded persons as a service committee for ministry to retarded persons for two years. Synod also heard the appeal from First CRC of Grand Rapids regarding the gravamen of Dr. Harry Boer against the confessional teaching of the doctrine of reprobation. Synod refused to sustain that appeal. Another appeal to synod carries with it some very important implications for the future of the educational institutions of our church. This was the appeal of Classis Chicago South regarding the President of Trinity Christian College. The appeal was based on the decision of the synodical deputies not to permit Dr. George Van Groningen to retain his ministerial credentials as President of Trinity College. Classis Chicago South approved his being called to this position, but the deputies refused to sustain that decision. Therefore it was appealed to synod. The advisory committee recommended and synod decided that the synodical deputies were correct in not permitting a minister to be called to the presidency of Trinity Christian College and retaining his credentials as a minister of the Word. This will surely have ramifications for such colleges as Dordt, King's College, and Redeemer College, not to mention Calvin, and ministers' service in any other area outside the institutional church.

And so synod came to adjournment late Wednesday evening. From my observation, I would say that synod acted with some degree of hesitation on many

issues. It did, of course, act decisively in regard to Clayton Libolt. But it was not courageous when it came to the GKN. It hesitated and equivocated where it had a golden opportunity to act with strength and prophetic witness regarding the truth of Scripture. It also postponed action again on the matter of women in ecclesiastical office. I do not think this issue will die. It is bound to come up again. This synod had an opportunity to act decisively one way or another. It took a decision which at least postponed final decision for two more years.

Positively, this synod was marked by fewer "political" manipulations than some previous synods. I believe this was due in no small measure to the evenhandedness of the chairman, John De Kruyter. He

was given a standing ovation at the end of synod from an appreciative body. Many have remarked about the singing at synod. It is always outstanding, but this year it seemed to me it was even better than other years. This was surely due to the expert accompaniment at the organ by delegates Rev. Jack Vander Plate from Classis Florida and elder Bert Polman from Classis Toronto. It was an important synod dealing with issues that have been with us many years, and will continue to be with us for many more. Our prayer is that the Lord who is the king of His Church will bless what was done according to His Word, and will bring to nought that which is not pleasing to Him. May He be praised by this synod and every one to come. ●

## A Strange Kind of Integrity

Jelle Tuininga

In the issue of June 1, *The Banner* editor makes a plea for openness, honesty and integrity. "We should all calm down, be open and honest with each other, argue with each other, never stop loving each other. . . ." He also states "that *The Banner* does not sell pages for messages of prophets and prophetesses on either side of a given issue."

I endorse the editor's plea. We surely could stand some more integrity, especially among the leaders, in the way we handle things in our ecclesiastical house.

But I have never been able to understand why *The Banner* keeps allowing space for the ads of the self-styled "Committee for Women in the Chr. Ref. Church." Is this not "sell(ing) pages for messages of . . . prophetesses"? The style and purpose of this Committee is clearly informed by the secular philosophy of the Women's Liberation Movement and revolutionary in character. Never mind duly established authority in the church: these women are determined, come hell or high water, to open all the offices in the church to women. And they are willing to pursue all ends to reach that goal, including special "prayer services" before the meetings of synod.

But notwithstanding the revolutionary character of this movement, *The Banner* keeps allowing room

for their ads, and now *Calvinist Contact* is also getting on the band wagon. I don't understand this business.

Some years ago synod took concrete steps to silence the Assn. of Chr. Ref. Laymen. Consistories were even instructed to discipline members of this Assn.! We could not put up with this kind of stuff!

Nevertheless, one thing is clear in my mind: the A.C.R.L. was not nearly as revolutionary or undermining in character as is this Women's Committee. The former at least had high regard for our creeds and the Church Order. That's more than I can say for these women! Yet the latter have freedom to propagate their views.

A few years ago synod came close to reprimanding the Dutton consistory for continually protesting the erroneous teachings of Dr. Verhey, while the same synod refused to take a clear stand on the doctrinal issue at hand.

It seems that some things are more allowed in the church than others, all depending on who makes the rules. I think Christ said something about meting with one measure. What is more, the Lord's Supper form talks about the "gross sin" of those "who seek to raise discord . . . or mutiny in Church or State." Well, if this Women's Committee does not fall into that category, then I would like to know who or what does.

We need integrity to be sure. But I find this a strange kind of integrity.

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# Why Baptize Infants?

Peter De Jong

I still have some clear memories of what was probably my first serious encounter with that question when, just out of seminary and in our first parsonage in the southeastern corner of Texas, we entertained a Presbyterian and a Baptist minister. It was not long before the two veterans were giving the newcomer an introduction to what must be one of the most debated religious questions in that Baptist land. The Baptist had just appealed to his classic text, Mark 16:16, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" to establish his principle that the only possible way in which anyone can be saved is by believing, that to be followed by being baptized. The Presbyterian countered with the question: "Suppose that you had a baby who died in infancy; would you say that that child is saved or lost?" The other hesitated, but finally answered, "Saved." "How can you say that?" was the retort. "Didn't you just tell us that the only possible way anyone can be saved is by first believing?" "Because the baby hasn't rejected Christ yet," was the somewhat reluctant explanation. "Oh, then you also have another way of salvation, haven't you?" was the response. That ended the argument.

This Baptist embarrassment about the proper role of children in the Christian faith has serious practical implications. Some time later we were dinner guests in a home in which the mother was a Baptist and the father a Lutheran. The mother brought up a question of conscience which troubled her. She wondered whether she was right in teaching the children to pray, "because they are not Christians yet." If one teaches someone who is not a Christian to act like one, is she not teaching hypocrisy? As a good Christian mother she was teaching her children to pray, but she had difficulty in squaring that with the logic of her religious conviction about baptism.

Why do we baptize infants? In Reformation times the Reformers were ready and often eager to answer that question to anyone who would question or challenge the practice. Some years ago some research in the early Dutch Reformed Church history showed how the 16th century Reformed church leaders were ready to debate this and related questions with their Anabaptist critics to the extent of prolonging one such debate into 156 sessions!\*

Today it often seems that many of our enthusiastic

Baptist friends are more eager to try to give Biblical arguments for their denial of infant baptism than our Reformed people are to explain the Biblical grounds for practicing it. On this point, as regarding other questions about our Christian faith and life, we ought, like our forerunners, to "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15). In response to a request to deal with this subject let's face the question, "Why do we baptize infants?"

## God's Revelation

We baptize infants because the Lord included them in His gospel, covenant and church. Does the Bible teach this? Let's recall some of the evidence for it. As we have already observed, many people object to baptizing infants because they say that the Bible teaches us to baptize only believers in Christ, little children cannot understand and believe, and therefore we may not baptize them. What does the Bible really say?

