

THE OUTLOOK

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

SEPTEMBER 1981



**ANOTHER REFORMED SEMINARY
TIME FOR CATECHISM
CHURCH AND SOCIETY**

Another Reformed Seminary

Deo Volente

John Vander Ploeg

Will there be a new Reformed Seminary? Needless to say, only God knows for sure.

All that we know for sure is that eight CRC ministers in northwest Iowa have voiced their conviction of the urgent need for such a seminary, that at a meeting in Chicago on April 21 it was decided to proceed with the formation of the Mid-America Reformed Seminary, that an association was organized for this purpose, that officers for this association have been or are now being elected, and that an adequate building in the vicinity of Orange City, Iowa has been purchased, and that charter membership in the association remains open until December 31, 1981.

Beyond this, all depends on *Deo volente* — or, the Lord willing.

A few questions and answers are in order.

1. Does this movement have any chance of success?

To be sure, there is no ironclad guaranty.

However, let the skeptics who doubt and the critics who hoot at any thought of success bear in mind what we read in Zechariah 4:10 about despising the day of small things.

Also, let others who go forward with their heads in the clouds and their eyes closed to unavoidable hurdles take to heart what Jesus once said about first sitting down to count the cost when one desires to build a tower (Luke 14:28ff).

Any chance of success?

That's what they must have wondered when over a hundred years ago now a new Theological School began holding classes with one teacher and seven students in the upstairs above the Williams Street Christian school. Did anyone in his wildest dreams ever envision at the time that out of this would come today's Calvin College and Seminary with its imposing campus? *But God willed it, and so it came to pass.*

You may be sure that there were also those who had the same misgivings when over forty years ago some of us launched the little Reformed Bible Institute with Miss Johanna Timmer as the only teacher. That day of small things found no approval at Synod in those early days and it was given no place on the

approved list. However, it did somehow find a place in the hearts of the Lord's people and, *because God willed it*, out of it there came forth the Reformed Bible College with today's enrollment, splendid facilities, and beautiful campus.

To mention but one more example in which we also had the privilege of helping along about forty years ago — the opening of the Pella Christian High School with just a handful of students — forty the first year, fifty the next, and so it kept on growing. The critics may have wished it would sink to the bottom of the sea but that never happened. Instead it continued to grow so that today with a large staff of instructors besides the principal, it is also housed in a modern structure — *all because God willed it.*

What about the future of the Mid-America Reformed Seminary? With God all things are possible. *Deo volente*, it too will grow and prosper. And if not — it is always better to have tried and failed than never to have tried at all. As we attempt great things for God let us also expect great things from God.

2. Does a second seminary have a right to existence?

Think, for example, of the expense and effort required. You just don't start a seminary on a shoestring.

To proceed responsibly, a generous financial outlay must be available, a reasonably qualified teaching staff should be assured, an adequate theological library ought to be at least in the vicinity if not on hand, proper facilities must be obtained, and some assurance of continued moral and financial support should be at least somewhat in sight.

There was a time when Calvin College also as "onze school", enjoyed an exclusive claim to CRC financial support for the training of our college students. This arose out of the situation that Calvin provided a pre-seminary course for the training of the church's future ministers. However, today Calvin no longer enjoys a monopoly on the claim to CRC financial support. Dordt College and Trinity College in the U.S.A. as well as King's College and Redeemer College in Canada also look to the CRC constituency for such support even though, in distinction from Calvin, they are not subsidized by an

ecclesiastical quota. Obviously, there are no serious objections or obstacles as Calvin now shares the responsibility and honors with these other schools. Is it not warranted to expect the same of Calvin Seminary now that another seminary is being proposed?

There are also other denominations, with which the CRC has had a close affinity, that recognize more than one seminary for the training of their ministers. The Reformed Church in America has both Western Seminary in Holland, Michigan, and New Brunswick Seminary in New Jersey. The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands have for many years supported both Kampen and the Free University in Amsterdam as training schools for their ministers. Why should it not be warranted to provide a similar choice for ministerial training in the CRC even though Calvin has the exclusive claim to being the *official* seminary of the denomination?

3. But what is the rationale for another seminary?

Unless a real need can be established for another Reformed seminary we are not justified in asking our constituency to put this extra drain on their stewardship and neither does it then make sense to spread out or extend our theological teaching talent.

Now it will not do for me to try to conceal from you my inescapable conviction that this need does exist. Since my time as editor of *The Banner* and also following this the conclusion has haunted me that there is no future for the CRC unless in God's gracious providence we are given a new "school of the prophets." Ten years ago in an address given in North-West Iowa I aired this conviction. At that time mine was a voice crying in the wilderness and it fell on deaf ears. At the time I also spoke elsewhere along the same line. Consequently, when I was asked to write on this matter now, contrary to my inclination, I was not free in my conscience to refuse to do so.

