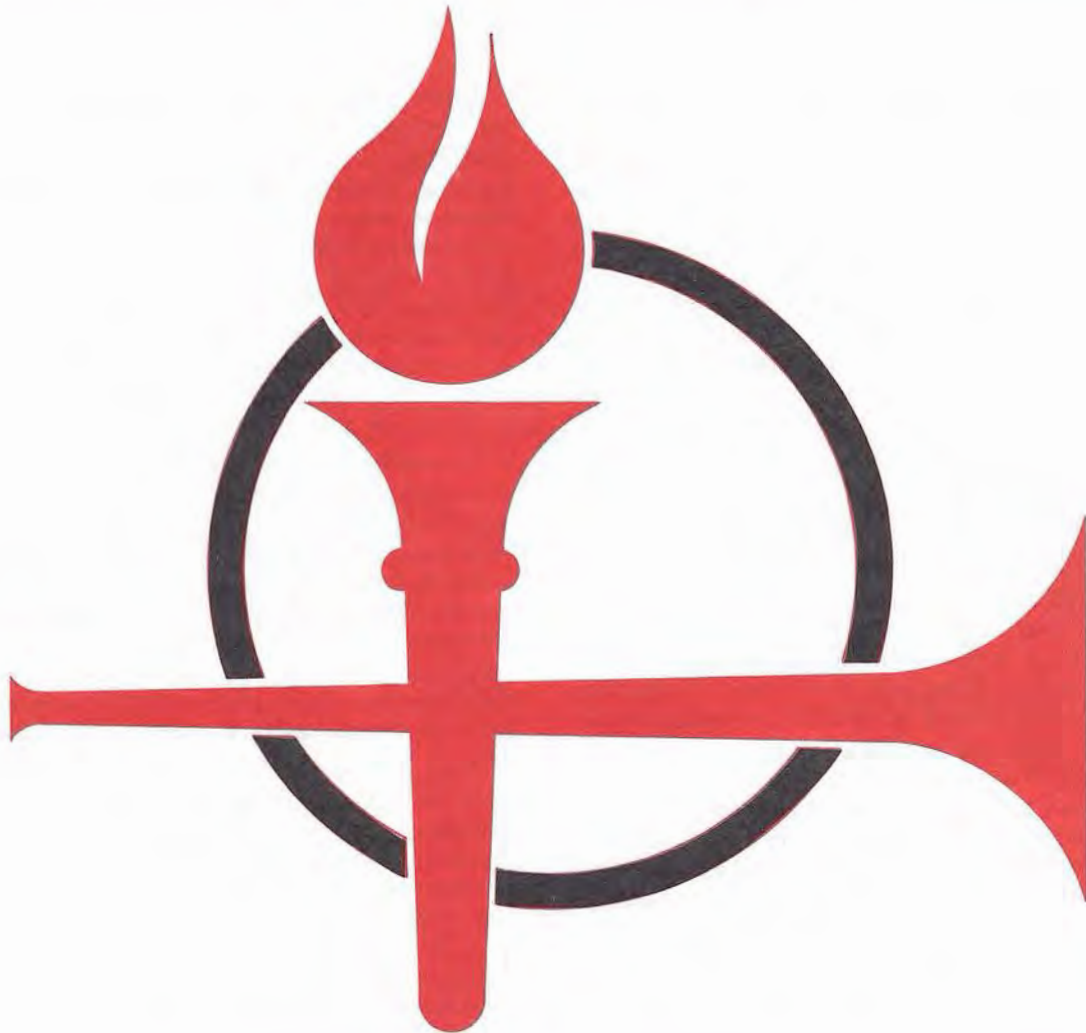


THE OUTLOOK

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

NOVEMBER 1981



**DEACONS RULE
DUTCH REPORT ON BIBLICAL AUTHORITY
WHICH VERSION NOW?**

CONSERVATIVES IN THE CRC: the view from the back seat

Theodore Plantinga

When I accepted the editor's kind invitation to contribute an article to *The Outlook*, I decided to do what I could to foster dialogue between the various sectors in the Christian Reformed Church. And dialogue — if it is to be meaningful — involves some frank talk. Hence I shall begin by indicating how I view the conservatives in the CRC.

The conservatives, it seems to me, can best be compared to back-seat drivers. Although they still have some influence in the denomination, they are clearly not behind the wheel. Because they are in the back seat, they are being taken where they do not want to go. As back-seat drivers, they do not have a good view of the road ahead. They issue warnings now and then, but no one seems to pay much attention as the car lurches along.

Many specific areas could be appealed to in filling out this thesis. I will mention only three.

First, the conservatives in the CRC seem to be almost without influence in the critical area of higher education. People of their way of thinking are not often appointed to teach in our educational institutions. The interest in higher education among the conservatives seems to be sporadic. Of late there has been talk of a new seminary, but as far as I can tell such talk does not issue from a wide-ranging critique of what the young people in the CRC are being offered in the name of Christian higher education; rather the issue seems to be solely theological.

Secondly, the conservatives almost seem willing to settle for little impact theologically in our circles, for they operate with a reduced or restricted conception of theology that does not take current cultural and intellectual realities into proper account. Today's theological challenges will not be met adequately with appeals to Louis Berkhof. In fact, if the conservatives would pay more attention than they usually do to the other Berkhof (i.e. Hendrikus) and probe the sources and background of his thought, they would be better equipped to deal with the theological challenge from the Netherlands. In particular, the meaning of such thinkers as Marx and Hegel for theology needs to be explored more intensively in the CRC than it has been thus far. The alternative, I fear, is to back into liberation theology without quite knowing what it is.

Thirdly, during the last decade or two, the conservatives in the CRC have not taken our Christian responsibilities in politics and social action as seriously as they should. As a result, they have drifted slowly toward a reduced view of the Christian life, a view that simply does not appeal to the rank and file of the younger generation. The main reason for this, I suspect, is that the conservatives have slipped into a pattern of reaction — criticizing efforts made by others instead of getting involved themselves. The back-seat driver, as I noted, does not have a clear view of the road ahead.

In conclusion, I would like to issue an appeal and challenge to the conservatives in the CRC. I would like to see them broaden their horizons culturally and become more adventuresome intellectually, by reading more widely and paying attention to a wider range of issues. One way to do so is to become more involved in — and supportive of — Christian efforts in higher education, where the issues not just of the CRC but of our society generally and of the whole world have to be faced.

Such a broadening would then help prepare the way for dialogue with other segments of the CRC, including its left wing. Since moving to Grand Rapids, I have been surprised at the extent to which communication between the right and left wings of our church as represented by people in the Grand Rapids area has broken down. Dialogue would require of both sides a willingness to lay suspicions (and even prejudices) aside.

The conservatives in the CRC are very adept at pointing out how the left-wing segment in the CRC, which is beginning to speak the language of liberation, is accommodating itself to the left-wing forces in the secular world which have made liberation their guiding theme. This is indeed a worrisome form of worldliness, and it should be discussed openly. The liberation that is promised can easily turn out to be a new bondage. But the conservatives who argue such a point should then also be sensitive to the danger of accommodation and worldliness in their own ranks, which takes the form of uncritical support of capitalistic values and of the political agenda of certain elements of the Republican Party.



"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).

I hope and pray that the conservatives will reinsert themselves into the life of our denomination through free discussion, unconditional participation, and openness to Christian brothers and sisters with different opinions. Perhaps this brief article will spark a response that will lead in such a direction.

Editor's Note: Dr. Theodore Plantinga is an assistant Professor of Philosophy at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan. (He should not be confused with Dr. Alvin Carl Plantinga of Calvin's Philosophy department or with Professor Cornelius Plantinga who teaches Systematic Theology at the seminary.)

I had intended to place Dr. Plantinga's provocative article without comment, anticipating possible reader reactions. Since he invites "dialog" some comment may be in order, with the suggestion that others may wish to join in.

Dr. Plantinga's intriguing illustration suggests what some of us have been sensing (as a son put it in discussing the article) that we were being "taken for a ride" by some of our leaders.

Who is responsible for conservatives being shoved "in the back seat"? Are they at fault because of laziness or lack of initiative? That possibility has to be considered. (An editor's frustrations in trying to get people to write their convictions sometimes makes that a tempting explanation.) Fairness, however, requires us to face the fact that the people who are "behind the wheel" of both our educational and ecclesiastical establishments have usually shown no inclination to "trade off driving" with conservatives. The student letter in our June Outlook is an unusually clear expression of the common student complaint that the convictions held and taught in their churches get no fair expression in many college classrooms. It is commonly alleged that the Bible's claims to inerrancy and its requirements about who may hold church office get no official support, and opposing views are widely disseminated. Some time ago I attended two lectures at Calvin dealing with the family, but noted that neither speaker represented the conservative convictions which are traditionally and still widely held in our churches. This summer a conference on Biblical interpretation was held at the AACS Institute in Toronto and widely publicized, but again, neither of the two leaders represented the conviction of Biblical inerrancy, although much of the discussion reportedly centered around that issue.

Relegating conservatives to "the back seat" is also becoming routine in the operation of our church establishment. Consider the appointments to important committees. Although some may contain a "token" conservative or two, many of them, notably those dealing with women in office, have been plainly "stacked" to predetermine their direction. And it is an accepted practice that standing committees nominate their own successors. It is hardly fair to blame conservatives for lack of "dialog" in circles from which they are systematically excluded.

Furthermore, is it fair to charge that conservatives lack interest in Christian higher education? Who started and over the years supported our colleges? Liberals do not generally begin and sustain such schools; they subvert them.

And as far as clear vision is concerned, to the extent that conservatives seek to gain and keep a Biblical perspective on where we are and where we are going, they often have a more accurate sense of our over-all position and direction than their opponents, who in their eagerness to adjust their views to conform to current fads in the secular world turn out to be remarkably naive.

Regarding dialog, I have often felt that discussion of differences may be desirable. Such discussions may lead to clearer understanding by all and to sounder decisions than those reached by consulting only one opinion. On many secondary matters there is room for difference of opinion and compromise. When we have to deal with basic matters, especially those that concern the clear teaching of God's Word regarding our faith and life, although we may learn from dialog with those who differ, we have to refuse to compromise. While ever ready to talk with Christian brothers and sisters, we will have to refuse to accompany them where we are convinced that they are going or leading others astray.

I appreciate especially Professor Plantinga's concern about the direction of our Christian higher education and his effort to provoke us to give more attention to it. Will his writing elicit further response from our readers?

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Contents

November, 1981	Volume XXXI	No. 11
CONSERVATIVES IN THE CRC		2
Theodore Plantinga		
DUTCH REPORT ON BIBLICAL AUTHORITY		4
Louis Praamsma		
THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH		8
Lubbertus Oostendorp		
"WHICH VERSION NOW?"		10
M. H. Woudstra		
MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY NEWS		13
John H. Piersma		
USING BUT NOT ABUSING		14
John Blankespoor		
LETTERS TO THE EPHESIANS		16
Henry Vander Kam		
A LOOK AT BOOKS		20
THE DIACONATE -- A RULING TASK		21
Leonard J. Coppes		
AN ECUMENICAL CHRISTIAN SCHOOL CREED ...		23
Myron D. Rau		
THREAT OF MOSLEM FUNDAMENTALISM		24
The Editor		

Dutch Report on Biblical Authority

Louis Praamsma

Dr. Louis Praamsma is a veteran church historian and retired Christian Reformed pastor living at Hamilton, Ontario. He recently wrote a 4-volume church history, De Kerk van Alle Tijden (The Church of All Times) which is being translated into English. In this article he analyses for us the 1980 report of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands on the subject of the Bible's Authority. This is the issue which underlies most of those churches' as well as our own current problems.