## Family Baptisms

In Acts 16:30-34 we are told how the missionaries encountered the desperate Philippian jailer who asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Notice that the question was individual and personal. It is the more significant that the answer included much more than the question. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, you and your household." "And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. And . . . immediately he was baptized, he and all his household. And he . . . rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household" (NAS). Notice how repeatedly and emphatically the "household" or family is included. We observe the same phenomenon earlier in the chapter as it tells of Lydia. "The Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us . . ." (vv. 14, 15). Several times the New Testament speaks of the baptism of such

\**Wilhelmus Johannes Kuhler, De Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche Doopsgezinden in de Zestiende Eeuw, Haarlem, 1932, H.D. Tjeenk Willink en Zoon, pp. 447, 448. Kuhler mentions another such debate that ran to 124 sessions.*

"households" (1 Cor. 1:16). Critics may argue that the record does not state the age of the children. True, but the point is that the whole families of believers were baptized.

### The Church Included Children

Are there any clear indications that little children were included in the churches? Yes, there are. Consider the Letter to the Ephesians addressed to "the saints who are at Ephesus, and who are faithful in Christ Jesus" (1:1). "Saints," the "separated from the world and dedicated to the Lord" was the standard New Testament term for Christians. Among those saints addressed in the letter were "Children" who must "obey your parents in the Lord . . . Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise)." Correspondingly Christian parents are enjoined to "bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (6:1-4). 1 Corinthians 7:14 makes it plain that this "holy" or "saintly" status of children as church members even holds if only one of the parents is a believer. It leaves no doubt whatever of their being included in the Lord's church. The New Testament knows nothing of the conscientious scruples of our Baptist friend against teaching them to act as Christians "because they are not Christians yet."

Powerfully reinforcing this clear Biblical teaching that children of believers must be regarded and treated as members of the Lord's people was the Lord's own correction of his apostles. The Lord was involved in a discussion of the evidently much-debated questions about marriage and divorce (Matt. 19:3-15; Mark 10:3-16; Luke 18:15-17). When parents brought their children (Luke reported "babies") to Jesus, his followers felt that this was an interruption of much more important business and rebuked the parents. Mark reported this as one of the very few times when Jesus became "indignant" with his followers. "Permit the children to come to Me;" He said, "do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all."

The disciples, like present-day objectors to children's baptism and their being considered members of the Lord's church and people, assumed that their involvement required that they be able to understand and act. Therefore their inability necessarily excluded them from a proper place in these matters. The Lord's angry correction showed that the disciples' assumption was not just a minor mistake but a radical misunderstanding of the nature of the Lord's work and kingdom. The Lord's gospel and kingdom were not in the first place matters of man's decision and activity (as the Pelagians and Arminians of every age have misunderstood them) but of the Lord's initiative and action. Man's response, though required, is secondary. If the Lord has decreed that children of believers, even the "babies" are to be included, His blundering followers must not be permitted to keep them out. That is clearly the significance of His angry rebuke.

Pointing in the same direction as these scriptures

is the conclusion of Peter's sermon explaining Pentecost (Acts 2:38, 39). "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself."

### Fulfillment of Old Testament Promises

In my early experiences with Baptist views it very soon became apparent that the basic difference between their understanding of these matters and ours was a result of their radical separation of the Old Testament from the New so that the Old Testament was really regarded as no longer valid for us. "New Testament Christianity" was and is for many of them a common description of our faith. Any careful reading of the New Testament, however, makes it plain that although there is a difference between the Old and the New there simply is no such radical break between the two as they assume. The Bible, constantly quoted by the Lord and His Apostles throughout the New Testament as God's Word, was the Old Testament. I have a New Testament published some years ago for evangelistic work among Jews in which quotations from or references to the Old Testament appear in bold-faced type. It might surprise many readers to discover how large a part of the text is in such bold-faced type. To get any comprehensive understanding of our Christian faith while restricting oneself to the New Testament is about as difficult as understanding a novel when reading only the last third of it, or as difficult as understanding our nation's laws while disregarding the U.S. Constitution.

Even more prominent in God's Revelation than the Constitution is in our nation's laws is God's "Covenant." That word, largely ignored in most church circles today, appears about 300 times in the Bible. Although most of them are in the Old Testament over 30 of them are in the New. It refers to the relationship which God established with His People. It is not merely a personal relationship but one which He defined in words, in promises and commandments. The Bible is God's "Book of the Covenant" — our English Word "Testament" is an alternate word which can just as accurately be translated "Covenant." The Bible in both Old and New Testaments is constantly referring back to the earlier, basic, establishment of God's covenant as a kind of "constitution" of His relationship with His people. Peter appealed to that on Pentecost, "For the promise is for you and your children. . . ." It is especially to the covenant as God made it with Abraham and his children that the New Testament, as well as the Old, appeal.

Someone might ask, "What proof can you give that the Christian faith is to be understood in this way?" The plainest explanation of the gospel as the working out of God's covenant with Abraham is the explanation of it in the third chapter of Paul's letter to the Galatians. As the Apostle had to correct the Galatians' misunderstanding of the gospel, he referred to Abraham. "Even so Abraham believed God

and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'All the nations shall be blessed in you.' So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer" (vv. 6-9). Paul went on to explain how Christ fulfilled this promise by His suffering and death "in order that in Christ the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (v. 14). If men's contracts must be maintained, even more must God's covenant be fulfilled to the letter (15ff.). Thus he led to the conclusion, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." "And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (vv. 26, 27, 29).

Romans 4 also speaks of Abraham as the father of all believers, both Jew and Gentile. It reminds us that, as such, Abraham "received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of faith" (v. 11). That sign of the covenant relationship to God given to Abraham the believer, the Lord also commanded should be given to his infant children (Genesis 17:7ff.). Paul in Colossians 2:11, 12 shows that this Old Testament sign of circumcision had the same meaning as the New Testament sign, baptism, does for us, expressing and assuring to us our saving relationship with the Lord.

### Our Obligations

In order to appreciate and profit by God's covenant revelation to us and our children, symbolized and assured by baptism, we always have to bear in mind the *commands* and *obligations* included in it. One of the most common and destructive errors among God's people in both Old and New Testaments has been the neglect of this part of God's revelation. The covenant revelation to Abraham included duties as well as promises. He must (Genesis 18:19) "command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him."

Throughout the Old Testament one of the most common complaints of God's prophets was that His people, usually ready to reassure and even pride themselves in His promises, neglected and disobeyed His command to believe in and obey Him. They had to be warned that they were "breaking" His covenant and depriving themselves and their children of His blessing.