The basic or rock-bottom concern in our controversies within the CRC and also with respect to Calvin Seminary is to be found precisely in our view of Scripture and in the matter of hermeneutics as the study of the proper interpretation of Scripture. Is the Bible infallible and inerrant? Are, for example, the first eleven chapters of Genesis literal history or something less than that?

Our differences as to creation or evolution, homosexuals, women in church office, the nature of God's love for all men, divorce, lodge membership and church membership — these are to be traced largely if not altogether to our differences in our view of the Bible.

Our view of Scripture is of number one importance because it is precisely at this point that the direction in which the CRC or any denomination will go is determined. And now it is precisely here that, as we see it, Calvin Seminary is falling down on the job. Mind you, we do not say this about every member of the faculty, but we cannot escape the conclusion that this is true of those on the faculty who set the pace. Meanwhile we are grateful to learn that "even though he (Libolt) was endorsed by the faculty of Calvin Seminary, and by the Board of Trustees... there was significant opposition to his candidacy

THE OUTLOOK

(USPS 633-980)



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

JOURNAL OF REFORMED FELLOWSHIP, INC.

Send all copy to Managing Editor, Rev. Peter De Jong, 4985 Sequoia Dr., S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49508. Phone (616) 898-8267.

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE: Arthur Besteman, John Blankespoor, John Piersma, Harlan Vanden Einde, Henry Vanden Heuvel, Syburn Voortman, Clarence Werkema.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES: Renze De Groot, President; Clarence Werkema, Vice-President; Arthur Besteman, Secretary; Ronald Van Putten, Treasurer; Peter Wobbema, Jr., Assistant-Secretary-Treasurer; John Blankespoor, John Engbers, Paul M. Ingeneri, John Piersma, Cornelius Rickers, Berton Sevensma, Harlan Vanden Einde, Henry Vanden Heuvel, Syburn Voortman.

Assistant to the Editor: John Vander Ploeg.

Production Manager: Peter Wobbema.

Business Manager: Mrs. Mary Kaiser.

This periodical is owned and published by Reformed Fellowship, Inc., a religious and strictly non-profit organization composed of a group of Christian believers who hold to the Reformed Faith. Its purpose is to give sharpened expression to this Faith, to stimulate the doctrinal sensitivities of those who profess this Faith, to promote the spiritual welfare and purity of the Christian Reformed Church particularly and also of other Reformed churches, and as far as possible to further the interests of all Christian action and institutions of Reformed character.

The publishers of this journal express their adherence to the Calvinistic creeds as formulated in the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, and the Westminster Confession and Catechisms.

All contributions represent the personal views of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the members of Reformed Fellowship, Inc.

Subscription Policy: Subscription price, \$7.50 per year, \$13.50 2 years (Canada rates \$9.00 per year, \$15.50 2 years). Unless a definite request for discontinuance is received, it is assumed that the subscriber wishes the subscription to continue without the formality of a renewal order and he will be billed for renewal. If you have a change of address, please notify the Business Office as early as possible in order to avoid the inconvenience of delayed delivery. Include your Zip Code.

EDITORIAL AND CIRCULATION OFFICES

THE OUTLOOK

4855 Starr Street, S.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506, Telephone 949-5421

Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 9-11 a.m.

After Office Hours please call: 452-9519

Mailing Address: 4855 Starr Street, S.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506

Contents:

| September, 1981 | Volume XXXI | No. 9 |
|---|-------------|-------|
| ANOTHER REFORMED SEMINARY..... | | 2 |
| John Vander Ploeg | | |
| THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH | | |
| LET THE CHURCH BE THE CHURCH | | 6 |
| Lubbertus Oostendorp | | |
| PLAIN TALK | | 8 |
| Laurie Vanden Heuvel | | |
| TIME FOR CATECHISM. | | 11 |
| Peter De Jong | | |
| REBUILDING THE WASTE | | 13 |
| Peter De Jong | | |
| THE DUTCH REPORT ON BIBLICAL AUTHORITY .. | | 15 |
| Peter De Jong | | |
| LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS (LESSONS I & II) | | 16 |
| Henry Vander Kam | | |
| JOB GOES INTO THE DEPTHS | | 20 |
| John Blankespoor | | |
| LETTERS TO THE EDITOR | | 22 |
| A LOOK AT BOOKS | | 22 |
| MATERIAL AVAILABLE FROM | | |
| REFORMED FELLOWSHIP | | 23 |
| 1981 ANNUAL MEETING | | |
| OF THE REFORMED FELLOWSHIP | | 24 |

both by one member of the faculty and by several board members" (*The Outlook*, August '81). Now we must face up to this situation and tell it the way it is. An elder in the CRC expressed himself to me recently to this effect, that to advocate a new seminary one must be willing "to bite the bullet." Disagreeable as this task may be, we are without excuse if we refuse to do so.