I. Which Quality?

Nov. 4, 1980 the synod of the Reformed (Gereformeerde) churches in the Netherlands adopted a report "On the quality (Dutch: *aard*) of the authority of Scripture."

This report was not only included in the Acts of Synod, it was also separately printed under the title: "God with us" and made available to the consistories and the membership at large.

I am still a reader of my old weekly church-paper, the *Groninger Kerkbode*, and I like to read the reports of the meetings of my former consistory in that city. In one of them I read that the chairman brought up the above-mentioned synodical report for discussion. The only answer he got was, that it was so very difficult, so hard to read. It was decided that the minister would introduce the first part of the report in one of the next meetings. In the following weeks I looked for such an introduction in vain, but I may have skipped an issue.

II. Background

The Dutch report is no easy reading-material indeed. Especially its first part, which bears a more

philosophical than a theological character, must be a real headache for an elder who reads it; and I have the idea that the entire report at times must have been a real headache for the committee that composed it.

That committee did not have an easy task. One of its members was Dr. T. Baarda, now a professor of the Free University. Baarda had published in 1967 his study on "The reliability of the Gospels," in a series of brochures (The: *Cahiers voor de Gemeente*) composed by "New Theologians" who tried to give guidance to the men in the pew. In that brochure he had declared that from a historical point of view the Gospels are unreliable in several respects; he had even spoken of some "legendary features" in them. At the synod of Dordrecht (1971/72) letters were received in which objections were raised against Baarda's ideas. A committee was appointed to look into the matter. That committee got its own history. Its mandate was not an easy one. "The question should be studied, to what extent the church, claiming the authority of the Bible and professing the historical revelation of God in Jesus Christ, can determine a norm for historical studies, without curtailing scientific theology."

In other words: how can we save the Bible with a capital B and save Science with a capital S?

The background was the situation in the sixties, in which the *Cahiers voor de Gemeente* had been published. Prof. Kuitert had told his readers that some miraculous stories of the Bible did not need to have happened so, and that the name "Adam" in the Bible did not refer to a real man but to a "teaching-model"; Baarda had found all sorts of irregularities and inconsistencies in the gospel-stories and Professor Augustijn, also of the Free University, had claimed the right to freely criticize the confessional standards and yet to sign them in their unchanged

original form; Professor Hartvelt of Kampen had come with his ingenious formula: although Scriptures are not simply God's Word, they are good for God's Word.

All that and much more had happened, but in the mean time the dialogue had continued, according to the rule that we should never say "no" to each other, but always remain on talking terms. That was the climate in which the committee had worked. Their report, sent to the churches, was finally adorned with the title: "God with us."

III. "Relationism"

Some ideas stand out in this report. The first and foremost is that of *relationism*.

The term "relativism" which means that all things are relative and depend on times and circumstances, that the truth will never be found, is carefully avoided. Yet the concept of "relationism" is not too far removed from it. It means that the truth as we know it, always has come to us by human mediation and always is colored by human insights. We read literally in this report: "The truth of God, his revelation, is only there where human tongues begin to move." (p. 14).

These human tongues have spoken and human hands have written the Bible. That Bible is a wonderful book of human encounters with God, but essentially it is not an exceptional book. On the one hand, "from a scientific point of view there are no sufficient grounds for the assertion that the Bible would be more reliable, in respect to history, than other sources" (p. 67). On the other hand, "what we call inspiration by the Holy Spirit is actually a whole history of the truth revealing itself. A history that is marked by far-away events, words of patriarchs and prophets, tradition, many sources, the formation of the canon of the Bible, work of scribes, redactors, theologians, congregational groups. All this was continued through the ever renewed confessions and exegesis of the Christian churches up to today" (p. 15).

An always continuing inspiration! — but what is the quality of this kind of "inspiration?" Does it not entail a leveling down of this special work of the Holy Spirit?

It certainly does, and we should not speak any longer of an infallible, inerrant Bible. The entirely human book that the Bible is, and through which the truth of God is transmitted, is a very relational book. The authors were related to their times and circumstances, and in their work we find the insights, sometimes also the errors of those times and circumstances; the reader easily finds out when he only is aware of the fact that we find several literary genres, more or less trustworthy, in the Bible.

One of those genres is that of the so-called *popular stories* (Dutch: *volksverhalen*). These stories tell us something of the power of imagination of the men of those far-away times, sometimes something of their humor, but they need not to have happened as they are told.

Among the popular stories of the Old Testament are mentioned those of David's slaying of Goliath

(p. 65) and of Lot's intercourse with his own daughters (p. 66). With respect to the story of David and Goliath it is said that there is a contradiction between 1 Sam. 17 and 2 Sam. 21:19.¹ As far as Lot's story is concerned, we read that the Israelites were constantly at loggerheads with their neighbors, Ammon and Moab, who were evidently related to them. In order to express their contempt of them, they called them "bastards." This appellation must have been the origin of the "popular story" of Lot and his daughters.²

A similar method is applied to the New Testament. It is said that the evangelists sometimes have put words in Jesus' mouth which He has never spoken, and that they pictured his life in terms of their new insight in the Old Testament. "In many cases," so we are informed, "Jesus may not exactly have used the words or performed the acts in the way the evangelist describes it. In that case the evangelist, following an accepted practice in the ancient East, made use of a historical design, to preach the good tidings of Jesus Christ from (what was told about Him in) the Old Testament" (p. 77).

Most remarkable is the view of the report on Jesus' great prophetic discourse (Matt. 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21). We read: "This discourse may have been linked with certain historical sayings of Jesus, for instance His prophecy of the destruction of the temple. But its point of departure is the situation of the later congregation which was threatened and persecuted. The discourse is built up from that situation, and offers from that point of view certain interpretations and expatiations"¹ (p. 82).

What about the first man Adam? The report does not mention his name. It does not speak of the first man who fell into sin, but of "the reasonable supposition that man for the first time fell into sin" (p. 85). It finds fault with speaking of history with respect to Gen. 3, prefers to speak of pre-history and applies again the idea of a special literary genre. It concludes this part by saying that we should ask no longer *how* the fall into sin took place, but rather should ponder the problem *that* man from the start has neglected his duty toward God.

We might mention many more instances of this "relational" approach to the truth, for this report is very extensive. We choose only one more, that of the possibility of miracles.

1. This is an old question which often has been discussed. The Dutch Dr. K. Roubos assumes that the name "Goliath" indicated a special group of giants. Dr. C. J. Goslinga points to the possibility of a scribal error.

2. The same "explanation" was given by liberal exegetes in the beginning of our century. Dr. G. C. Aalders wrote about it: "This kind of opinion is diametrically opposed to our conception of Scripture." (K. V. Genesis II, 1936, p. 94).

It is an amazing fact that the words quoted are written, not in a liberal Introduction of the New Testament, but in a report of a Reformed Synod. A handful of the many confusing constructions of the background of this passage can be found on p. 530 of the Commentary on the Gospel of Luke by Prof. N. Geldenhuys.

1. Dutch: "Wie een relationeel waarheidsbegrip aanhangt, zal de mogelijkheid van een wonder principieel open moeten houden." This is a specimen of the philosophical language of the report. Instead of: "Anyone who believes" — "Anyone who adheres to a relational conception of truth."

We hear that the possibility of miracles, in principle, must be an open option for anyone who adheres to a relational conception of truth¹ (p. 86). Yet the one Christian can accept more, or less, miracles than the other one; and the one miracle is more, or less, acceptable than the other one. In a way, as much as the continuing inspiration, the wonders do not stop: we may always be comforted by the fact that God can work miracles by our own hands, to the effect that our life makes sense. This is the meaning of the words of Ps. 90:17: "And establish Thou the works of our hands upon us." God's blessing of the works of our hands is a continuing miracle.

The unique place of the great miracle of the resurrection of Christ is stressed, which is called His triumph over the powers of darkness, and from the start, the heart of the preaching of the gospel. It is added that some members of the church do not believe it. "If there are members of the church who find it difficult to accept the resurrection of Christ, the church, in view of its pastoral task, must exercise patience toward them" (p. 90).

IV. Criticism of Past Convictions.

The relationist attitude of the Dutch report entails a very critical attitude with respect to the ideas of former generations; those former generations of Reformed people and Reformed theologians were related to their time, limited by their time, timebound; as after all, also the men of the Bible were bound by the limits of their time. What is our task now? — We should dare to be ourselves and in our own way respond to the challenges of our time.

The judgment of the Dutch synodical report on classic Reformed theology is not favorable. That theology believed in an objective truth, a once and for all given norm. But did not this position make man completely passive? Abraham Kuyper was a great theologian. But he did not take the problems which we must face when we study the Bible without prejudice seriously. Preceding Kuyper and Bavinck, we meet quite a parade of orthodox theologians who set forth a mechanical theory of inspiration, making the Bible a "sort of receptacle (Dutch: *vergaarbak*) of several truths, supernaturally inspired and literally dictated" (p. 43).

The same contention (which is nothing but a caricature) is later repeated: "According to the classic Reformed conception the human authors of the Bible were essentially only passive instruments of the Spirit, pencils in the hand of God."

Moreover, our forefathers were often very legalistic in their application of the law of God. "The way in which the Bible for a long time has been used in our circles, has conjured up the image of an old-fashioned task-master." And the slogan: "The Bible the only standard of doctrine and life," has often been misused to protect human traditions against any new approach.

V. What is the Quality of the Authority of the Bible?

Under the Dutch report we find the signature of Dr. T. Baarda. When it was published, it was imme-

diately acclaimed by the Dutch-Reformed (Ned. Hervormd) Prof. H. Berkhof, who spoke of "an ecumenical landmark." The same language was used by the Kampen Professor J. T. Bakker, who said: "Thus far it was so that a preacher often very nervously went to the pulpit, when he intended to say that the biblical passage on Jonah in the whale was no history, but a splendid popular story. There was a permanent state of schizophrenia between theology and preaching. If the report *God with us* makes an end to that schizophrenia, I would call it a landmark in the history of the Reformed churches." (*Elzeviers Magazine*, Jan. 31, 1981).

Clearly, the "quality," proposed by the report, is not that of an *infallible, inerrant Bible*. Many interesting, even sometimes beautiful things are said about this book, but it is after all a human and often erring guide. It denotes a continuous quest for truth, to be continued by each reader in his own individual way. The truth of the past is not identical with the truth of today and it necessarily differs from the one person to the other.

VI. How Should We Respond to the Gospel of Relationism?

Let us say from the start that God's Word is addressed and related to His people indeed. God created the world; that is a relationship. He created man in His image; that is a relationship. He made a covenant with man; that is a relationship. He established a new covenant; that is a relationship. Jesus Christ came to save sinners; that is a relationship. Prophets and apostles preached the message of salvation; that is a relationship. Without a personal relationship with the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ nobody will be saved; and without a personal hearing of what the Spirit says to the churches, the Word of God in Holy Scripture will not profit us.