The same warnings recur in the preaching of John the Baptist and of our Lord. Those who prided themselves on their status as covenant children of Abraham but lacked Abraham's obedience of faith were deceiving themselves (Matt. 3:9; John 8:33, 39-44), and needed to be called to repentance.

Our Baptist friends have often found fault with the practitioners of infant baptism for filling their

churches with unbelievers who think they are saved because they were baptized. Their objection does not hold, as they think, against infant baptism, which we have seen is a Biblical doctrine, but it is valid against the only too common misuse of infant baptism. It often seems that the misuse of infant baptism has been encouraged in our Reformed circles especially by the mischievous notion of "presumptive regeneration." This is, to state it simply, the idea that infant baptism assumes that all of these children are already "born again" and therefore need neither regeneration nor conversion. We may safely assume therefore according to this idea that everybody in the church is already certainly saved and that therefore no one needs to trouble himself about that. One wonders how much this way of thought and life has contributed to the apostasy of our old mother churches in the Netherlands. There can be little doubt that it is contributing to our own.

But doesn't this doctrine of the covenant's inclusion of the children of believers and their corresponding baptism make the preaching of repentance and conversion in the church superfluous? The Lord and His apostles certainly never taught us that it did. The Lord warned his followers, "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3, 5). Similarly Paul addressed the Corinthian church, "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God," "And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain. . . ." (2 Cor. 5:20, 6:21).

We must be on guard against letting the "sign" and "seal" of the "righteousness of faith" be perverted by our faulty practice into an encouragement to unbelief and disobedience. Therefore in our traditional "form" for infant baptism, parents must promise to instruct their children in the Christian faith to the "utmost of their power" before baptism is given to their children. And everything possible must be done to lead the children to Christ, for that is the way in which the Lord designed to convey to them their heritage in His kingdom (Mark 10:14). While gospel and sign are a God-given encouragement to faith for believers and their children, if they are abused to justify unbelief they will call for more severe judgment (Luke 12:47, 48; 10:10-14).

Why baptize infants? The Heidelberg Catechism nicely summarizes the Biblical argument. "Infants as well as adults are in God's covenant and are his people. They, no less than adults, are promised the forgiveness of sin through Christ's blood and the Holy Spirit who produces faith. Therefore, by baptism, the mark of the covenant, infants should be received into the Christian church and should be distinguished from the children of unbelievers. This was done in the Old Testament by circumcision, which was replaced in the New Testament by baptism." And the catechism was carefully drawn up to help give those children a thorough Biblical training in order that the promise of the gospel and sacrament might become their experience in the way of obedient faith.

REFORMED FELLOWSHIP, INC.

PUBLISHERS OF THE OUTLOOK

4855 STARR STREET S. E.

GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN 49506

Phone 949-5421

Dear Subscriber:

The Board of the Reformed Fellowship commends you for your vital interest in the Reformed faith as evidenced by your subscription to THE OUTLOOK. Our aim has been and still is to help those who love the Reformed faith maintain their perception of Biblical truth. We are not averse to the idea expressed in the cliché that we should "always be reforming". Our concern is that we do not become so concerned with "reforming" that our Reformed principles become diluted so that they are no longer recognized.

The concern in much of the church today to be accepted by the world on its terms is leading many to believe that the church must adapt its principles to accommodate such ideas as evolution, women's "rights", etc., etc. (A prospective candidate for the ministry appeared before our recent Synod, with both Seminary Faculty and Board recommendation, who expressed personal disbelief regarding a historical Adam and Eve.) We realize that it is not very popular in this climate to hold forth the truth that "our God is the same yesterday, today, and forever", and that His Word is truth and does not change.

Since ours is not a popular movement (and we're not here to conduct a popularity contest), we continue to struggle financially, although we must confess that the Lord has provided for all our needs to the present.

We are eager to disseminate more information to help those who are interested in holding for the positive truth of the Scriptures as it is set forth in our Reformed Confessions and the Creeds. Our best means of doing this is via THE OUTLOOK, which is presently heavily subsidized by the members of the Reformed Fellowship.

At the beginning of this letter we commended you for your interest in the Reformed faith. Will you show your further loyalty to this cause by becoming members of the Reformed Fellowship and also by personally recommending THE OUTLOOK to others? This can be done in various ways - suggesting that others subscribe, passing your copy on when you've read it, giving gift subscriptions at the special rate offered for this purpose (for new subscribers only, please!) and by sending additional gifts to the Reformed Fellowship so we can send out promotional copies from time to time.

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Sincerely,

THE BOARD OF THE REFORMED FELLOWSHIP

# THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

## the church: good or bad

Lubbertus Oostendorp

### A Biblical Church Order?

The Reformers wanted to ground their church polity on the Scriptures. This was their strength against the traditions of Rome. Calvin was fully convinced that the church order which he developed could be derived from the Bible. Any recent efforts to deny the sufficiency of the Word as a guide for the rule of the church is thus a radical departure from the Reformed heritage.

To simply affirm the Scriptural bases of the Presbyterian system will not remove several modern difficulties. The knotty questions raised by the proliferation of denominations as well as the questions of culturally dated precepts have brought with them many problems. An honest conversation with other denominations as well as a profound study of Scriptural principles may not be easy, but they are necessary.

### The True - False Distinction

What about the old distinction between the true and the false church? Who today would dare to apply to the contemporary confusion the rule of the Belgic Confession that "these two churches are easily known and distinguished from each other." Of course, the truth of this statement must be historically justified. Nor do we have to change the basic standards of judgment. Only the application has become hopelessly complex. However, the pressure toward ecumenicity should not force us to abandon the important distinction true - false. No new discoveries have warranted our denial of our heritage in the Protestant Reformation. Nor should we hastily call a church false. But many of our brethren in

other communions who are rejecting the doctrinal and moral stand of several mainline denominations are worthy of our support. The distinction true - false must still be maintained.

### The Better - Worse Distinction

More practical however for most of us would be an emphasis on "better" and "worse." The crisis of a church being so false that one must leave it arises only in extreme situations. The duty to seek the "better" and rebuke the "worse" is a constant challenge in every church. Paul's letters, as well as the message to the seven churches of Rev. 2 and 3, stress the importance of not being too content with the fact that we are a "true" church. How often, alas, churches have had "a name that they were alive, but were dead" (Rev. 3:2). Too often the great illusion was maintained of a "better image of ourselves." We thought we were rich but were poor, thought that we were clothed but were naked, thought that we could see but really were blind (Rev. 3:17, 18).

In teaching the doctrines of ecclesiology the issue true - false is not particularly helpful. Much more helpful is the concept better - worse. Seldom does Scripture deal with the issue of a totally false church. In fact, it is rather difficult to find even defective congregations like Corinth put in that category. The New Testament however is constantly pointing out defects ("as many as I love I rebuke," Rev. 3:19) and pressing on toward an ideal church.