When I was still editor of *The Banner*, more than ten years ago now, there came a request to Synod to investigate the disturbing reports about trends in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. During the discussion Rev. Bastiaan Nederlof addressed Synod to assure the delegates that to do this was the work of the Calvin Seminary professors and that they would take care of it.

On November 12, 1970, in an address at Hudsonville, Michigan, I reported on this as follows:

"We may content ourselves by recognizing and stating our conviction that we are not receiving from Calvin Seminary the united, militant, and the enthusiastically Reformed leadership over against the attack on Scripture to which we are entitled. Consider the following matters to point this up.

"1. Why is it that we are not receiving thorough enlightenment for the rank and file of our membership from the Calvin Seminary Faculty members concerning the new hermeneutics being wafted over here from Amsterdam? I mean enlightenment to equip and fortify us over against this pernicious teaching that assails the historicity of the opening chapters of Genesis?

"On July 16, 1968 I sent the President of Calvin Seminary the following request: The Publication Committee has decided the following: 'That the Calvin Seminary faculty be asked to provide a series of six or more articles on the teachings of Kuitert, Baarda, Augustijn, and possibly others (at the Free University) to begin the first of October if at all possible, and that the first article or two take up the matter of Kuitert's view of the interpretation of Scripture in general and of his view of Genesis 1-3 in particular. Also that, out of courtesy, copies of these articles be sent to the men involved.

"This action has been taken in view of the decision of Synod 1968 'to assure the Fruitland consistory that Synod has full confidence that the professors of theology at Calvin Seminary will carefully study all new developments in theology and evaluate them in the light of Scripture and the creeds, and serve the churches with the results of their research and discussion. It is the continuing obligation of these professors to vindicate sound doctrine according to Article 20 of the Church Order.'"

"On October 9, 1968 Dr. Henry Stob, Faculty Secretary, replied to inform the Publication Committee that the Faculty:

- a. Thanked the Publication Committee for its request;
- b. Recognized with appreciation the resolution of Synod and acknowledged its responsibility as there-in expressed;
- c. Expressed its desire to engage in extensive Faculty discussion of the teachings referred to — with

a view to receiving mutual assistance in evaluating them — prior to the publication of articles on them;

d. Judged that it is not appropriate to engage corporately in the project proposed by the Publication Committee, although it recognizes the right of any of its members to address himself publicly to the issues."

When on September 1, 1970, two years later, I had still not received even the first article in such a series I wrote the President of Calvin Seminary once again about the matter. I am still waiting for a reply from him."

The deplorable developments in the Dutch Churches since that time are known to all who are abreast of what has been taking place. The result was that I was left with the growing conviction that there could be no future for the CRC unless there would be a new "school of the prophets."

Another matter that calls for attention is the disappointing position the Calvin Seminary Faculty and Calvin's Board of Trustees took in recommending for candidacy Mr. Clayton Libolt notwithstanding the view of Scripture to which he held. Notice that once again it was the Bible that was involved and that both the Calvin Faculty and the Board of Trustees were minded to let it pass. Excerpts from the report on Synod 1981 (signed by AJH) in *The Banner* of June 29, 1981 (p. 16) tell the story:

"Libolt, a graduate of Calvin Seminary who completed additional studies at the University of Michigan, had been recommended by Calvin's faculty and Board. But Synod's advisory committee dealing with candidates decided to interview him. Six of the thirteen committee members were unhappy with what they heard. The remaining seven, a majority of one, recommended that synod approve Libolt's candidacy after interviewing him on the floor of synod... For an hour and a quarter the would-be candidate, described by one delegate as a 'most promising Old Testament scholar' attempted to explain what he believed especially regarding how one should read and understand the Bible... When asked by one delegate how the Bible can be distinguished from books regarded by other religions as 'holy', he responded directly: 'It's inspired by God'.