We will add something. We will add that the Word of God and the preaching of that Word is related to men and times. God spoke to His people of the old covenant in terms of the situation of that old covenant; and to His people of the new covenant in terms of the situation of that new one. The shadows of the old dispensation came to fulfillment in the new dispensation. The apostle Paul became a Jew to the Jews and a Greek to the Greeks. The missionaries to our old German forefathers spoke in the cultural environment of those Germans. The preachers in the time of war in the Netherlands spoke the language of an occupied country. The preachers in a concentration camp speak the language of that concentration camp.

It would be simply foolish to deny all this.

But the point is that God's truth does not depend on all these relationships, but transcends them; that it does not *become* truth by human cooperation, but that God's Word *is* truth.

How and what do I know about God's relationship, His covenant with His people? How and what do I know about Jesus and what He did for me?

"From the holy gospel, which God Himself first revealed in Paradise; afterwards published by the

holy patriarchs and prophets, and foreshadowed by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law; and lastly fulfilled by His only begotten Son" (Heidelberg Catechism answer 19).

Where do we find that gospel?

"We confess that this Word of God was not sent nor delivered by the will of man, but that *men spoke from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit*, as the apostle Peter says; and that afterwards God, from a special care which He has for us and our salvation, commanded His servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit His revealed Word to writing; and He Himself wrote with His own finger the two tables of the law. Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures" (Belgic Confession Art. 3).

How much should I believe of it?

"True faith is a sure knowledge, whereby I hold for truth *all* that God has revealed to us in His Word" (Catechism answer 21). These words are words of our confessional standards, framed in the 16th century. But they resound in the hearts of the believers of all times, because they express in human words what the dearest treasures are of the people of God. They speak of a relationship with God through Jesus Christ which is granted to all believers of all times and places; for I believe the communion of saints, that is "that believers, all and every one, as members of Christ, are partakers of Him and of all His treasures and gifts" (Catechism answer 55). They speak also of a relationship with the Word of God in the Bible which is granted to all believers of all ages, "for we believe without any doubt all things contained in them [the books of the Bible], because the Holy Spirit witnesses in our heart that they are from God" (Belgic Confession Art. V).

VII. Meeting Objections

But is this standpoint not naive? Is it not unscientific? Does it not play down the big problems that are raised by serious scholars of our own time and age?

The answer to this question is, that it is very naive to assert, that those so-called big problems have only been discovered in very recent times. They have been there since the beginning of the Christian church.

It was even so that we meet in the New Testament men with big problems concerning the credibility of data of the Old Testament. They were called Sadducees and they said that there was no resurrection (Luke 20:27), nor angel, nor spirit (Acts 23:8).

In order to refute them Jesus quoted Scripture. He said: "That the dead are raised even Moses showed."

Jesus often quoted Scripture, even in its first chapters. He certainly believed that Jonah had been three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish (Matt. 12:40). That was not a "popular story," but real history. As much as his resurrection from the dead was real history.

All the so-called critical points which are dished up by the "New Theologians" have many times been

rehashed since the days of Celsus and Porphyry who attacked the credibility of the Bible in the first centuries.

And many defences, many apologies of Christianity and its Bible have been written.

It would be an easy task to give proof of this, and also to give proof of the arrogance of the Dutch report with respect to the Reformed fathers, particularly Abraham Kuyper; did these Reformed fathers hold a theory of mechanical inspiration?

It is not true. Did Kuyper not take seriously the problems which we find by open-mindedly reading the Bible (p. 45)? It is not true.

But we will not enter into details.

The essential point is touched upon when the report states, when denouncing Kuyper's attitude toward Scripture, that he was led astray by "his supernatural view of inspiration." That was Kuyper's view indeed; he believed that all Scripture is inspired by God, and that the prophecy of Scripture was spoken by men from God moved by the Holy Spirit.

The heart of the matter is to be found in the question: Do you believe in the Christ of Scripture? Do you believe in the complete Christ of the complete Scripture?

VIII. A Church Crisis

We have to consider these things well.

Prof. Bakker expressed his hope that this report would signal the end of a period of schizophrenia. And schizophrenia is a serious mental disease. It points literally to the splitting up of the mind of man into two separate apartments. The term must have been used by the Kampen professor to indicate a conflict between the personal conviction of the preacher and that of (the majority of) the congregation.

But now the end of this period is in view. That means that the time is coming (or has come) that the minister will be free to speak his mind; to bring the gospel of the popular story of Jonah; to preach the message of doing miracles with our own hands.

What about the congregation? How does relationship apply to the relation between a "New Theology" minister and an "Old Theology" congregation?

The door is open to a constant dialogue. In practice the door is also open to a constant exodus. Quite a number of persons have left the "Gereformeerde" churches in the last decade. And many feel like sheep without a shepherd.

I need not stress the importance of all this in the context of the present situation in the Christian Reformed Church. What happens in a special Dutch denomination that is still very dear to us, does not happen on an island. In a way it is only a symptom of the spiritual situation of the Christian church in our time. The Roman-Catholic church is being rocked by the shocks inflicted by its New Theologians. The Evangelical churches in America experience their "battle for the Bible" when the idea gains ground that this book is certainly infallible but not inerrant. We are not scot-free. The Dutch report tells all of us: open your eyes and make up your mind. ●

The Mystery of the Church

Lubbertus Oostendorp

A Necessary Distinction

Protestants have considered the church as an object of faith. We *believe* much that we cannot *see*. Theologians have therefore very naturally come to speak of the church as both visible and invisible. By this they did not intend to imply that there were really two churches, one visible and the other invisible. Rather the tangible aspect is one thing. The intangible aspect is quite another side of the church.

This distinction of visible-invisible is very important for a proper understanding of the Church of Jesus Christ. Understanding it is essential to our proper regard for the body of Christ. Misunderstandings and misapplications of this vital distinction have been the cause of many practical difficulties.

The Danger of Externalizing

Even where there might be the closest coordination between the visible body and the invisible side of the church, the distinction is still significant. In other words, the fact that one might consider the organized congregation as being made up of true believers, does not negate the relevance of the distinction. Particularly where such "ideal" conditions prevail, the danger of a kind of "externalism" may arise. How easily the members of such a "good" church might imagine that the relationship with the visible structure is the "real thing." The mystery is gradually replaced by a simplistic view which tends to reduce the church to a social institution. Even in worship, spiritual feelings give way to merely psychological experiences. Israel no doubt suffered greatly from the illusion that the external nation and its shrines were the chosen of the Lord. And by a rather simple logic, they convinced themselves that they were the people of God, even when their hearts were far from Him.

The Bible's Teaching

The Bible often deals with the contrast between the visible and the invisible. Many scriptural pas-

sages, however, seem to justify an uncritical identification of the people, the land and especially the temple with the truly "holy." The Psalms especially are filled with praise for Zion. "God is in the midst of her", Ps. 46:6. "He is our God and we are the sheep of his hand", Ps. 95:7. The same theme is repeated again and again in the history of the Jewish people. They are an elect nation. Jerusalem is a holy city and the temple is the place where God dwells.

Small wonder that the Psalmist in Ps. 80 is perplexed by the withdrawal of God's favor. Of God's "vine" he asks "Why hast thou broken down its walls so that all they that pass by the way do pluck it", vs. 12?

Israel's historians tell the tragic story of rebellion and apostasy. A good deal of their account seems to be written to show why the chosen people should be punished (Judges, II Chron. 36:11, ff.). In both the historical books and in the prophets there are many instances of vain appeals to the *holy* people and *holy* objects. What a shock it must have been to Eli's sons to find the Ark in which they had trusted conquered by the Philistines. More than any other, Jeremiah exposes the false hopes of those who trust in the externals of worship. Isaiah, too, sees a deceived people vainly trusting that they are the "holy city", Isa. 48:12. The hardness of Israel reaches its climax in the rejection of Christ.

The New Testament continues to warn against the danger of trust in an external church. Paul seems deeply disturbed by the rejection of Israel. Especially in Rom. 9-11, but also in Gal. 3-4, he sheds light on this most difficult problem. If we may call Israel a kind of external church of the O.T. dispensation, then certainly it has not gone well with the external system! Neither for the present, nor the future (Gal. 4:30) do things seem good for the Old Testament people of God.

Some theologians have sought answers to the problems of that people in a bright future restoration of Israel. And it is true that the God who rejects has often proved to be the God who still accepts. Paul

resorts to the idea of a *remnant* who are saved. They are not all Israel that are of Israel (Rom. 9:6). Isaiah 1:9 and Jeremiah 23:3 had prophesied that a remnant would be saved.

Barth's Wrong Solution

Karl Barth has dealt very extensively with the rejection of Israel. He too speaks of the "seven thousand" in Israel. But his solution to the problem is not an election within Israel. Rather, for him all this reference to rejections is a rejection of the elect! Fond as he is of paradox, here too he resorts to a paradoxical explanation. The church is for him the elected elect, i.e. the people who are elected and know their election in Christ. But Israel was and is even today the rejected elect. Their rejection of Christ means for them a kind of rejection. Nevertheless they are and remain the beloved elect of God. Thus they, like Esau, are all the rejected elect.

Barth here touches on some profound truths, especially when he applies the concepts "rejected" and "elected" to Christ. In a very real sense Christ was rejected, even though He was the elect of God. And in His rejection and election we who were rejected have been accepted. For the N.T. Church, as well as Israel, were rejecters. But does this mean that all "rejected rejecters" are ultimately saved? By no means. There is clearly an invisible election of a remnant within a visible church.

In both Romans and Hebrews we read of a rejection which is ultimate and final. Hebrews knows even a rejection of the external Israel when it says that we must go outside the camp. In both books, it is only the believers who are saved. Once more Barth and his followers are trying to preach peace to those for whom there is no peace.

Faith in the Invisible Church

God seems to have gone out of His way in the Bible to expose externalism. The outward church is not the essence of the church. There are basically invisible characteristics which mark the true saints. There is one people of God in many external institutions. If the whole church may in some sense be called a covenant people, there is still an election of grace within that body.

For various reasons and in different ways the Reformers, Calvin and Luther, stressed the invisible aspect of the church. This was for both a matter of deep personal faith. They had seen what could happen to an apostate structure. Like Jerusalem, Rome had ceased to be the holy city. It was not a church which was really "church." But as the Heidelberg Catechism confesses, the Son of God is gathering a church chosen to eternal life. And these are united in the true faith.

Our day has seen a good deal of deserved criticism of the external church. The rise of liberalism and the meaningless proliferation of denominationalism had contributed to this. Often this has led to radical efforts to purge the church and establish a pure

church. Luther and Calvin had been concerned with the true external church. Hence the Reformation! But when both Lutheran and Reformed churches began to apostatize, many resorted to a visible-invisible dialectic. And well we may sympathize with members who were caught in the liberal churches. Was it not true that they, and all the true believers, were still members of the church of Christ which is in heaven?

Seeking a True Visible Church

It is one thing to resort to this dualism in a liberal context. It is quite another thing to do as some of the Seceders of 1834 in the Netherlands did. Having come from congregations which were a mass of unbelievers, they continued to project the same kind of censorious judgement upon their own congregations. It always seems rather pessimistic of Rev. Simon Van Velzen to call his congregation "nothing but a mass of hypocrites." In various denominations there are still ministers who consider only a very few of their large congregations as "true Christians." This creates a false antithesis in the concepts visible-invisible.