In dealing with problems in the denomination or in trying to make improvements it is all too easy to be forced into a psychological or logical corner by the constant reference to true - false. Strange as it



may seem, overly zealous defense of the status quo has historically hindered the very reforms which might have saved in a critical situation. Practically every church reform I have studied saw the conflict deepened into a true - false crisis. And every time the critics were forced into more radical judgments by the blindness and vehemence of the defenders. This certainly was true of the Roman Catholics and Luther and of the dealings of the Dutch Church with De Cock and Abraham Kuyper. Instead of seeking to remedy evils, the defenders stubbornly denied their existence. "We dare you to call us the false church!" became the defensive cry. And then by persecuting the prophetic spirits who dared to criticize, they proved how close they were to the description of the false church in the last sentences of Art. XXIX of the Belgic Confession (a church that persecutes Christians).

In dealing with the marks of the church using the distinction better - worse, we can try to press on to an ideal church. Then we can talk frankly about better preaching of the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). In this area, too, as in the matter of commitment to sound doctrine, we have too often been cornered with the "good enough" mentality. We have even been tempted by a psychologically arrived at "better image of ourselves" while in sober reality our performance continued to deteriorate.

### Maintaining the Marks

A good church preaches the truth of the Word of God. It does this not only as dependent on the preferences of one pastor or another, but by a conscious desire of the congregation. Moreover, this determination to have the Word purely, consistently and adequately preached must be carried out. Pastors and elders must show concern not only for what is said but for what is being omitted. And perhaps today the omissions have become the bigger problem. Until someone can show me a better guide for well-rounded and comprehensive preaching of the whole doctrine of salvation, let that most helpful document, the Heidelberg Catechism, keep us on the right path. Nor should the expository preaching on whole Bible books be avoided because it requires diligent study.

Preaching and teaching go together. A good church is concerned with the instruction of the children. This also holds for good seminary training of its preachers.

Some theologians have suggested the added mark of missions to the three familiar marks of the church. By once more placing this in the context of better - worse instead of true - false, we certainly would have to include it. Personally, I have preferred to place missions under the adequate and faithful preaching of the Word. For how can we adequately preach the Gospel and limit it to the congregation? A good church carries on evangelism. It preaches the Gospel to the whole world!

Calvin seemed to be even more interested in the content and quality of the faith than was his disciple, De Bres. Each in his own way includes in the marks of the true church obedience to the Word. In the

*Institutes* IV 2:4 Calvin reminds us that the true sheep not only "hear Christ's voice," but "follow" Him. The Belgic Confession speaks of "all things being done according to the Word" and describes the resulting body of obedient Christians. Karl Barth, in his own existential way, claimed that the Church "existed" only when and while the congregation was believably and obediently listening to the Word. Based as it was upon the idea of the existential moment, this view would limit the existence of the church rather severely. In a more traditional way it is good to emphasize the importance of *receiving* and *obeying* the Word!

### Ministry of Mercy

Speaking rather within the context of a good church than in an absolute idea of true - false, at least one more mark should be added. In my classes on the doctrine of the church as well as in my congregational ministry I have always stressed the importance of the *ministry of mercy*. Does it not seem strange that there should be three offices to carry on the work of the church and only two of them have a significant part in marking a true church? Granted that the ministry of the truth should more naturally determine the truth or falsity of the church, why is the ministry of the deacon completely neglected? Again, granted that the maintaining of discipline is integrated with defending the truth, why should there not be also an emphasis on the love that marks the Christian and the Christian church. Let me hasten to explain, that I do not want to have the work of mercy forced into the corner of the "true - false" church. But that the faithful and loving exercise of diaconal work is a vital activity of a good church, I trust no one will deny.

Imagine if you will, a church in which there are many affluent members. Some who spare no expense to satisfy their every desire have the controlling voice among the deacons. The congregation has just recently decided to spend several hundred thousand dollars on a new building. Again everything must be the very best!

There is, however, a poor girl. She is a "new" member. That means she has not contributed to the funds of the church. Through no fault of her own, she has become ill and has incurred a large medical debt. After much fear and hesitation, she gets up courage to ask help from the deacons. She does so because the Bible says in Psalm 72:

*When the needy seek Him  
He will mercy show  
Yea the weak and helpless  
Shall His pity know.*

She knocks at the door and asks for help. Without explanation she is sent away. Have they said: "You were seeking the merciful Lord at our door? What a sad confusion in your mind. Go away. *For He is not here!*" What shall we think of the "Christian" character of such a church as this?

The ministry of mercy is a mark of the loving Christian church. We might speak of discipline and sacraments as further marks of the church. But this is enough for this article.

# D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones on the State of the Church

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*On Sunday, March 1, the Lord took from the evangelical Christian world one of the most influential preachers he has given us in our time, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. The Banner of Truth to which he had long been a "constant helper and adviser" devoted a special (May) issue to him and his labors. From it we print two excerpts of his addresses which may be especially interesting to our readers. The address of the Banner of Truth is 3 Murrayfield Road, Edinburgh, Scotland (Its U.S. address is P.O. Box 621, Carlisle, Pa. 17013.)*

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## THE FIRST REPORTED ADDRESS: 'THE TRAGEDY OF MODERN WALES,' MARCH 1925

*Extract from 36 pages of hand-written notes*

A nation given whole-heartedly to worldly success cannot possibly produce a great pulpit. Preaching today—again please note the glorious exceptions—has become a profession which is often taken up because of the glut in the other professions. I have already referred to the method adopted in the choice of ministers and we are reaping what we have sown. It is not at all surprising that many of our chapels are half-empty, for it is almost impossible to determine what some of our preachers believe. Another great abomination is the advent of the preacher-politician—that moral-mule who is so much in evidence these days. The harm done to Welsh public life by these monstrosities is incalculable. Their very appearance in public is a jeer at Christianity. Is it surprising that the things that I have already mentioned are so flagrant, with all these Judases so much in evidence? We get endless sermons on psychology, but amazingly few on Christianity. Our preachers are afraid to preach on the doctrine of the Atonement and on predestination. The great central principles of our belief are scarcely ever mentioned, indeed there is a movement on foot to reword them so as to bring them up-to-date. How on earth can you talk of bringing these eternal truths up-to-date? They are not only up-to-date, they are and will be ahead of the times to all eternity.

## DECLARING EVANGELICAL DOCTRINES

*From an address at the Royal Albert Hall, December 3, 1935*

What is it that accounts for the present state of the Church of God on earth? Realizing that things are not as they should be, and bemoaning the present state of affairs, the first question we must ask is not so much 'What can we do?' but rather 'Why are things as they are?'