"But the dismay of some delegates was evident when, on several occasions, Libolt expressed his belief that the opening chapters of the Bible are 'not transparent to the event'. Here the chairman of the advisory committee that had earlier interviewed Libolt — Rev. Peter Brouwer, delegate from Classis Minnesota South — zeroed in on the young scholar's views: 'When in Genesis 3 it tells us there was a Garden of Eden, was it a *real* garden? When it tells us there was a tree, was it a *real* tree? When it tells us there was a voice speaking to the woman, was it a *real* voice? After wondering aloud what was meant by the questioner's use of the word *real*, Libolt explained that 'because of the kind of God we have, it's quite possible that the events happened just that way'.

"But he would go no further than *possibility*, although he was invited to do so several times over.

At each point, he noted that 'because of the kind of literature we have been given at that place in Genesis I don't think the (Genesis 1-3) narrative says or means to say that these things are 'real' in the sense of your question'. The kind of writing one finds in Genesis' early chapters, he insisted, is 'not like a newspaper report'. Despite continuing questions, none — with one glaring exception — of a hostile character, Libolt persisted in holding his commitment at the level of *possibility*.

"When asked to interpret a New Testament passage from Paul's Letter to the Romans (the fifth chapter in which 'the one man Adam' is compared with 'the one man Jesus Christ'), Libolt argued that the purpose of that passage was to teach that 'in one man, Christ, there is the possibility of life', but in his view the passage would not require the presence of a historical character named Adam . . .

"... At 7:30 P.M., the synod reentered closed session to consider what it had heard and what it should do. An hour later, Calvin Seminary president John Kromminga came out of the session looking all of his sixty-two years. He took Libolt aside to explain that the delegates had reached their decision.

"By a majority the delegates to the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church had decided that Clayton Libolt would not become a preacher in this denomination in 1981."

It is to the credit of Synod that it regarded Mr. Libolt's position on Scripture as very serious and that he was refused candidacy, as a delegate informed me, by the large majority vote of 95 to 58. An elder delegate told me that he had been lukewarm about the idea of a new seminary until he heard members of the Calvin seminary faculty in connection with the Libolt case. Obviously, that proved to be an eye-opener to him. It is not without reason to believe that there can be no good future for the CRC unless we face up to the need for a new "school of the prophets."

4. Are the professors at Calvin Seminary not simply entitled to our full confidence?

It would be a mistake to blithely and naively assume that this is so. They too must not expect such confidence unless they *earn* it. It is only when they teach and preach and write and act in such a way as to inspire full confidence that they have the right to expect this from the church.

This is true especially at such a time as this when so many religious leaders are betraying the trust placed in them by unsuspecting congregations. It is true among us also that a new minister is on trial before a discerning congregation is ready to place unreserved confidence in him. Anyone wholly committed to the Reformed faith will not resent this but will rather welcome being put to the test by those who are knowledgeable as to "sound doctrine," because he is eager to be known for what he really believes, teaches and preaches.

Our seminary professors are in a highly responsible position and should be especially careful as to giving any occasion for a loss of confidence in them. Gossip, false rumors, and slander are vicious and

may never be allowed to undermine or destroy anyone's reputation and influence. However, we are equally guilty if, in the name of charity, we condone or close our eyes to that which threatens the life and future of the church. When we learn about faculty members who openly defend Allen Verhey and Clayton Libolt at Synod, about a faculty member being worked with because of his problem related to Scripture, about another who addresses a letter to Synod trying to convince the delegates that they should adapt to receiving women as well as men in church office even as Peter had to adapt to the idea of receiving Gentiles as well as Jews, and about still another who participated in the laying on of hands for the ordination of a woman minister — is it then any wonder that there is an erosion of confidence and that some will finally conclude that having another seminary is an idea whose time has come?

5. Are there not other seminaries to attend?

To be sure, there are. Westminster in Philadelphia, Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Fuller in California, and Gordon-Conwell in Massachusetts may be mentioned. But there are reasons for believing that these are not designed for our particular needs.

It should be recognized that neither our CRC constituency nor our students identify readily or naturally with these other seminaries. Notwithstanding how close our affinity with any of these schools and how great our interest in them may be, it is simply a fact that they do not share our denomination's identity. Moreover, they do not have the same doctrinal standards as those to which we subscribe. Besides this, these schools do not teach Christian Reformed Church history and the Church Order of the CRC, courses that are required for anyone preparing for the ministry in the CRC. The contemplated new seminary would certainly include these courses so that, in my judgment, it should not be expected of the graduates that they take the extra year at Calvin seminary now required of graduates from other seminaries.