Around the 1930's, there was a wave of anti-external church fundamentalism. Having suffered from the liberalism of the mainline denominations and the dead orthodoxy of some conservative churches, men turned away from the church entirely. Some groups even argued that church membership was unscriptural. In my days at Calvin Seminary, I was given a ride by such a non-church Christian. Having learned that I was a member of the CRC he warned me against creeds and denominations. As for him, he only believed the Bible. When I asked him to what church he belonged, he assured me most confidently that he belonged to the church of Jesus Christ in heaven. Perhaps it was a bit irreverent, but I could not resist the temptation to ask: "And have you been attending there often lately?"

We may not neglect the external church. It was of some such outward congregations that Paul affirmed them to be the "temple of the Holy Spirit" (I Cor. 3:16) and the "pillar and ground of the truth" (I Tim. 3:15). Ideally there is an integration of the characteristics which are invisible, with their visible manifestation. How closely the invisible and visible are in desired coordination can only be empirically determined from the life of the institution. The Scripture gives examples of all kinds of churches (Rev. 1-3). God forbid that without charity or common sense, a minister should class his congregation with a Laodicea when really it is like faithful Smyrna. Equally absurd, however, is the temptation to flatter a Corinth as though it were a Philippi. Neither optimism nor pessimism should here be our guide. We are called to be realists! Our day certainly seems to call for continued insistence on true conversion. While we strive to make the visible church what it ought to be, let us never succumb to the illusion that mere external membership or worship is the same as the unseen link that binds us in the Holy Spirit with Christ and one another. ●

Which Version Now?

M. H. Woudstra

**A REVIEW ARTICLE BASED ON
"WHICH VERSION NOW" BY BOB SHEEHAN,**
Carey Publications, 5 Fairford Close,
Haywards Heath, Sussex RH16 3EF, England
32 pp. Price \$2.25.

Readers have sent in a number of letters about Bible translations. Some of them have been disturbed or convinced by claims that the King James Version is the only authentic English Bible and using others is more or less an indication of apostasy. Several pamphlets have been sent in which encourage such conclusions. Dr. Marten H. Woudstra, Professor of Old Testament at Calvin Theological Seminary, who has a well-deserved reputation as a conservative Christian scholar and has served on our churches' translation committees for a quarter of a century, deals with these matters by way of reviewing an excellent little British book on the subject.

In recent decades, Christians in the English-speaking world have witnessed the publication of a large number of new Bible translations. In this respect the present era resembles the time preceding the publication of the King James Version in 1611. Prior to the appearance of that version English Bible readers already had had a choice of many translations. This began with the translation of William Tyndale, the first one to use Hebrew and Greek texts for his English rendering of Scripture. Tyndale died a martyr by being burned at the stake in 1536.

Closely following upon Tyndale's version were those of Coverdale (1535) and Thomas Matthew (1537). In the year 1539 the Great Bible appeared, in 1560 the Geneva Bible, beloved among the Pilgrim Fathers, and finally there was the Bishops' Bible (1568). The King James Version, published in 1611,

was commissioned by King James I. Sheehan informs us that it "had a board of translators that were not all evangelicals. The leader of the High Church was one as well as the leader of the Puritans in the Church of England" (p. 23). On the other hand, some of the newer versions, such as NASV, NIV and LB had totally evangelical translators. As a footnote to the author's observation it may be noted that those who translated the NIV were required to express their agreement with the following statement on Scripture: "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written, and is therefore inerrant in the autographs," or to other similar "strict" statements as found in the Reformation creeds and the Baptist Declarations of Faith.

I suppose the English Christians of the 16th century, being faced with such a multitude of Bible versions, may have felt the same question arising in their heart as is now being raised: "Which Version Now?"

One can only applaud the concern of Christians for having a Bible version that is faithful and God-glorifying. May the day never come when Christians show no interest in this question. God's written Word is precious, it is the anchor for our soul, the road map by which we must walk. What is most important, it speaks to us of the Divine Savior and is motivated by God's redemptive concern. The Belgic Confession, written in 1561, already knew of this redemptive concern when it stated so beautifully in Art. III: "God, from a special care which He has for us and our salvation, commanded His servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit his revealed will to writing" (cf. also Jer. 36:1, 2; John 20:30, 31).

Because so much is at stake, Christians should insist that in the translation of the Bible they use there be no tampering with the truth of God and no bias in the handling of the text of Sacred Scripture. It was this same awareness which prompted the NIV translators to insist on subscription to a firm declaration concerning the origin and nature of the Bible.

For several centuries the KJV continued to be the undisputed Bible of the English-speaking world. This version is a true monument to English prose. By it untold generations of men and women have found the Savior and received comfort and light upon their life's way.

Since the end of the 19th century the picture began to be more diversified. In 1881-1901 the American Standard Version appeared. This version has been widely used in the Christian Reformed denomination and is still found in the pews of many of its churches. Then came the Revised Standard Version, the Amplified Bible, the Berkeley Version, the New English Bible, the Living Bible, The Good News Bible, the New American Standard Bible and the New International Version, not to mention some other, Roman Catholic versions, which also appeared in recent years.

The booklet here reviewed takes note of almost all of these recent versions. It shows a thorough acquaintance with them, both as to contents and translation policy, and it discusses in a balanced and charitable fashion the merits or demerits of both the earlier King James Version and its newer successors.

Because the reviewer considers this treatise to be such a worthwhile contribution to the question it raises, he will confine himself chiefly to a summary of the author's presentation without adding much of personal comment.

What should be noted is that the booklet reviewed deals almost exclusively with the New Testament, at least in the part that deals with the text a translator should use. That part addresses itself to questions surrounding the Greek text of the New Testament. In the Old Testament the questions pertaining to the text are quite different. All newer translations have as basis for their Old Testament translation the so-called "Masoretic Text," although some versions adhere to this text more closely than others. It is in the New Testament that one finds a greater lack of unanimity concerning the actual text of the original. Therefore, let not the reader of certain alarmist literature concerning "Which Bible?" overlook this basic distinction. The text underlying the modern translations of the Old Testament is basically the same as that underlying the King James Version.

The only difference lies in the discovery of some early manuscripts of the Hebrew texts and the greater knowledge of comparative language study which has shed light on obscure Hebrew words. These later finds had to be applied to the modern versions. This could not be done by those who translated the KJV.

Sheehan points out that questions of the correct text are important. Even seemingly minor elements such as individual words, verb tenses, etc. can affect the truth of God. But we are faced with the fact that God did not deem it necessary to preserve the first copies of His Word for us. We are also faced with the fact that the text of the Bible suffered from the mistakes made by copyists. On that score there is hardly any disagreement between Christians of whatever persuasion.

Nevertheless, 97% of the text of the New Testament is generally accepted by all scholars as truly representing the original. So the dispute is over 3% of the New Testament only! Sheehan rightly calls attention to this. Says he: "To discuss the problem under the title 'which Bible' is to enlarge the issue out of all proportion and is a reprehensible playing on uninformed fears" (p. 5). See also what was said above about the Old Testament text.

What should further be noted is that the matter of the proper text of the New Testament is not one that divides orthodox from liberal scholars. One finds orthodox scholars on both sides of the fence.

The main options for choosing the Greek text for translating the New Testament are three. Some favor the Received Text (R.T.); others prefer the Majority Text (M.T.), and a third group are committed to an eclectic principle, i.e., they choose the Greek variant reading on the basis of eclectic principles. E. F. Hills is chosen as representing position (1); and W. N. Pickering of position (2). The third viewpoint is found in a variety of handbooks.

The R.T. bears this name because this text was generally accepted (received) in the 16th century. The name should not be understood as expressing the idea that this text was "received" directly from God. This text was published by the great humanist Erasmus. This scholar, though critical of the R.C. church, never broke with the church, as did Luther. To the reviewer it is somewhat strange to see people, who are devoted to the King James Bible as the "true Reformation Bible," and who point to the alleged Romanism of other N.T. texts, accept the Received Text, a text which was published by the Roman Catholic humanist Erasmus!

The R.T. is based on a comparison of six Greek manuscripts (actually there are some 5338 manuscripts of the Greek N.T. known to us). These six were checked and corrected by reference to the Latin translation, called Vulgate. In other words, the R.T. is not the majority text as such. Dr. Hills believes that the R.T. must be used as base for translating the N.T. God preserves His Word, so he argues, and He also preserved the way in which the manuscripts were transmitted, even though today we have no representatives of this text from before the 4th century A.D. Yet, so Hills contends, the Holy Spirit bears witness to this text as the true one.

Sheehan points out the following weaknesses in Dr. Hills' arguments. (1) Hills has not demonstrated that the Holy Spirit also made sure that this good text was always *used* in the church. In fact, he has to admit that for 1200 years (from the 4th to the 16th century) this text was not recognized by the church. (2) Dr. Hills' theory is short on facts. (3) It gets rid of inconvenient evidence and downgrades material to be gleaned from ancient Bible versions and from western church sources. (4) The appeal to the guidance of the Spirit as extending to this matter is very questionable. (5) Hills admits that one may sometimes go against the testimony of the majority of Greek manuscripts, as did Erasmus. What, then, remains of his appeal to the Spirit's guidance in preserving the text?

Modern Bible versions, for good reasons, do not follow the R.T. in the 3% of the disputed readings. See, for example, the footnotes in the NIV on Matthew 27:35; Acts 8:37 and I John 5:7-8.

The second view examined is that of W. N. Pickering, who holds that the Majority Text must be followed. This term is used for N.T. manuscripts dating from the 5th to the 16th century. A smaller group of manuscripts dates from before the 4th century.

Why follow the M.T.? It is alleged that the church fathers had such a high regard for Scripture that they would not tolerate any deliberate changes in the text. When, in the 5th century, the major heresies had been put down the true text of the New Testament emerged and was copied faithfully since that time. The reason why we have no early copies of the true text is because these copies were worn out by their much use, or they were destroyed after copies were made. Moreover, the church fathers do contain quotes from this majority text in their writings.

Mr. Sheehan refutes these contentions one by one. For one thing, it simply is not so that the church fathers quoted from this M.T. (p. 12). Mr. Pickering's position is unsubstantiated on all points.

The third approach to the text of the N.T. is the eclectic one. This is the one favored by the author. This approach asks questions such as these: Does this reading have ancient support? How widespread is this reading? Does it occur only in Egyptian documents or also elsewhere? What is the actual weight of this reading as compared with other readings?

All newer versions follow this eclectic approach. Those who cannot accept it are necessarily limited to the use of the King James Version. Even the modernized KJV is not acceptable to these people since it is largely the work of one man.

The second part of this study is no less important than the first. It deals with the proper principles of Bible translation. Granted that one has the proper text, how is this text to be translated in understandable English? A good bit of current criticism of the newer versions such as the NIV stems from a failure to understand the need to present the truth of God in language that can be grasped by the modern reader. This is why Sheehan's contribution is so worthwhile at this point.

Sheehan points out that the KJV does not always render the same Hebrew word with the same English word. For the word *chesed* it used no less than eleven different meanings, because the translators recognized that "there be some words that be not of the same sense everywhere" (p. 25).

It may also surprise some readers that in the matter of recognizing the Deity of Christ the KJV sometimes receives less points than do some of the newer versions. In the translation of John 1:1; Romans 9:5; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8 and 2 Peter 1:1, the KJV scores three out of five points since it does not give a "high Christology" in Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1. But the NIV scores five out of five. Yet it is alleged by some that the NIV, as do other modern versions, "humanizes" our Lord Jesus Christ.