The War and the spread of education, the improved social conditions, the amelioration of the injustices in life, the motor-car, the cinema, the wireless, and all these things which we mention so frequently as causes of the present condition of spiritual decline, are in my opinion, mere secondary causes, the results and by-products of something else which is very much deeper and much more important. The real cause of the present state of the Church is to be found in the Church's *voluntary* departure from a belief in the Bible as the fully inspired Word of God, and from a stressing and emphasizing of the great evangelical doctrines which had been so stressed and emphasized especially in the eighteenth century.

From the moment that philosophy was given the place of revelation, things began to go wrong. Of course people continued to attend church and chapel in fairly large numbers, partly out of mere habit and custom, without realizing exactly what was happening, but we can be perfectly certain that the Church lost her authority and her power from the moment that she ceased to believe firmly in the authority of the Word of God, and when she became doubtful and hesitant in her presentation of its doctrines to the people. From the moment that the idea began to gain currency that the Bible was the history of the quest of mankind for God, rather than God's revelation of Himself and the only way of salvation to mankind, the Church began to decline and to wane in her influence. From the moment the Church jettisoned the great evangelical doctrines and substituted for them a belief in the moral and spiritual evolution of mankind, and began to preach a social gospel rather than a personal salvation, from that moment church attendance really became a mere matter of form, or a merely pleasant way of gratifying one's appetite for ceremony and ritual and oratory and music. Church attendance was no longer vital and no longer absolutely essential. At that point, I suggest, the rot set in which has led to the present painful and pathetic state of affairs . . .

I do not want to be controversial, but must we not admit and confess that there is far too much heard at the present time of the word 'decision,' as if the great thing is that you and I should decide for Christ, rather than that He should do something for us? Yea, is not there a tendency on our part to emphasize results at the expense of regeneration?

Let us face this question quite honestly. Can we, I wonder, *from the Word of God itself*, justify all the present tendency to concentrate on youth and on youth movements? Let me go still further. Can many of the evangelistic methods which were intro-

duced some forty or fifty years ago really be justified out of the Word of God? As I read of the work of the great evangelists in the Bible I find they were not first and foremost concerned about results; they were concerned about proclaiming the word of truth. They left the increase unto Him. They were concerned above all else that the people should be brought face to face with the truth itself. I watch St. Paul going into the town of Corinth, and I like to listen to him as he soliloquizes just outside the city. I imagine he might have thought of many expedients in order to win the town of Corinth. He might have consulted the Mayor of the town. He might have thought of many other expedients which I am not going to mention, in order to have results. But I hear him say: 'I determined not to know anything among

you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.' The great Apostle was afraid of rhetoric, eloquence, oratory; I think he was terrified lest a man might join a church simply because he had been carried away by Paul's own speaking. I am very certain he would be afraid of many of the evangelistic methods that are being freely employed at this present moment. No, no, my friends, our business, our work, our first call is to declare in a certain and unequivocal manner the sovereignty, the majesty, the holiness of God; the sinfulness and the utter depravity of man, his total inability to save and to rescue himself; and the sacrificial, expiatory, atoning death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, on that Cross on Calvary's Hill, and His glorious resurrection, as the only means and the only hope of human salvation. ●

## The Moral Majority, Inc. (an evaluation)

Simon C. Walburg

Yes, I did it again. I sent another check in support of the Moral Majority, Inc. Why? Let us try to evaluate the reasons to see if they are valid and stand up under the scrutiny of Christian stewardship.

Americans indeed are taking notice of Lynchburg, Virginia's Jerry Falwell — educator, pastor, conservative theologian. His Moral Majority has become a movement to contend with, backed by an army of Christian voters calling for candidates who believe in Biblical morality as well as solid legislative ability. Loved or hated, Jerry Falwell is a dominant note not to be ignored in this age of crass realism and sexual permissiveness. Indeed Jerry Falwell, according to a Saturday Evening Post article, is "a funny, personable, courageous human being." But he is a very serious man when it comes to his goals. And what are his goals? He states, "We are crusading against abortion on demand, against pornography, against sex and violence on television, etc." He believes that God will solve our economical crises — but only after we resolve our spiritual crisis by returning to time-honored, fundamental values.

In one of his blurbs in a recent crusading letter Jerry Falwell asks: "Is our Grand Old Flag Going Down The Drain?" He states, "the answer is YES." He substantiates this by continuing, "Just look at what's happening here in America:

1. Known practising homosexual teachers have invaded the class rooms and the pulpits of our churches.

2. Smut peddlers sell their pornographic books under the protection of the courts.
3. X-rated movies are allowed in almost every community because there is no legal definition of obscenity.
4. Right in our own homes the television screen is full of R-rated movies saturated with sex and violence.
5. And believe it or not, we are the first civilized nation in history to legalize abortion in the late months of pregnancy. MURDER!"

Truly, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." Proverbs 14:34.

Surprisingly, even though the Moral Majority is only two years old it has come a long way. For a small donation you can receive THE MORAL MAJORITY REPORT, a monthly periodical that updates you on the happenings of this dynamic organization.

To give you a "taste" of this Moral Majority Report I will give you a few highlights of recent months showing their objectives and how they are achieved.

Jan. 1981 Report: Moral Majority joins coalition for better T.V. C.B.T.V. begins massive monitoring program for 50 states, thousands to be involved. This coalition will be headed by Rev. Donald Wildmon, director for the national Federation of Decency, an organization that has been dedicated to cleaning up television for a number of years. Rev. Wildmon believes between 25,000 and 35,000 local churches, and as many as five million individuals will be involved in what will be the largest single effort ever mounted against the tide of sex, violence and profanity that daily assaults our senses on the television screen.

Feb. 1981 Report: Moral Majority President Jerry

NOTE: Mr. Simon C. Walburg lives at 1816 Keyhill S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49506.

Falwell is fighting for a pro-life movement to stem the tide of murdering the unborn — 8 million abortions since 1973. The proposed human life amendment has four parts of which section 1 states, "The right to life is the paramount and most fundamental right of a person." Sections 2, 3, and 4 expand on the fact explicitly including the unborn.

March 1981 Report: Liberals are launching vicious attacks on the "New Right." A smear campaign is underway to muck-rake this movement of Right and Righteousness. Porno-publishers are especially scheming to discredit the Moral Majority. Jerry Falwell retorts: "They have labeled the Moral Majority the 'Extreme Right,' because we speak out against the 'Extreme Wrong.'"

April 1981 Report: Some captions — "60 more Moral Majority chapters are planned by New York leader." "Children and their music, they're being rocked by audio-pornography, according to Glen C. Griffin of Bountiful, Utah, writer of this item. He contends, "Some of the pounding cacophony would seem to push every decent thought out of one's mind. Some of the sound vibrations in themselves are sensuously stimulating." He further suggests that we educate our children to learn to love "good" music. In other words teach them to appreciate the wholesome, the true and beautiful.