In 1926, at the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of our Theological School and Calvin College, the late Professor Louis Berkhof, wrote the following in the *Semi-Centennial Volume*:

"The great purpose of our school was in the beginning, and has been ever since, to train young men for the ministry in our church by teaching them the great and comprehensive system of the truth as it was developed by Calvin. According to the intent and purpose of its founders, our School, as an institution for the training of ministers, is decidedly a denominational school; and this not merely in the sense that it is maintained by the Christian Reformed Church, but also in the sense that it is dedicated to the higher interests of the denomination, and to the maintenance, development and propagation of the principles for which the denomination stands."

In line with this statement of purpose the Mid-America Reformed Seminary is determined to be wholeheartedly, enthusiastically, and contagiously Reformed, and that it will be — Deo volente! ©

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

let the church be the church

Lubbertus Oostendorp

"Let the church be the church." With this logical slogan Dr. John Mackay began his term as president of Princeton Seminary in the fall of 1937. He spoke and taught much about the church, but I was never able to determine what it was he wanted the church to be and to do. Undoubtedly, he was reacting to the spirit of the day which seemed to run by the theme: "Let the church be all things to all men." He was, moreover, very deeply involved in the ecumenical movement. "Let the church be the church" needed emphasis at a time when totalitarian states were making the church the tool of a tyrannical state.

Church Deformation

Historically the church has not been able to keep itself as the church and has often done things which were not the task of the church. As the N.T. Christians moved from a persecuted minority to a dominant majority in the Roman Empire, the very nature and function of the church changed. The local churches lost much of their autonomy and power was concentrated in the Roman bishop. While the eastern part of the Empire went its own way, the western part saw a consolidation of power from the days of Constantine 325 A.D. until the Reformation.

American Separation of Roles

The fascinating tale of conflict between Popes and Emperors, the story of abuse on both sides: All this belongs to church history. Especially for us in the U.S. the barrier recognized by both state and church has freed our nation from the dominance of Popes over politics and of rulers over churches.

Most evangelical American denominations have concentrated their efforts on the traditional tasks of the church. They worshipped, preached, taught the children, evangelized, administered sacraments, and disciplined their members. Some denominations also carried on diaconal ministries, especially to their own members. Basically the great goal was to help people to worship God and find the way to heaven.

The Problem of Education

But there were areas where the church and a secularized state could not work together. Some denominations wanted to educate their children. Others left it up to the state. Many of the latter considered the public schools Christian, or made efforts

to maintain some Christian teachers and Christian ideals in them. A surprising number of denominations, moreover, were committed to establishing and running denominational colleges.

The "Social Gospel" Perversion

In general the churches continued to be concerned with what might be called the strictly religious side of life and culture. Several forces were at work in the American churches. While some congregations were concentrating even more only on the "spiritual," large numbers of preachers had lost interest in the evangelical gospel. Modernism was creating a vacuum in the content of preaching. Ministers who had come to deny the basic supernatural truths could only speak half-heartedly about sin and salvation, heaven and hell. To fill the void, they shifted their interest from the eternal to the temporal, from the vertical to the horizontal. This meant that the church was largely losing its evangelical task and replacing it with a social gospel.

Liberal theology has influenced many of the seminaries. Its emphasis has been social and corporate rather than spiritual and personal. From advocating a religion of voluntary charitable actions, it soon turned towards remaking the social structures. Thus the churches became involved in civil rights and pacifist movements. By throwing their financial, moral and political power behind various movements, the churches exercised political compulsion. Not content with influencing domestic politics, churches began to advocate reform and revolution in other countries.

The "New Morality"

Meanwhile, on the home front liberalism has become an advocate of the "new morality." Years ago the issue was the "new theology." Then the program of the modernist was two-fold. It began by defending the "right" to deny the creeds. From the right to be liberal it went on to a complete takeover. The issue, remember, was modernistic theology. But lately the second area has come in for attack. This is the attack upon our historic Christian morals and cultural standards. We are all acquainted with the long list of moral issues — abortion, the Sunday observance, homosexuality, marriage and divorce, E.R.A., etc. And the approach has once more been for the liberal churches to defend the right to differ. How often we hear the argument: "I don't believe in abortion, but I defend every woman's right to do what she wishes."

Dr. L. Oostendorp, retired C.R. pastor and teacher of Christian Doctrine at the Reformed Bible College, lives at 1802 Onaway S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49506.

Evangelical Awakening

Suddenly we are discovering what we should have known all along. It was our Christian teaching that once shaped the character of our Christian culture and civic laws. Of all people, especially Calvinists have been aware of this. Groen Van Prinsterer and Kuyper never tired of pointing this out. The Puritans were fully conscious of the impact of Christianity on life. Perhaps many Americans became confused by the illusion of a neutral education and a neutral culture.