Sheehan makes us see that all Bible versions in use among us, including the KJV, reject a word-for-word translation approach (p. 21). But some versions put greater store by words, while others favor meaning. This is how Sheehan evaluates some leading versions:

In the KJV the words are given greater importance than the meaning; in the RSV meaning is a little more important; in the NEB and GNB, meaning is all-important; with the NASV words are again emphasized; but in the NIV meaning has greater priority; in the LB meaning is again all important (p. 21).

Space forbids quoting further from this eminently sane and balanced presentation which we hope will receive wide circulation among the readers of this periodical. Let me conclude with Sheehan's final word regarding the future of Bible translations among us.

From this survey NEB comes out the worst. Its use by evangelicals is surely questionable. While the KJV and RSV still have much to commend them the NASV AND NIV lead the field. If the present trends continue the NIV will prevail where the Received Majority issue does not win through (p. 30).

As one who from the very beginning was involved in the NIV translation project the reviewer can only express the prayer that Sheehan's prognostication will prove to be correct. And let us then jointly move on to better things and promote God's cause and kingdom with one consent and one accord.

GOD IS THERE

*It's so peaceful in the country
In the early morning hours;
When the sun is slowly rising
And the dew is on the flowers.*

*It's so peaceful in the country
When the birds begin to sing;
And the frogs in croaking chorus
Make the hills and meadow ring.*

*It's so peaceful in the country
And I feel God's presence there;
I can face the day before me
Trusting in His tender care.*

Annetta Jansen
Dorr, Michigan

Mid-America Reformed Seminary News

John H. Piersma

The first SEMFEST and the first meeting of the board of trustees for the newly-organized Mid-America Reformed Seminary Association took place in September. Both meetings were acclaimed as very successful.

Borrowing the idea from the Reformed theological seminary in Kampen, the Netherlands, the new seminary steering committee organized a *school dag* ("school day") for Friday, Sept. 3, 1981. Guests were invited to inspect the recently-acquired facilities near Orange City, to enjoy a delicious chicken dinner served on the premises, and to attend a rally in a large, circus-type tent erected on the grounds.

Plunging ahead "on faith," the organizers ordered 400 dinners and set up about 600 chairs. Mockers were present in the area, of course, and predictions were available that the seminary's steering committee would be eating left-over chicken for several weeks. In addition, up to that day weather conditions were generally unfavorable for an outdoor gathering.

Friday, Sept. 3 dawned bright and clear, however, and it turned out to be the most agreeable day weather-wise for a considerable period. This was indeed a harbinger of great things to come so far as the sponsors of the event were concerned! Fact is that almost 400 chicken dinners were served, and every chair plus a few more brought in from the seminary building was filled.

The program featured a stirring address by Rev. John Sittema of Sanborn, Iowa. A Dordt College choral group directed by Prof. Dale Grotenhuis offered a number of most appropriate and beautiful selections, group singing was excellently led by Prof. Gerald Bouma, also of Dordt College, and Dr. Peter Y. De Jong briefly announced the availability of evening adult education courses for the fall

Rev. John H. Piersma has just transferred to become pastor of the Pleasant Street C.R. Church of Whitinsville, Massachusetts. He is our original trustee and editor of the Reformed Fellowship.

of 1981 and the spring of 1982. Rev. Thomas G. Vanden Heuvel of Orange City presided.

It was a happy and enthusiastic crowd that attended this meeting. Seminary leaders hope that this will be an annual event, an effort that will help keep this movement close to God's people!

* *

The organizational meeting for the newly-elected members of the board of trustees for Mid-America Reformed Seminary Association was held on Monday evening and Tuesday, Sept. 20, 21, in the seminary building.

Present were Harlyn Jacobsma, Orange City businessman; Henry Vander Pol, Seattle businessman; Rev. Thomas Vanden Heuvel, pastor of First Christian Reformed Church, Orange City; Rev. Richard Venema, pastor of First Christian Reformed Church, Chino, Cal.; Nick Yonker, Holland, Mich. businessman; John M. Vander Aa, South Holland, Ill. attorney; Rev. Nelson Kloosterman, pastor of Immanuel Christian Reformed Church, Sheldon; Dr. Steward F. Kanis, Pella, Ia. physician; Leonard Klok, Kalamazoo, Mich. businessman; Rev. John H. Piersma, pastor of First Christian Reformed Church, Sioux Center; Rev. Edward Heerema, pastor-emeritus of the Bradenton, Fla. Christian Reformed Church; Bartel Zandstra, Highland, Ind. attorney; James Boogerd, Rock Valley businessman; Rev. Jerome Julien, pastor of First Christian Reformed Church, Sheldon, Ia.; John O. Van Hofwegen, Walnut Creek, Cal. businessman.

Advisers were Rev. Edward Knott of Rock Valley; Dr. Peter Y. De Jong of Orange City; Rev. Henry Vander Kam of Doon; Rev. C. Eric Fennema of Sibley and Rev. John R. Sittema of Sanborn. Chosen as officers were Mr. Vanden Heuvel, president; Mr. Julien, vice-president; Mr. Kloosterman, secretary; Mr. Jacobsma, treasurer.

thanksgiving meditation

USING BUT NOT ABUSING

John Blankespoor

"And they that use this world, but not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passes away" I Cor. 7:31

*To bless the earth Thou sendest, from Thine abundant store
The waters of the springtime, enriching it once more.
The seed by Thee provided is sown o'er hill and plain
And Thou with gentle showers dost blest the springing grain.
The year with good Thou crownest, the earth Thy mercy fills,
The wilderness is fruitful, and joyful are the hills,
With corn the vales are covered, the flocks in pastures graze;
All nature joins in singing a joyful song of praise.*

(Ps. 65, Psalter Hymnal)

This kind of song we sing during the Thanksgiving season. Surely this is pleasing to the Lord. He always delights in responses of gratitude. But because gratitude is not natural for us, it is important for us to conduct serious, deep, soul-searching inventory of ourselves, with the purpose of bringing out more responses of heart-felt gratitude. To do this it is also extremely important to have a proper Scriptural perspective of material things. This is necessary at all times, but especially during the Thanksgiving season.

Basically, all of our Christian living is spiritual. Salvation is something spiritual, the fear of the Lord is something spiritual. But the Lord gives to men who are living souls and spiritual beings a physical world to live in, a world in which we receive and

need food and clothing, homes and jobs, farms and businesses, and many other physical gifts and necessities. With all these, He wants us to serve Him. Thanksgiving has to do with these physical gifts, but never as separate from the spiritual aspects of life.

There is what some people have called, the "two pile" idea of life, the "pile" of good things in life and the one of the bad, adverse things in life. And as long as the pile of good and favorable things is bigger than the one of bad things we have something to be thankful for. If the amount of good things far outnumber the one of evil things we hear people say, "We have so much to be thankful for." And who would say that this is wrong? But what if the pile of bad things seems bigger than the other one? Or if there is not too much difference? Surely this has been and still is the experience of many people and Christians in this life. Then, as far as our feelings are concerned, the reaction is usually quite different.

But the Lord always wants us to have the proper and right reaction. Regarding the adverse things the Scriptures speak much of being submissive. The Heidelberg Catechism says we must be patient in adversity. The prophet Habakkuk also knew about the "pile" of bad things. Listen (Ch. 3:17, 18), "For though the fig tree shall not flourish, neither shall fruit be on the vines; The labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no food; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

Regarding prosperity Paul says that God "gives us richly all things to enjoy." The Catechism says we must be thankful for the "pile" of good things. Scripture abounds in passages telling us that we must be thankful for material blessings. Spurgeon says that the greatest trial for a Christian is not persecution, but that "pile" of good things, prosperity. How well Moses knew this long ago, warning the Israelites again and again, as we read in Deuteronomy 8.

When Israel shall enter the land of Canaan, with its abundance of good things they shall eat and be full. But then they must bless the Lord their God. And he warns them that especially then they should beware lest they forget the Lord their God in not keeping His commandments.

To most of us the Lord has given in 1981 another "pile" of good things. In spite of inflation and recession. Compared with what the Scriptures call daily bread, even the un-employed have much, generally speaking. For all this the Lord wants us to be thankful. In the words of this text the requirement is expressed very aptly in these words, *we must use them but not abuse them.*

There are many translations of this verse. I prefer the one I quoted. What does it mean that we use the things of this world, or that we abuse, or misuse them?

Abusing them basically means that we use them for ourselves. Surely we can and usually do use Thanksgiving Day for ourselves. We are so happy and thankful because we have so much. I, I, I have so much. Abusing the things God gives us is also seen in being gluttonous, with man making a god of his belly and digging his grave with his teeth. Also when we complain and gripe much about the high cost of living and inflation, while in church we piously confess to believe in the providence of our heavenly Father. We abuse God's good gifts when we constantly want more for our own enjoyment and pleasure. We abuse them when the very thought of contentment is foreign to our thoughts and desires.

On the other hand, properly *using* the things of this world is rooted in and being aware of the fact that we are saved by grace through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have deserved absolutely nothing, not even daily bread. All Christian living begins with this basic knowledge and experience. Using this world further means that we are deeply aware that we are stewards of these gifts, not really owners. Also that we realize that the more the Lord gives us, the more we owe Him. After all, doesn't the Christian confess that everything is for the Lord and that He makes us heartily willing and ready to live unto Him? It further means that we are thankful for the gifts received, giving God the credit also for our ability to work, to do business, or whatever. God also wants us to enjoy the good things He has given us, but not make idols of them. Of course, using these things also means that we try to be contented, and constantly discipline ourselves against discontentment. Never, never may we or our children say, "I hate this or that kind of food." In the world people are thankful because they are happy for themselves. In God's kingdom with the receiving of many good things we are happy, of course, and want to be thankful, but it is always finally a gratitude *away* from ourselves. It means to be thankful to the Lord, with deeds and words. Basically it is the same as Christian love, which is the opposite of selfishness, a giving away, a living for someone else.

This kind of living, this kind of thankfulness brings true happiness. There is always happiness in the fear of the Lord.

The fashion of this world passes away, says Paul. Another version speaks of the form of this world passing away. This reminds me of a film we saw on television some time ago showing the sinking of the mighty Titanic in 1912. Fifteen hundred people drowned, within two hours. Very impressively that giant of the sea was pictured as sinking deeper and deeper into the water. Finally it was gone. Can you imagine anyone trying to board this ship at this time, or clinging to it? The form of this world is passing away, every day. Like this sinking ship. The end may be near. Therefore, Paul means to say, don't abuse this world by becoming engrossed in its riches; don't live as if you are married to the world. Instead, have the right perspective, by using it, knowing that it is all temporary and all of the Lord and for the Lord.

The fool is thankful only for himself. He is abusing and misusing God's good gifts. He is building his house on the sand. The storms are coming.

In Christ we can have the right perspective, and a proper sense of values of all the things of this world, also on Thanksgiving Day. In Christ we can have the right vision and attitude. We are only passing through. But while we are passing through He usually gives us many of these material things to enjoy and to serve Him with. And we know that when the form of this world does pass away, either with our own death, or the end of the world, we will lose nothing. We will have Christ always, and with Him a new heaven and earth. Therefore, bless the Lord, O my soul. ●

**STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP,
MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION**

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I certify that the statements made by me are correct and complete.

MARY KAISER, Business Mgr.

Letter to the Ephesians

Henry Vander Kam

JEW AND GENTILE — FELLOW CITIZENS.