May 1981 Report: Some more captions — "Now It's 'Do It Yourself' Abortion Kits." Again there is a reference to the Human Life Bill. Also a reference to the Humanity of the Unborn. Then concerning the Debate: When Does Life Begin? According to Dr.

Hymie Gordon, a professor of Medical Genetics, associated with the Mayo Clinic, responding to Senators, stated, "By all the criteria of modern molecular biology, life is present from the moment of conception." Next is: Moral Majority observes 2nd Birthday, making its impact in the changing of America, with its more than 3 million circulation.

This gives you a slight resume of the Moral Majority and its objectives and ideals. BUT — Jerry Falwell, because of his forthright, feisty and almost fanatic pursuit of his goals is drawing a lot of flak and fire from the opposition. As a result the so-called "Voice of Reason" a secular humanist organization, according to a Grand Rapids Press article, has formed groups in Detroit, Jackson, Illinois, Alaska, etc. in an effort to battle the Moral Majority whose reader response is tremendous.

Although I am critical of some of Falwell's doctrines and of his fund raising methods, weighing all the issues, pro and con, I feel the Moral Majority is a cause worthy of our support. For even as Jesus responded to his disciples in Mark 9:40 when they bemoaned the fact that "another" group, not of their select few, were performing miracles in His name, He said in effect, "Anyone that isn't against us is for us."

Most certainly it takes courage to speak out against this godless, Sodom-oriented age, but Christ warns us, "If the world hate you, you know that it hated me before it hated you." John 15:18. And again, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us." 2 Timothy 2:12.

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# The Pilgrim's Experiment with Communism

William Bradford

In a world in which Communist political power continues to grow and Communist social ideals continue to have an appeal we are apt to forget that the early U.S. colonial history includes the record of a Communistic experiment. The godly Pilgrim Fathers in the establishment of their original colony at Plymouth attempted to set up such a community. The hardships and poverty as the colony faced the threat of starvation prompted them to reconsider their decision to have all of the settlers share in working one common farm. They decided to split it up and have each family allotted its own parcel of land. Governor Bradford tells us about this in his own inimitable style in his *Of Plymouth Plantation*. No help seemed to be coming from England (Editor).

So they begane to thinke how they might raise as much corne as they could, and obtaine a better crope than they had done, that they might not still thus languish in miserie. At length, after much debate of things, the Governor (with the advise of the cheefest amongst them) gave way that they should set corne every man for his owne perticuler, and in that regard trust to themselves; in all other things to goe on in the generall way as before. And so assigned to every family a parcell of land, according to the proportion of their number for that end, only for present use (but made no deviation for inheritance), and ranged all boys & youth under some familie. This had very good success; for it made all hands very industrious, so as much more corne was planted then other wise would have bene by any means the Governor or any other could use, and saved

him a great deall of trouble, and gave farr better contente. The women now wente willingly into the feild, and tooke their litle-ones with them to set corne, which before would aledg weaknes, and inability; whom to have compelled would have bene thought great tiranie and oppression.

The experience that was had in this comone course and condition, tried sundrie years, and that amongst godly and sober men, may well evince the vanitie of that conceite of Platos & other ancients, applauded by some of later times; — that the taking away of proprietie, and bringing in communitie into a comone wealth, would make them happy and flourishing; as if they were wiser than God. For this communitie (so farr as it was) was found to breed much confusion & discontent, and retard much employment that would have been to their benefite and comforte. ●

Taken from *Of Plymouth Plantation* (Capricorn Books, p. 90).

## EPHESIANS BIBLE STUDY OUTLINES

We are thankful that Rev. Henry Vander Kam, writer of our Bible study outlines, is recovering after a severe heart attack. Because of his illness this season's series of outlines on Paul's letter to the Ephesians is scheduled to begin in the September issue (instead of in August).



### DR. SIERD WOUDESTRA REPLIES

Dear Rev. De Jong:

Please permit me to set a badly flawed record straight. I have in mind a number of things in the April 1981 issue of *Outlook*.

In your lead-article "Time to Break Fellowship" you charge me with saying that in my Nov. 24, 1980 *Banner* article on Isaiah 14 I say that the prophet *borrowed* (italics

mine, SW) this chapter from pagan Canaanite mythology. I should point out that what I wrote is: "The prophet uses here the language of pagan Canaanite mythology." The difference is obvious and pertinent. "Borrowing" means taking over; "using the language of" means making use of the Canaanite myth to get God's message across. There is nothing unusual about what I say. Reformed theology has always recognized that in giving His revelation God frequently made use of existing customs, institutions, concepts and words. For instance, God used the structure of a Hittite suzerainty treaty when He gave Israel His covenant, and John uses the philosophically loaded term *logos* (word) in reference to Christ in the prologue of his gospel.

The same issue of *Outlook* carries a letter by Rev. J. Tuininga. Also there I read unfounded accusations which should not be allowed to stand. On the basis of something I wrote in the August 1980 issue of the *RES Theological Forum* Mr. Tuininga charges me with a "radical, unReformed view of Scripture." I wish to make the readers of *Outlook* aware that essentially

what I do in that brief article is lay the finger on a peculiar inconsistency in the approach to Genesis which I frequently encounter. On the one hand, many Christian scientists are convinced that on the basis of presently available scientific evidence the earth is a few billion years old. On the other hand, the traditional hermeneutical approach to Genesis seems to allow only for a relatively young earth. As a theologian I struggle with this disparity and would like to see this matter openly and dispassionately discussed. In an honest academic discussion charges such as those of Mr. Tuininga should have no place.

The same letter writer in *Outlook* also misses the point when he insinuates that because somewhere I wrote that I regard Hendrikus Berkhof's theological approach in his *Christian Faith* as "essentially correct," I seem to have a view of Scripture which is far removed from that of traditional Reformed theology. I have reason to believe that Mr. Tuininga has never read H. Berkhof's book, certainly not the "A Word from the Translator" which I have appended to my translation of it. If he had

read the book he would have known that the Dutch title is not *Het Christelijk Geleef*, but simply *Christelijk Geleef*. In his own Introduction Berkhof carefully explains why he has left the article out. Also, if Mr. Tuininga had read the book, he would have known that in my own preface I specifically state: "a translator is neither responsible for nor necessarily in full agreement with what he translates. Often I have found myself silently entering into discussion with the author" (p. xvii). Finally, Mr. Tuininga shows no awareness that the words "essentially correct" occur in a review of Berkhof's book which I wrote for the *RES News Exchange* of May 1980. They refer to Berkhof's biblical-theological approach to Systematic theology. The simple fact is that I do not subscribe to Professor Berkhof's four levels in the Scriptural witness (p. 90 f.). Where then did Mr. Tuininga pick up these words "essentially correct"? In a series of articles written on Berkhof's book by the Australian minister Bill Deenick in *Trowel & Sword*, the unofficial monthly of the Reformed Churches of Australia. Enough said.