American evangelicals have had a rude awakening. It was not enough for the Christians to concern themselves only with preaching the gospel and emphasizing the spiritual side of life. This was in a sense their first response to the advocates of social and political change. Almost forgotten are other attempts like Prohibition — to save the morals of the country. But there has been an awakening. The very Christian foundations of our Christian culture and laws are breaking up. Murder and adultery, perversion and corruption are not only being allowed but also advocated!

The great movement towards Christian schools is a wonderful response to this atheism in education. The right to life movement is a must. And although I'm not sure whether we are a "moral majority" the moral right must be maintained.

A Necessary Distinction

There is however a distinction which we must be careful to make and maintain. The church is an institute, and an organism. As an institute it has very specific tasks. Nor should it yield to the temptation to turn itself into a political or social tool. The church is also the *body of believers*. They may and must also function as an organism. Thus we may consider the Christian life and action of the Christian community as the church of Christ living in the world. Some might wish to describe this distinction as church and kingdom. By whatever name it is described, it is clear that there are specific functions belonging to the organized institute in distinction from those belonging to the Christian community.

Confusion of Roles

It is not my purpose at this time to elaborate on the specific tasks of the institute. We might have to recognize many practical adjustments, often due to a void being filled by the church organization (e.g. operating medical, educational and recreational facilities). On the other hand, church tasks are being voluntarily undertaken by Christian people (e.g. mission societies, worship groups and theological education). The danger with much of the confusion of roles on a merely pragmatic basis is primarily that the organized church will lose a clear idea of its nature and function. Sometimes, however, when very strict enforcement of distinctions seems to stymie all action, we are sorely tempted to argue as did Moody with his critics. He said: "I like my way of doing something better than your way of doing nothing."

Who shall determine the character and limits of the work of the organized church? Perhaps an even more difficult question is: Who shall determine when and how the Christian, individually and collectively shall become involved in various areas of life. This is a vital question! Everyone of us is welcome to try to answer it in the light of Scripture. Pope John Paul expressed his opinion when he urged priests to keep out of politics and forbade some of them to sit in Congress. Rev. Jerry Falwell has been struggling with his role as preacher and leader of the "moral majority." Nor do I know how seriously our Baptist brethren have taken the issue of who should run the many Christian schools which are springing up everywhere.

Kuyper's Separate "Spheres"

I do not know if Dr. A. Kuyper around 1880 asked somebody for advice on the respective role of the church and the university. To him belongs the honor of working out a comprehensive theory distinguishing the authority of the church from that of various other institutions. He not only thought and talked, but acted. Through his efforts the Christian educational system from 1st grade to university was made the task of neither state nor church but of the Christian community (the church in its organic life). Missions and evangelism were considered by him the special task of the organized church and he succeeded in getting the transfer from an independent mission society to the care of the churches. Although he himself engaged in politics and even served as Prime Minister of the Netherlands, he did not do this "as preacher" but as Christian citizen. While he stressed the diaconal function of the church, he preferred to develop independent institutions of mercy. Through his influence we thus have not only parental Christian schools but also a variety of other institutions such as Pine Rest.

Church and Christian Duties

Let the church be the church! This applies most emphatically to the organized institution. And above all, the church should carefully and consciously determine the nature and limits of its official task. Above all, let the church keep its spiritual priorities in order. But there is another question: How must the Christians be the church of Christ in the world? Secular philosophers have been trying to persuade us to keep out! And while the Liberal churchmen were too ready to get involved in their liberal way, they too are almost panicking lest the conservative Christians should try to dictate morality to an immoral society! We hear the same cries of anguish from the secular educators when we press for Christian education.

Every Christian should take seriously both the role of his church and his personal responsibility to witness for Christ and to serve Him in the world. Here we need the help of the Christian philosophers and experts in various fields. But above all, I believe the Church and especially the pulpit must give sound guidance on where and how the Christian community must be the church in the world. ○

PLAIN TALK

Laurie Vanden Heuvel

In recent years a number of issues have come up in the CRC which have generated division of opinion in the church. Quite consistently, the conservatives have stated that, what is at stake in these issues is not just the issue itself, but the whole *doctrine of Scripture*. It has been implied and even stated many times in this periodical that we have in the CRC a "new hermeneutic," (a new way of interpreting the Scriptures) and this "new hermeneutic" is really the offender which is producing the controversies in the church.

I thought it would be appropriate at this point in time to take a little closer look at this invader. This offender has been with us a long time, showing its head already in the synods of the late 1950's and coming more clearly out of its corner in Reports 36 and 44 on the Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority, in the adjudication of the Verhey case and, most recently, in the Libolt case at the Synod of 1981.