Lesson 5

Ephesians 2:19-22

We must remember that the description which Paul had given of the state of the gentiles in contrast with that of the Jews before the gospel came to Ephesus was one of which they were not even aware at that time. The unbeliever doesn't realize what he is missing and can, seemingly, be quite happy in his life separated from God and from His people. The Spirit of God must open the eyes to make one see the poverty of such a state and fill him with a "holy jealousy" for what the people of God enjoy. Those things have happened in Ephesus. They have been brought together, Jew and gentile, through the power of the work of Christ. He was the only one who could effect a reconciliation between the two. He has sent His Spirit to complete the work He began, and in the church Jew and gentile may and can now call one another brothers!

Former Strangers

Before this the gentiles were strangers to the household of God. They had not even heard of him. The proselyting during the Old Testament dispensation must have been very limited. There are a few names in the Old Testament which show us that this "mission work" was not completely absent. There is a Ruth and there is a Rahab. These, despite the obstacles thrown in their path, were assimilated into

the people of God. But, who had heard of the God of Abraham in the Greek and Roman world of Paul's day? The Jews had remained strangers among the people in whose lands they dwelt! It is therefore not too much to say that the gentiles were strangers to the household of God.

The Great Change

But, all of this has changed. The change which has come with the coming of Jesus Christ into the world cannot be measured. Now, all of a sudden, it makes no difference whether you are born a Jew or a Greek; the all-important question is: Do you believe on the Son of God? The Ephesians had believed on Him. Then you are no longer strangers to the household of God! No, you then have become *members* of that household. Those who have come at the eleventh hour (Matthew 20) receive the same wages as those who were in the field since early morning! The Jew can't understand this. Is God fair in dealing alike with both? Not if it is a matter of earning. One certainly ought to earn more in twelve hours than in one. But, it is not a matter of earning — it is *grace*, and grace is not measured in terms of time. This was a difficult lesson for the Jew to learn. In fact, it was so difficult a lesson that they condemned the gospel and the gospel ministers for it!

Now Citizens

Not only has the status of strangers been removed from these gentiles since they believed, they are

also not to be considered as mere sojourners. The latter were privileged above strangers. They had a place with the saints. The Gibeonites, for example, lived among the Israelites for years and benefitted greatly by this contact. But, they were not citizens! Israel had to "put up with them" because of the vow made to their fathers by Joshua. Let not the church of the New Testament take that attitude toward these people who have come to the faith in Jesus Christ even though their roots are in the gentile world. What a privilege to be fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God. It is one of the author's purposes to make clear to these people how favored they are.

The Well Founded Building

From the term "household" he easily progresses to the idea of an edifice or house of which they have become a part. They have become citizens of a structure which is of the greatest significance. It is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets." This, of course, does not mean that these apostles and prophets "themselves" were the foundation on which this structure rested. It was rather the teaching of both apostles and prophets which formed the foundation of the house of which they were now members. Again, Paul does not refer to the prophets of the Old Testament, but to those of the New. These were secondary to the apostles but they, nevertheless, brought the same gospel, the same foundational message. The church is built on this foundation and on no other. Now there are those who teach that Christ is the foundation of the church. This is, of course, true (I Cor. 3:11). But, when the apostles and prophets come with the word of Christ, it can just as well be said that they are the foundation of the church. Similar expressions are found elsewhere. Christ is the Light of the world; but He also says that His followers are the light of the world. Ephesus must realize that the Christ is speaking through apostles and prophets. They come with the authoritative word. To look at them only as servants of the people is to attack the foundation of the church.

"The Chief Cornerstone"

But what is the role which Christ plays in the establishment and continuance of this building? Paul says that Christ Jesus Himself is "the chief cornerstone." This is not the first time the Scriptures have spoken of cornerstones and of Christ being a cornerstone. Psalm 118:22 immediately comes to mind. There are various passages in the New Testament which refer to this passage and show the important place Christ has in the structure of the church. Yet, I find it very difficult to understand all these various passages in their specific meaning. I also believe that the term "cornerstone" is not always used in the same sense in Scripture. Sometimes it indeed refers to part of the foundation, while at other times it seems to refer more to what we today call "a key stone." When we speak of a cornerstone today we

mean neither the one nor the other. At a "cornerstone laying" it is not a part of the foundation which is put in place, but, rather, a special stone with an inscription, etc. — one which could also be missed from the building. The question now becomes: In what sense is the term used in this particular text? The text seems to leave no doubt that by it is meant the most important part of the foundation. It is that stone which determines the angle of the walls and binds the walls together. When they are built on the foundation of apostles and prophets, they are also built on the foundation which is Jesus Christ. These truths are fundamental for the understanding of the nature of the church our Lord has come to build here on this earth. He, together with the teaching of His apostles and prophets are the basis upon which it stands. Outside of the church there is no salvation. (Article 28, Belgic Confession) The writer immediately does away with that atomistic view of salvation which is proclaimed so much today. The importance of the church is now being lost from view. Many still speak endearingly of Jesus but will have nothing to do with the teaching of the apostles and prophets. This is the characteristic of the false church.

The Building Which "Grows"

The first part of vs. 21 should not be translated "in whom each several building," etc.; but, "in whom the entire building," etc. There is but one church and the context had also made it clear that he was speaking of only one house which was being built. It is necessary that a firm foundation shall be laid for any house. The previous verse shows that the church has such a foundation. As I have stated before, Paul struggles with the limitations of human language. He has been speaking of a building. This, everyone can understand. When it comes to the foundation of that building he already makes it more difficult for us to understand him, but now, when he is speaking of the superstructure, logic seems to break down. That this description is a harmonious whole, we expect. The Master Builder is at work. Everything fits. But Paul goes on to say that this building, "groweth into a holy temple in the Lord." The building which sounded very much like a house when he first began to speak of it, now *grows* into a *temple*. This building, small at first, grows into something very large. This building, not esteemed highly at first, grows into a temple or sanctuary. A *building* that *grows*, is of course, materially impossible. But, when the apostle is speaking of the work of Christ, when he is speaking of the church of Christ, there is no metaphor which is capable of giving the whole picture. Christ has built His church. The teachings of apostles and prophets form its foundation. But, there is nothing static about the work of Christ. It throbs with life! Wherever one touches His work he is brought in contact with the only true life. Now, how can this be revealed in a "building?" The "building" itself will have to "grow" in order to adequately portray Christ's church. Notice what it grows into — a *temple*, a sanctuary. It grows into a holy place. The

work of God has great "success." That which began so small and so insignificant has become something of surpassing beauty and of great value.

Living Members

Not only does Paul speak of the church in general terms; he now also tells these Ephesians what their place is in this temple of God. They are the "living stones" of which the Apostle Peter speaks. When they come in contact with the foundation or with the cornerstone, they become alive! That is the reason this building can grow. It is made up of living building material. Each individual believer has his own place in this temple. All together they form then this temple or sanctuary in which God dwells by His Spirit! God lives in the church! That is His proper abode. The temple in Jerusalem was only a type. The building of that temple, Solomon, was well aware of this. The heavens are not able to contain Him — then how shall a house made with dead building material ever be able to house Him? Something better would have to come eventually. In 70 A.D. the temple in Jerusalem, which Herod had built, was destroyed. That was all right. It had served its purpose. The church had been founded and that is the place where God makes His abode.

God's Living House

It is the habitation of God in the Spirit. The spiritual nature of God's dwelling place was easy to overlook in the Old Testament times. God dwelt — first in the tabernacle and then in the temple. The Holy of Holies was the place where He dwelt in a very special manner. Only the high priest was allowed to enter there, and then only once a year. The heathen too had their temples. In Ephesus they had the great temple of Diana and her likeness within it. Israel's temple contained a *box*! Surely, they would not fall down before that in worship! Now God lives in the Spirit in the church where everything is alive! You are that temple!

Questions for discussion:

1. Does the gospel first make men dissatisfied with their lives? Explain. What do you think of the idea of building on something which the unbeliever already has?
2. Do we fully appreciate our relationship to the church of Christ? Do you think there would be so much criticism of the church if we did?
3. What does it mean that Christ was made the head of the corner?
4. Catholicism believes in the direct descent of apostolic authority to the clergy of the present day. Protestants have been afraid of this view. Why? Have we lost something vital and precious as a result?
5. If a minister used illustrations the way Paul did, do you think it would be helpful in understanding his thought? Explain.



PAUL MAKES KNOWN THE MYSTERY OF REDEMPTION.

Lesson 6

Ephesians 3:1-13

In this epistle Paul deals, of course, with the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ and its value for all those who believe. However, he does not just repeat himself in each epistle. There are certain emphases in the one epistle which are not found in the others. In this letter he deals with the *church* of Christ, the blessing of being a member of that glorious body of our Lord, and he magnifies the office which has been given him. These are very important considerations for the church of our day. Many no longer realize what is Biblically meant by the term "church" and there is much confusion regarding office.

Christ's Prisoner

Paul begins this chapter in a strange way. The first verse forms an incomplete sentence. This is not completed in the immediately following verses, but one has to go all the way to verse 14 to find the conclusion of the thought he had begun to express in verse 1. He refers to all that he has written in the previous two chapters when he begins, "For this cause." He is a prisoner at this time and that for a very definite reason. They must not look on him as one who deserves incarceration for crimes committed. He is "a prisoner of Christ Jesus in behalf of you Gentiles." He is not ashamed of the fact that he is in prison in Rome. One will usually seek to hide the fact that he has been in prison at one time or another, but Paul doesn't. It is amazing how often he brings up this rather touchy subject. He was imprisoned because he has been faithful! Those who did not proclaim the full gospel of Jesus Christ have their freedom. He has made known the whole counsel of God — and that brings trouble! It is because of these gentiles that he is in prison. He has claimed an equal place for them with the believing Jews — and that brought trouble! He has to defend his apostleship time and again. Let no man say that his imprisonment is an indication that he is not a true apostle. He is Christ's prisoner. He is a prisoner because he was faithful to his calling. If anything, the fact that he is a prisoner is an indication that he is truly an apostle!

There are various translations current of the words found in verse 2. As this verse is translated in the ASV, it is difficult to understand what the author has in mind. However, he is not speaking of a dispen-

sation, but of a "stewardship," or of a manner in which Paul has dealt with that grace of God which had been given him as a trust and which he was to use for their benefit. The "if" is not an indication of uncertainty, but ought to be understood as meaning "since." These Ephesians had heard the gospel very clearly from the mouth of Paul. They also knew that he had spent himself for the gospel and for those who were the recipients of the gospel.

The "Mystery"

That whole gospel was the "mystery." It was that which had not been made known before but was now revealed. This he had received by *revelation*. It was not a philosophy of men. It had not been given to him by others. He had received it directly from his God. He was an apostle! God had spoken to him. What he had made known to the Ephesian church was not some "cunningly devised fable," it was the word of God Himself. They must, therefore, recognize Paul as God's trustee. He had been entrusted with the word of God. He had made known to them things which prophets and even angels did not understand! Let them then see how exalted was the office to which he had been called — who was now a prisoner. Then they would be able to pray for him and they would also gladly hear God's word from him. He told them that he had referred to this matter before very briefly. They must never lose sight of the content of this mystery and they must also remember from whom they had heard it.