I would like to conclude this letter by quoting almost in its entirety Professor Berkhof's paragraph on the subject of doctrinal discipline.

If church polity is to guard the mediating process, it will obviously have to set rules for proclamation and instruction. To begin with, the office-bearers will have to state, in one form or another, the content and the norm which they accept for all their transmission activity. If they become aware that they no longer agree with that, they should resign their office. But what is to be done if they do not feel that way themselves, but the church at large thinks differently? In that case the church can make a pronouncement about the teachings of such an office-bearer to avoid a confusion of spirits and to make clear what she sees as the true gospel. Will such a declaration and a concomitant admonition to the office-bearer suffice? In other words, is it enough to practice a so-called ethical, therapeutic, or judicial form of doctrinal discipline? Or should he also by ecclesiastical sentence be deposed from his office, by what is called juridical or justiciable discipline? A church which is deeply conscious of her high calling and which knows of the distortions to which the gospel, since it is foolishness and an offense to the world, is always subject, will not a priori exclude such a deposition as the final resort. There are situations in which it is all or nothing. That is rarely the case, however, where it concerns the deviating ideas of only one office-bearer. Nor should a possible deposition be automatically considered in case an office-bearer defends views which are rejected by his own denomination but accepted in other churches. As a matter of fact, the lesson of history is that "heretics" have often been people who defended truths that had been lost sight of or who were ahead of their own church in their insights as to how the gospel could best be passed on to a future generation. For these reasons juridical discipline may not be excluded, nor may it become the rule. The church is only rarely served by acts of force;

rather it is promoted by coming with arguments, by a spiritual struggle to see the light, and by brotherly discussion. (*Christian Faith*, p. 384f.)

I suggest that the Christian Reformed synods and other bodies that have to deal with doctrinal discipline take these words of the Leiden professor to heart. We would have less heat and see more light.

Sincerely yours, Sierd Woudstra  
Religion and Theology Department  
Calvin College

#### Editor's Response:

My critical allusion to Rev. S. Woudstra's explanation of Isaiah 14 could have been more precisely phrased. Although he did not say that Isaiah borrowed the whole of his 14th chapter from pagan mythology, he did allege, as he states in his letter, that Isaiah used "the Canaanite myth to get God's message across." This explanation given in the Nov. 24 *Banner* seemed to follow the common Liberal practice of trying to trace what the Bible presents as unique Divine revelation to pagan "sources." What especially caught my attention was the blunt statement, "The Most High was the highest of the Canaanite gods."

PDJ

#### REPLY TO WOULDSTRA

I was not born yesterday and I am not a total stranger in Jerusalem. This was not the first thing I read of Dr. Berkhof, nor of Prof. Woudstra. For better or for worse, one always reads within a certain context. He gets to know from which corner the wind is blowing, and that may indeed color one's interpretation.

However, the fact that I am by no means the only one who objects to Woudstra's views suggests that my view may not be as jaundiced as it appears.

In his reply to Prof. Schuurman in the *RES Theological Forum*, Woudstra is doing much more than calling attention to a "disparity" or "inconsistency" among Christian scientists with a view to Genesis. Discussion on that subject is still in full swing, and not nearly all Christian scientists (not even all those who hold to a "young earth") see the kind of disparity between "the traditional conservative reading" of Gen. 1 & 2 and the findings of science that Woudstra sees. And what is more, as Prof. Schuurman says, no science may ever rule over Scripture.

But what I wanted to say is that Woudstra's own views come through quite clearly. Indeed, there are statements that he attributes to others, but even there, as Schuurman says, "the language is suggestive." And though Woudstra wants to hold onto the doctrine of creation, Schuurman correctly notes that "in light of the foregoing it must be said that its content has drastically changed. It seems to need a new filling." This 'solution' of the dilemma cannot be mine. Precisely. That's all I was trying to say too.

To come back to Berkhof, there are insights in his books for which one can be thankful. But his view of Scripture is one which is totally unacceptable within a Reformed framework. It is little wonder, as pointed out by Haverkamp in *De Wachter*, that he is so enthusiastic about the latest

report on Scripture put out by the Geref. Kerken. If Woudstra had written in his "appendix" that he categorically rejected Berkhof's view of Scripture, it would be quite a different matter. But he didn't do that at all. What is more, his lengthy quotation from Berkhof's book speaks volumes. Fact is, after reading that, I wondered why he objected to my letter at all. I would have had more respect for him if he had simply said: My sympathies lie with Berkhof and that's that. I always get leary of Professors who backtrack when someone challenges them.

We need less heat and more light. Granted. "In thy light we see light" (Ps. 36:9). And there is a proper kind of "heat": "We declare that we not only reject all errors that militate against this doctrine... but that we are disposed to refute and contradict these and to exert ourselves in keeping the Church free from such errors" (Form of Subscription). For that cause De Bres and his followers were willing to "offer their backs to stripes, their tongues to knives, their mouths to gags, and their whole bodies to the fire." We need a bit more of that kind of heat and light today.

J. Tuininga

P.S.: I can think of dozens of good Dutch books which, if translated, would be of infinitely more value to the church than Berkhof's volume.

#### THE OPEN LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT

Dear Rev. DeJong,

In the June issue of *Outlook*, page 11, you make reference to the letter, over my signature, to President Ronald Reagan, in connection with the United States' Latin American policy.

Some of your observations appear inaccurate to me and I would like to share the following observations with the readers of *Outlook*.

You make reference to a copy of the letter to President Reagan as it appeared in the *Banner* of April 13, 1981 (page 22), and then write, "By what authority does this mission secretary presume to commit the whole denomination to such a partisan opinion on a strictly political issue?" I must point out that the *Banner* clearly stated that the Executive Committee of the Board of World Missions authorized me to write the letter. The Executive Committee consists of eighteen members, all representing the Christian Reformed Church by synodical appointment. The initiative for this letter originated with the Executive Committee itself in its March, 1981 meeting. After careful scrutiny of the first draft, the committee mandated me to address it to the President.