I do not intend to dig deeply into reports and cases and present a detailed theological dissertation on this invader called the "new hermeneutic." I intend simply to make a few observations about it in general and present a brief demonstration of the success it has achieved in our denomination.

Observations

First, the "new hermeneutic" calls itself "new." The point has been made in recent years, in synodical discussions by leaders in our denomination, that, although this method of interpretation as it applies to specific issues, may be "new" to the CRC, it is nonetheless "progressive," "refreshing," and "within the bounds of the confessions." The fact is that this hermeneutic is not "new." It was basically present in the massive movement called "Liberalism" which has destroyed thousands of churches at home and abroad. The "new" hermeneutic is *foreign*, that is, it does *not belong* in the community of the Reformed faith and, contrary to what some have said, the framers of the confessions would have rejected it as *heresy* and so should we.

Mrs. Vanden Heuvel writer of this article and editor of this department, lives at 207 Kansas, N.W., Orange City, Iowa 51041.

eight/september, 1981

The second observation I would like to make is that this invader is a "hermeneutic," that is, it is a *method of interpreting the Bible*. Its vulnerability as a method shows up particularly when it is applied to passages of the Bible which have always been accepted by the Reformed churches as *historical*. In approaching the *historical* of Scripture, the "new hermeneutic" uses two techniques to bring meaning to or subtract meaning from a given historical passage.

Techniques

The first technique the "new hermeneutic" uses is to *drive a wedge* between the *event* (events) of the given passage and the *description* of the event(s). So, for example, a proponent of the new hermeneutic may believe in the *event* of a fall, but he may reject the description of the event: a literal garden, a serpent, a conversation between a snake and a woman, a forbidden tree.

Starting with Genesis 1-11, many proponents of this hermeneutic have marched right on through the Old Testament, into the New Testament gospels and on to the resurrection. All the while, they maintain stiffly that they are "Reformed" and "within the confession." Not all proponents of the new hermeneutic go this far, of course, but once a person has adopted the new hermeneutic in principle, how does he decide where to stop?

The second technique used in the new hermeneutic is to insist that "the Bible is infallible as to what it intends to teach." Now most Christians would be willing to accept that statement, but like the proverbial insurance policy, what the statement gives in the big print, it takes away in the small print. The only difference is that all too often, the proponents of the new hermeneutic make this apparently innocent statement about infallibility, but they *do not put into print* what they mean by "infallibility."

What the proponents of the new hermeneutic mean when they say "the Bible is infallible as to what it *intends to teach*" is that, for example, the Bible intends to teach that once creation was perfect and then something came in to spoil it. That *truth* is infallible. In order to get that truth across to the Hebrew people, God used some graphic language,

some word-pictures (which may have been borrowed from neighboring cultures) to create a setting for a fall from perfection, but that *setting* is not necessarily true.

Demonstration

Now look at the position of Dr. Allen Verhey as stated in the *Acts of Synod*, 1979, p. 645. Here Verhey's position is set forth by the committee which had to deal with him: Dr. Andrew Bandstra, professor at Calvin Seminary, Rev. Tymen Hofman, pastor of the Neland Ave. CRC, Dr. Carl Kromminga, professor at Calvin Seminary and Dr. William Spoelhof, former president of Calvin College:

"Dr. Verhey contends that 'the Bible stakes its case on history' but that the Scriptures do not record or intend to record history with 'minute circumstantial accuracy.' Rather, the Scriptures, in reporting events, 'intend to shape the faith and life of the communities they address by their recital of the history.' . . . Dr. Verhey contends that the Scriptures do not record history in order to provide us with an *account exact in every historical detail*, but in order to proclaim God's Word and will by way of such accounts. Thus the *historical* account of the fall of Adam and Eve may be described in terms of a serpent tempter, *not with the intention of identifying the tempter as a snake*, but in order to warn Israel against repeating Adam's fall and rebellion by worshipping the nature deities of her pagan neighbors, deities often represented by serpents in the pagan rituals."
(*Italics mine. L.V.H.*)

About the *gospels* Verhey says:

"Again, the words of Jesus recorded in the gospels are *not always and necessarily word-for-word transcripts* of what Jesus said, but accounts shaped by the fact that the gospel writers are addressing the teaching of Jesus to new historical situations."

About the resurrection, Verhey says:

"In connection with the reference to an *earthquake* in Matthew 28:2, Dr. Verhey insists that one may legitimately advance the hypothesis that Matthew *intends to speak symbolically here*, . . . Dr. Verhey argues that the raising of the possibility of the use of symbolic language here ought to be allowed."