Revealed to Paul

As they read this epistle his understanding of the gospel, or of the mystery, will become clear to them. Is this pride? Paul has been accused of pride by many throughout the ages. He speaks of the fact that his labors have been more productive than those of other apostles, etc. So here, he writes, "You will be able to see how well I understand the gospel." However, in verse 8 the humility of this man is clearly shown. No, there is no false pride, but, rather, complete honesty! And, the understanding he has of this mystery is indeed profound. Who has so delved into the depths of the gospel of Jesus Christ as he? Who has shown such riches in the gospel as he? Yet, this is not of his own doing but is the gift of God.

Previously Hidden

In verse five the apostle again emphasizes the fact that the mystery of which he has been speaking has not been made known in previous generations. However, he still has not defined the nature of this mystery. It is indeed that which has now been revealed to the apostles and the prophets of the New Testament dispensation. And now, in verse six, he tells us what the content of that mystery is. The fact that it had not been made known to previous generations must not lead us to the conclusion that the prophets of the Old Testament had not spoken at all

about the future relation of Jew and gentile. There are many passages which speak of the blessing which is going to come to the gentile through the Jew. However, they did not know *how* this would come to pass, nor did they know the *nature* of the blessing which the gentile would receive. This is now revealed.

Entry of the Gentiles

The Old Testament prophets leave the impression that somehow the gentiles must be united to Israel in order to receive Israel's blessing. God had made a covenant with His people — an everlasting covenant. Somehow the gentiles must be brought into that relationship; but how? The Spirit had made it clear that *a new humanity* had come into being with the coming of Jesus Christ. The theocracy falls away and the church of the New Testament comes into being. Now the gentiles can become fellow-heirs (if ye be Christ's, ye are Abraham's seed). They have become fellow-members of the same body — which is the church. They have therefore become fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ — of eternal salvation. The whole manner of life has been changed. History has changed. Even the apostles had difficulty understanding this change. You can see the understanding this particular apostle has in this mystery of Jesus Christ. He grasped it!

Paul's Privilege

This mystery, then, has been made known in the gospel, and of that gospel, says Paul, I was made a minister! What a privilege! He is honored above the great of the Old Testament times. He is not self-appointed. No, it was a gift of God that he was made a minister. How gracious his God has been. It is also the power of God which has worked through the gospel which he was allowed to proclaim. He isn't worthy of this honor. He is "less than the least of all saints." In other places he speaks in similar language. In I Cor. 15 he says that he is the least of the apostles. In I Tim. 1 he says that he is the chief of sinners. He cannot understand that to him has been given such a blessing that he may make known to the gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. This is a gospel which goes far beyond the understanding of men. It is so beautiful! Gladly will he suffer for this Christ and for His gospel. It is the greatest news ever made known.

God's Revelation

The purpose of the ministry of the gospel is to enlighten everyone how this salvation, this mystery, now works. Christ is the content of the gospel and He is the One who will bring the true light to all those who believe that gospel. These things were formerly hidden from the eyes of men, they were hidden in God. If He had not revealed Himself, no one would ever have known Him, for no one can by searching find out God. So also concerning the salvation of both Jew and gentile — it had to be revealed! Only He who had created all things could reveal it.

"Many-colored Wisdom"

The purpose of making known this gospel is also found even beyond the present sphere. It is to make known to the principalities and powers, i.e., to angels, the glorious wisdom of God. The word translated *manifold* doesn't do justice to the original. Paul really speaks of the multi-splendored, the multi-colored, wisdom of God! This is made known through the church. It is true that all His works praise Him and that all things reveal His wisdom, but the church reflects that wisdom in a manner found nowhere else. These are things angels desire to look into. Therefore, proclaim the true gospel so that the true church may come into being and the glorious wisdom of God will be revealed to them.

God's Eternal Purpose

The eternal purpose of the God who created all things is summed up in Christ Jesus our Lord. All God's works have purpose. Christ stands at the center of them all. In Him will God's glorious wisdom be revealed. John speaks of the fact that this Word was from eternity; that He became flesh; and that He will come again as judge. God's full purpose has not yet been realized. There is more to come but it will all center in the Christ.

Benefits Realized

This Christ, Who is our Lord, has given Himself for these to whom the Apostle is writing. They must realize what benefits have been bestowed on them in Him. In Him they have a boldness to come to God. They are children who have freedom of speech before their Father. This gives them confidence. All of life has been changed. Faith in Jesus Christ has brought life to light.

Confidence

Seeing these Ephesians have received so much through the gospel which has come to them and which has been believed by them, nothing must blind them to the glorious grace revealed. They are aware, of course, that Paul is in prison in Rome, and he has spoken of this himself. They must not become downcast as a result of the situation. Regardless what comes in life, we may not become discouraged. He shows that he is confident that the sufferings of the present time are not to be compared to the glory which is ours. The church in Ephesus feels badly about Paul's imprisonment. He could do so much if he were free. He asks them not to look at his suffering in that way. He will glory in tribulation — and they must too! He, Whose purposes cannot be thwarted, is in control. He realizes all His purposes in Christ Jesus. The future is in good hands!

Questions for discussion:

1. What is Paul's view of his calling? In Galatians 1 he also mentions the fact that he had received his message by revelation. Therefore he is fully aware of the fact that he is proclaiming the word of God. How can a present day minister be certain that he is proclaiming the word of God?
2. Do you think Paul saw more clearly and earlier than the others that the gentiles were fellow-heirs of salvation? Why? Remember he was a Pharisee.
3. Did Paul have too high a view of his ministry? Can we have too high a view of it today?
4. Does the church today reflect the wisdom of God? Does your church?
5. What is Christ's position in history?
6. If we understand the gospel and truly believe it, can we ever complain? ●



THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES AND PROPHETIC SPECULATION, by Edmond Charles Gruss. Presbyterian and Reformed, Nutley, N.J., 1972. 127 pp., \$2.95 paper. Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien.

The Jehovah's Witnesses, known for setting dates for the end of the world, have an erroneous way of looking at Biblical chronology. This, Gruss, a former Jehovah's Witness, points out. He challenges them to test their system of thought by the Bible. This is a valuable contribution on one aspect of the Jehovah's Witness error.

THE SEPARATED LIFE: A STUDY OF BASIC PRINCIPLES by Johannes G. Vos. Great Commission Publications, 7401 Old York Road, Philadelphia, PA 19126. 35 pages. \$.35. Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien, pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa.

A penny a page — and worth much more! This booklet gives a Biblically-oriented approach to the Christian life. What ought to be the Christian's attitude toward the world? World flight and worldly indulgence are both answers — and bad ones at that! Vos gives the Biblical answer. He

writes, for example: "Many of those who today are so zealous for human ordinances about things indifferent fall into the error of the Galatians, who supposed that the Christian life is begun in the Spirit, but perfected in the flesh (Gal. 3:3), begun by the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, but completed by human efforts, actions and abstinences" (p. 29).

Perhaps this would be a valuable book for small discussion groups, besides being valuable for our general reading.

A LIFTING UP FOR THE DOWNCAST, by William Bridge. Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1979. 287 pp. \$3.95, paper. Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien.

These thirteen sermons on Psalm 42:11, preached in London in 1648, fully explain the meaning and application of this familiar text. The purpose of these messages is to give the comfort of Jesus Christ where there is deep discouragement and despair.

THE DIACONATE – A RULING TASK (Women Deacons or Women Rulers)

Leonard J. Coppes

In the recent debates about women in office it has been proposed that the office of deacon ought to be more clearly separated from the ruling office of elder than it is in the practice of our Reformed churches. It is argued that if that were done, women might be ordained as deacons without violating the Bible's clear order that women were not to rule in the church (1 Tim. 2:12). In this article Dr. Leonard J. Coppes, pastor of the Calvary Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Harrisville, Pennsylvania, brings a new consideration into the discussion by pointing out that in the Bible the official work of deacons was always part of the responsibility of rulers.

The debate surrounding women in church office is complex and summons varied responses. Here, however, this particular issue will be addressed: should women be ordained as deacons? Let us state from the outset that women ought not to be ordained as deacons primarily because Scripture places the official (having to do with office) responsibility of the diaconal task in the hands of the eldership. In so doing the Lord teaches that the diaconal task is, in its essence, part of ruling the church and that those who fulfill it in an official way exercise a degree of rule over the church. Inasmuch as we believe Scripture explicitly forbids women to rule in the church we believe women ought not to rule by being ordained as deacons.

I. God — the Great Deacon.

In the Old Testament benevolence was the official task only of the king and the elders. This proposition is seen most clearly by noting that the king and elders acted as representatives of God who was the one who cared for the poor and needy. In the Mosaic law, for example, God is described as the one who rules over Israel and guarantees provision and protection to all Israel (Deut. 7:12-16; 8:1-20). The promise of kingdom blessings is conditioned by the obedience of the people to their divine ruler (Deut. 7:12, 13; cf., Exod. 19:5, 6). Thus, ultimately it is God who provides not only for Israel but explicitly for the poor and needy among Israel (Deut. 10:18; cf., Prov. 22:22, 23). On the basis that He provides for the poor and needy, He commands Israel to do so — they are to act in imitation of God and as His representatives.

As the King, the source and enforcer of the law, the Ruler over Israel, God legislated provision and protection for the poor and needy. One place where this emerges clearly is in Deuteronomy 15:7-11. Here the principle enunciated in Deuteronomy 10:19 (where God commands Israel to care for the poor and needy) is expanded. The Lord is not talking necessarily about giving lump sums of money to the poor and needy. He is saying that His people ought to extend loans to the poor and needy in their land. This is said in connection with the year of remission which came once every seven years according to Jewish law. On the seventh year one could not charge interest on the money that he had loaned. If one had 200 dollars and a rich man came to him, a rich man might say to him, "Well, I will pay double interest the year after the seventh." Or at least the lender might envision how his debtor could do him some favor later; that is, the lender might buy a friend. The one making the loan might be satisfied with that. But a poor man might say: "I am not going to pay any interest this seventh year." Because he was a poor man one might think (rightly perhaps) that he would never pay any interest and perhaps not even pay back the principal. He might be poor for a reason. Certainly, he had no favors to bestow. The Scriptures say, "Lend to the poor man anyway." God protects the cause of the poor.

God not only protects the poor under these special conditions, but Deuteronomy 24:12-13 talks about loans to poor men at any time. The Jews (and the Scriptures) allowed one to make loans to his fellow Jew and charge interest or hold some kind of collateral. Deuteronomy 24:12 talks about a very poor man. The only collateral that such a man had to offer was the cloak from his back. So in order to pay debts or in order to buy food he put his coat in hock. The Lord commanded Israel's "bankers" to return his coat to him every night. Perhaps a man would pay his debt a good deal quicker if he had to sleep in the cold, but in the case of the poor and needy (because they were poor) lenders were not to keep his coat overnight.

Still other places show how God protected the poor and needy in His law. Consider Deuteronomy 24:14-15. In verse 15 the Lord talks about a man who lived from day to day. His wage for the day was all the money he had, and from this wage he bought his food. It was necessary if he was going to live at all for him to have the daily food. He was totally dependent, therefore, upon this wage. The Lord said they were to give such a man his wage before the

sun went down so he could still go out and buy and trade and do the things he had to do to get food because "he set his heart on it." That is not quite an accurate rendering of the meaning here. It would be better to render, "because his life depended upon it." In other words, the Lord wrote into the Mosaic legislation a law that provided for those who were poor and needy by requiring His people to take care of them. Furthermore God said (vs. 15) that if they did not obey this law the poor and needy would turn to Him, cry against the offenders, and God would lay the charge against them as sin.