You also express yourself critically of the intent and content of the letter itself. You state that our mission administration tries to hinder the established government (of El Salvador) from defending itself against a Marxist guerilla take-over. In response I would refer to the letter to President Reagan in which I stated "We recognize that international communism will seek to take advantage of unsettled conditions wherever they exist. We encourage you in taking decisive action to discourage such a takeover." But I then went on to

state that the underlying problems in Central America are famine and oppression and that the U.S. must do its share in solving those in a Christian and just way. It is a matter of record, Mr. Editor, that the governments of El Salvador and Guatemala use means of brutal oppression to silence legitimate criticism, and because of U.S. aid to those governments we as a Christian Reformed Church are not free from responsibility in these policies. As a matter of fact, the governments of these countries, by their brutal methods, are forcing people into the arms of the communists, whose policies we all abhor.

In writing our President we knew ourselves in the Biblical tradition of being moved by the plight of the poor and oppressed, and that, we thought, also represented the best of American tradition.

I would appreciate your sharing these thoughts with *Outlook* readers.

Sincerely, Rev. G. Bernard Dokter,  
Latin America Area Secretary

#### Editor's Reply:

The letter from our Latin American Missions secretary explains that his own open letter to the president on which I commented was written on the initiative of the Executive Committee. He corrects the mistaken impression I received and conveyed that the initiative that produced it was the writer's. I regret the mistake and gladly pass Rev. Mr. Dokter's correction on to our readers. The correction does not remove the serious objections which I see to this letter. It increases them to the extent that it makes the sending of it more official.

(1) Although the letter does express opposition to a Communist take-over, it at the same time argues against the giving of military aid to the government of El Salvador in its life-and-death battle against being overcome by militant Communist revolutionaries. The argument contradicts itself.

(2) The letter is open to criticism from the point of view of church polity. While individuals may express their convictions to our government, by what authority does our Executive Committee for World Missions commit our churches to trying to dissuade our President from giving military aid to the government of El Salvador in its war against a take-over by Communist guerillas? Our classes elected the delegates to carry out a foreign mission program, not to lobby regarding social, economic, political and military matters in Washington.

(3) Such a letter threatens the welcome and possibly the safety of the missionaries in that land in which they work. Having lived for about ten years outside of the United States I am the more sensitive to the need of a visitor being cautious about expressing judgments regarding the internal politics of the land in which he is only a guest. Such a visitor who becomes involved in political agitation regarding the government of the country is asking for his own expulsion as an undesirable alien or may even be endangering the safety of himself and others associated with him. As the agenda report intimated (p. 60), "missionaries may themselves become an embarrassment to the national groups they nurture."

(4) The most serious objection to this action is that it appears to be a distortion of

the gospel as the Lord and His apostles taught and called us to bring it. The Lord absolutely refused to let Himself become involved in political activity against the Roman government although many felt for and justified such revolutionary activity with the same kind of arguments as those used to justify such revolutionary activity today (John 6). Similarly, Paul and the other missionaries showed the same preoccupation with the gospel and refusal to become involved in the political and social politics of revolution which are increasingly being championed by many churches and religious agencies. The influence of the gospel did eventually correct social evils and alter institutions, but to make of the gospel a political revolutionary movement is a perversion. That the Liberal churches, who have little respect for the Lord and less for the Bible, fall for this political perversion is not surprising. But we should not imitate them.

#### INFLATION IS A MORAL PROBLEM

In connection with Rev. Peter DeJong's timely article, "Inflation Is A Moral Problem" in the May '81 issue, reprinted from the *Outlook*, March 1975, I would like to share what some years ago, the D.A.R. magazine (Daughters of the American Revolution) had to say about inflation in a patriotic article.

"Inflation is gnawing at the vitals of the economy; we are a people burdened with soaring debt, both personal and national. Inflation is robbing the people of their savings. However the entire blame for inflation cannot be laid at the Government's door for we are all to blame to some extent for the inflationary wave sweeping the country. We are a people who live by the principle, "Buy now, pay later." The luxuries of yesterday have become the necessities of today. The fact is that the average American is spending far more than he should. Meanwhile Labor Unions are demanding wage increases far in excess of productivity increases. And the results are, we are in danger of pricing ourselves not only out of the world markets, but domestic market as well. Never in history was it more important for the people to understand the need for self discipline. No native American has known the ravages of runaway inflation. Secure in their belief in the country's wealth, not all Americans have recognized the dangers inherent on the inflationary road we are travelling. For years there have been voices raised to warn that the road from inflation to socialism is inevitable and let it not be forgotten that socialism is the little brother of communism. Today the American people can no longer afford to ignore the storm signals being hoisted on many fronts. The impending crisis resulting from our dwindling gold supplies and continuing unfavorable balance of payments cannot be postponed indefinitely. No sacrifice is too great to stave off national bankruptcy; a bankrupt nation is no longer a great nation. The survival of freedom itself hinges on national solvency. This every American must understand because there is no subtler, no surer means of overturning the existing basis of a society than to debauch the currency."

This was written about ten years ago

and the American economy, once envied by the entire world, is still squeaking along. Economists in general agree that our startling low levels of savings and investments are the key factors in our failure to produce the capital to finance the real economic growth for which we yearn so deeply.

The people of West Germany and Japan, the big losers of W.W. II, set aside 15-20% of their earnings. This has created the enormous pool of savings which has helped the spectacular growth of those countries. In the U.S. the savings are an incredible 4.5%.

Many are blaming the Federal Reserve Board for the high interest rates. But the Federal Reserve Board states that rather *we* than *they* are the cause of high inflation rates: from living beyond our means, from living off credit, from refusing to believe that in order to live well, we must produce well; which is to say we must work productively and save for a rainy day.

But then the question arises, is this not the language of the Scriptures? We read in Genesis 3:17-19 that the punishment for sin is hard labor. God's law "Six days shalt thou labor . . ." is basically still valid, so that a man when he can no longer toil in the sweat of his brow, may be able to eat the bread of the labor of his days of vigor. It is a sad thing that the secular press has to tell us this, and that we hear so little of it in the church press. America was built by hard working people.

A Christian sees his work as a divine vocation. The ungodly sees it as a necessary evil — seeking a shorter work week and extended vacations. The Lord promises us in Proverbs 14:34, "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." It is no surprise then that today the economy is declining.

Dr. Abraham Kuyper once said, "It is so profoundly untrue that God's Word lets us hear only appeals for the salvation of our souls. No, very definitely also for our national existence, and for our social life together, God's Word gives us fixed ordinances; it marks out lines that are clearly visible. . . . For on almost every point on social life, God's Word gives us the most positive direction."

Is it not time that the *Outlook* provides us with articles like that of Rev. DeJong which gives us a more positive direction towards a Christian lifestyle?

If we are concerned only with the defense of our doctrines, but no application of the Biblical message for life, in our efforts to defend the faith, we can end up with a faith that is no longer translated into action.

Herman Woltjer, Zeeland, Mich.



# ANNUAL MEETING

OF

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THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1, 1981

AT

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610 52nd St., S.E., Grand Rapids, Mich.

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