II. The Rulers — God's Representative Deacons.

The Old Testament pointedly holds the king responsible for seeing that the poor and needy are cared for, i.e. that His law is obeyed by all the people (Deut. 17:13-20). This "diaconal" task is part of the very essence of ruling as is established by the fact that God explicitly holds pagan kings responsible to care for the poor and needy within their kingdoms (cf. Ezek. 16:29; Dan. 4:27; Prov. 28:15, 29:14, 31:9, 14).

But who was responsible to see that the poor and needy throughout the kingdom were cared for properly? Who was responsible to rule the people regarding this aspect of divine law? Clearly the answer is the king but the king viewed as fulfilling his function through the local elders (cf. Prov. 29:14; Deut. 17:18-19).

The involvement of elders in benevolence is seen not only in their role as executors of the law sitting as judges over Israel but also in their role as dispensers of the third tithe. In the ancient world the non-levitical elders were responsible for civil matters while the levitical elders were responsible for ecclesiastical matters (Deut. 1:15, 16, 16:18, 17:9; II Chron. 19:8-11). These non-levitical elders sat at the gate of the town where they held court when the need arose (Ruth 4:1, 2; Prov. 31:23). Every third year, Israelites were to deposit a tithe for the poor and needy (called the third tithe) at the gates of the towns in which they lived (Deut. 14:28, 29). This, the only provision for a "diaconal offering" to be presented by the community as a whole, raises the problem of distribution.

We have little doubt that the elders "ruled" over

The two addresses at the annual meeting of the Reformed Fellowship on Oct. 1:

*John Vander Ploeg, Jr.,
"A Layman Reflects on Synod"
Nelson Kloosterman,*

"A New Seminary: Its Need and Wisdom"

are available on one tape which can be ordered from the Reformed Fellowship office at 4855 Starr St., S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49506, phone (616) 949-5421, for \$2.50.

this diaconal offering. First, note that the towns in view here were the walled cities (Hebrew IR means walled town as compared to HASER which signifies a non-walled town). These stronger walled or fortified towns were not always large but were ordinarily the places where people sought refuge when they were threatened by invaders. They were safe places, refuges. Secondly, these would naturally tend to be the central cultural points of any given area. Third, the dwellings in these towns would be more secure and, therefore, the towns were the most likely places for the rich to build their homes. Building there would minimize the danger of physical harm to themselves and their families and of plunder of their worldly goods. Fourth, construction of such towns required a greater investment of resources and this would require investments by the rich. Those who paid for the construction of a safe place would probably live in that place enjoying its benefits. Fifth, non-levitical elders were chosen from among heads of households who had distinguished themselves as family and community leaders (Deut. 1:15). Sixth, such distinction would not be forthcoming to one who had proved himself incompetent in business. Seventh, the elders were those who were sufficiently wealthy to have time to sit at the gates of their towns as judges and counsellors. Eighth, the third tithe to be "laid up at thy gates" was mandatory on all Israel. Ninth, it was specifically to be brought to the gates of the towns where the elders sat (Deut. 16:18). Tenth, the elders were responsible to guarantee that the poor and needy received their just due before the law (Deut. 1:17, 16:18-20, 24:17, 18). Therefore, we conclude that the third tithe deposited within the gates of the towns was given into the hands of the elders (there were no levitical elders ruling every town) who were responsible to distribute it equitably among the poor and needy.

III. New Testament King and Elders and Deacons — God's Representatives

The ancient responsibility of the earthly king and his representatives to care for the poor and needy finds fulfillment in the New Testament.

Christ announced that He was the long-expected Davidic king who would establish His kingdom and its provision for the poor and needy (Lk. 4:18; Matt. 11:2f.; cf., Isa. 11:4, 16:1). As the earthly human king standing as God's ruler, He healed, fed the hungry, etc.

Several Old Testament themes regarding the official benevolence of God find New Testament expression. Just as God's king (Christ) cared for the poor and needy so those who ruled under His headship did so. The apostles saw to the poor and needy (Acts 6:1). It was part of their service or ruling over God's people. So in Acts 6:2, 4 the task of the apostles is described as the ministry (diakonia) of tables and the ministry (diakonia) of the Word. The word deacon is not used to describe those who were ordained to the ministry of tables. It is not necessary, however, that the word appear. Those apostolic helpers functioned in diakonia and were ordained to do so. They were

deacons. It is important to note that before their appointment, the apostles, rulers over the church, fulfilled the benevolent task as representatives of Christ the great king.

Equally significant is the fact that when the diaconal offering for the saints in Jerusalem was sent it was handed over to the elders (Acts 11:29, 30). There is nothing unnatural in this when it is seen against the Old Testament background. If the rulers of the Old Testament church handled the diaconal offerings why should not their New Testament counterparts do so?

Also, when Paul established churches he saw the necessity of caring for the poor (cf., Gal. 2:10) although he saw no necessity of ordaining deacons — he established his churches with only elders (Acts 14:23). The elders as rulers and governors in God's stead were to judge and to tend for the poor — as did their Old Testament counterparts.

Finally, the qualifications for the office of elder and deacon clearly recall the Old Testament pattern for elders. Old Testament non-levitical elders were to be leaders in their communities, i.e. heads of

households who distinguished themselves as "heads." So, Paul teaches that New Testament elders must first establish themselves as good rulers over their own households if they are to rule over the church (the household of faith, I Tim. 3:4, 5). Significantly, he requires deacons to have proved themselves (presumably as mature individuals, I Tim. 3:8) and, also to be good rulers over their own households (vs. 12). These similar requirements for elders and deacons when viewed against the Old Testament background and the practice of benevolence in Acts 6 and 11 suggest, if not establish, that the essence of the office of elder and deacon is the same — viz., rule over the church. The essence is the same but the specific assignments are not, inasmuch as only the elder is responsible officially for the teaching, discipline and sacraments of the church — the ministry of the Word.

Therefore, since the official practice of caring for the poor and the needy is essentially a ruler's task and part of ruling, and since women are not to rule over the church (I Tim. 2:12-14), women should not be ordained as deacons in Christ's church. ●

An Ecumenical Christian School Creed

Myron D. Rau

Recent years have found Reformed churches focusing greater attention and emphasis on evangelism. Meanwhile, the ongoing drive of the ecumenical movement continues. At the same time, there is increased dissatisfaction with public education, causing untold numbers to turn to parochial and private education, as well as to our Christian schools. This seems to be the setting under which the Christian Schools International (CSI) board appointed a Task Force to study the future of Christian education. Having a deep concern regarding an ecumenical Christian school creed and its concept as proposed by that Task Force, I have been invited by the editor to set my impressions and concerns into an article for publication.

A Quiet Change of Foundations

After a year in existence, a bit of information from the Task Force is filtered to us by way of an article in THE BANNER, July 20, 1981, "The Future of Christian Education." It is authored by Dr. N. H. Beversluis, who is the chairman of a committee of 13 prominent men in the field of Christian education, and in the Christian Reformed Church. He also appears to be the main developer of the proposed document. A.K., in his editorial in THE BANNER, Sep-

tember 21, 1981, "Christian Day Schools and Evangelism" states, "meanwhile, schools are about to begin writing a new chapter and they are going about it in their usual quiet way." And quiet indeed it has been.

Planned by Administrators Instead of Societies and Boards

To assist its study, the committee sent a set of 7 topics, subdivided into 26 questions, to the administrators of the 350 CSI member schools, of which they received 194 responses. A draft copy of the proposed document was subsequently also sent to all administrators. It is interesting that all this was quietly done through the school administrators with total disregard to boards and school societies. Quite often the views of administrators differ and are not necessarily representative of their respective societies. The schools still belong to the societies! The committee almost admits this in its study report on page 4, last paragraph of item 'D,' relative to questions 24-26. The questionnaires should have been addressed to the boards and societies. But, of course, CSI is the teacher's union and the administrators' allegiance to it would be unrelenting. I received a copy of the material in question by making inquiry to CSI as a result of THE BANNER article quoted above, and not because I happened to be a member of the school board.

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A Reduced Christian Faith

It is my impression that the proposed ecumenical Christian school creed is a mass of intellectual rhetoric, drawn up by a select group of professionals, and is not geared to the comprehension of the average person, which is what the school societies are made up of. It is composed of only four pages of an actual biblical outline, or confession, and nine pages devoted to what is called classroom application. It is narrowed down to a fundamental Christian faith to which all Christians could subscribe, or may perhaps be even less than that. It consists of creation and covenant, the fall as covenant breaking and salvation as covenant restored. There is no mention of some of the major implications of a true Biblical creed, such as the infallibility of the Scriptures, inspiration, the trinity, virgin birth, etc. This plus perhaps other clues might well give rise to suspicion that the Association for the Advancement of Christian Studies (AACS) may be at work here. Even though our Christian schools leave the primary teaching of the Scriptures to the church, they were established by our Calvinistic forefathers so that the Biblical training of the school would coincide with that of the home and the church. Thus our schools must continue to subscribe to the Reformed creeds in their entirety, and must continue to be under the leadership of committed Reformed boards and society members.

A Welcome to False Doctrines

If we water down our Calvinistic creeds with an ecumenical creed, it would open the way for all who believe in the fundamental Christian faith to be granted society and board membership, causing us to lose our distinctiveness. There are schools among our number which have already practiced this, and its results have taken their toll. Of even graver consequence, there would also no longer be a basis on which to stand if teachers were to teach humanistic Arminianism or any other humanistic and unbiblical interpretation of the Scriptures. It is dangerous not to stand firm on the historic Christian faith which we have been taught, for the sake of growth or evangelism. Our schools were established first and foremost to provide education for the covenant children of families within the Reformed faith, and not as a major avenue of evangelism.

Future or End of Christian Schools?

CSI and its Task Force refers to this phenomenon as the future of Christian education. I call it the

undermining of our blessed Christian education heritage! We are not told how CSI intends to implement this or how soon, but anything of this magnitude ought to be presented to the societies for consideration. Certainly, there are further and perhaps more profound implications to be found within the document and its concepts, and I await critique from those qualified to do so.

I have strong personal convictions that as most CRC and RCA people live in isolated, "Reformed" confinement, quite unaffected by the great variety of Scriptural interpretations, they have come to a point of no longer really appreciating our unique doctrinal beliefs. For this reason we could very easily sell out our faith. One way to begin doing so is through our Christian schools by way of an ecumenical creed! ●

THREATS OF MOSLEM FUNDAMENTALISM

The recent sensational murder of President Sadat of Egypt reportedly by fanatical Moslem fundamentalists calls attention to the fact that this movement is particularly hostile to converts to Christianity. We have recently been informed of the plight of an Egyptian student at the Reformed Bible College. Steven John, a convert from Islam to Christianity, fears that he will be killed if he returns to his native land, and is seeking religious asylum in the U.S. The State Department, denying that request on the ground that there is supposed to be religious freedom in Egypt, threatens deportation. The student, calling attention to the Egyptian government's adherence to Islamic law under which he as a convert to Christianity is considered legally dead and therefore outside of the law's protection, is continuing his appeal with the help of a local attorney. Mr. John hopes that publicizing his case and letters to our congressmen will help him in his appeal to our government. God's Word teaches us to remember and support those who are persecuted for their faith (Heb. 13:3). The increasing influence of militant Moslem fundamentalists threatens increased persecution to many of our fellow-Christians in that part of the world. Let them not be forgotten in our prayers.

—The Editor