The committee which dealt with Dr. Verhey took a very defensive attitude toward him. (*Acts*, 1979, p. 647)

"We conclude that:

1. Dr. Verhey works responsibly with the six steps of interpretation he has outlined;
2. he does not charge the biblical authors with falsifying or even being 'honestly mistaken' about historical circumstances;

(*He doesn't? L.V.H.*)

3. His view *does not call into question the historical reality of man's fall and the fact that mankind is under a curse because of Adam's fall, nor does it question Jesus' authority to make binding moral declarations . . .*

(*Here the committee is satisfied that Verhey maintains the event character of the fall, the curse and basic truth of Jesus' declarations even though the details may not be accurate.*

-L.V.H.)

The committee acknowledges that Verhey's method of interpretation is foreign to Reformed circles: (*Acts*, 1979, p. 648)

"Moreover it is freely granted that his views are plainly out of harmony with the interpretations of the passages in question traditionally held in our circles. But we do affirm that his interpretations do not contradict the teachings of our creeds.

Do you see how Verhey has driven a wedge between *event* and the *description* of event and has been exonerated by those in strategic positions for doing it?

One of the grounds the committee has used for justifying Dr. Verhey is Report 44: (*Acts*, 1979, p. 648)

"the results of his interpretations of the biblical passages in question (from Genesis 3, Matthew 19 and Matthew 28) do not demonstrate disagreement on his part with the doctrinal pronouncements in the Forms of Unity of the Christian Reformed Church nor with the pastoral advice of Report 44 of the Synod of 1972 of the CRC and are therefore allowable interpretations;"

Report 44 has been lauded by many in the CRC as a *conservative* report. How can it cover Dr. Verhey?

Listen to the *Acts of Synod*, 1972, p. 495, where the authors of Report 44 (A. Bandstra, D. Holwerda, F. Klooster, J. Vos, M. Woudstra, G. Spykman) "maintain the clear witness of Scripture and the creeds to the historical reality of the events recorded in Genesis 1-11, *yet without imposing upon the church an official binding interpretation of all the details which enter into the composition of this unique segment of biblical revelation.*" That is the "big umbrella" that covers Dr. Verhey and all who share or will share his views in the future.

Furthermore, Report 44 presents a very foreign method of harmonizing the gospels.

"... the gospels are not to be viewed as necessarily and always presenting *verbatim* accounts of the words spoken or speeches given" (p. 518).

The committee justifies its method by saying:

"Crucial to this approach is the distinction that is made between the *actual events* in Jesus' life and the *reporting* of the events in the gospels" (p. 519).

Notice again - the wedge being driven between the *event* and the *reporting* of the event. What does all of this do to the doctrine of verbal inspiration by the Holy Spirit? Are we not really saying that in Genesis the Holy Spirit did not record history with "minute circumstantial accuracy" and in the gospels, the Holy Spirit appears to be giving *verbatim* accounts of words spoken and speeches given by the disciples of Jesus, but in reality they are *not* *verbatim* accounts?

The committee claims that its method of interpretation is within the creeds and confessions:

"It is our opinion that this approach - so long as it functions within the framework of the gospels - is permissible within our confession concerning the authority and reliability (infallibility) of Scripture." (p. 520)

In dealing with Report 44, the Synod of 1972 adopted seven points of pastoral advice. Point "e" (p. 69) is the one that spells out the *boundaries* of Biblical interpretation in the CRC:

"e. Synod instructs the churches to see to it that biblical studies are carried on in a careful and disciplined way, submissively rethinking the thoughts of Scripture itself; and accordingly warns against the use of any method of biblical interpretation which excludes or calls into question either the *event-character* or the *revelational meaning* of biblical history, thus compromising the full authority of Scripture as the Word of God."

Notice that all Synod is requiring of Biblical interpreters (ministers, professors, teachers) is that they maintain the "event character" and "revelational meaning" of biblical history. There is *nothing* stated about the *descriptions* or *reporting* of these events. Thus the door is left wide open for the rejection of these details.

Is this a conservative report? As my children would put it - "No way!"

It is not hard to see why Report 44 covered Dr. Verhey. He does not reject the event of the fall and resurrection. He just calls into serious question, the descriptive details.* If all the CRC is going to demand of its leaders is a commitment to the *events* of Scripture, leaving all the details open for grabs, we are bound for disaster and certainly we are already experiencing it.

Synod of 1981 discovered this when, to the surprise of many delegates, a candidate, Clayton Liholt, appeared who maintained the *events* of the fall and resurrection but rejected many of the *details* of the *descriptions* of these events. Still more surprising was the fact that candidate Libolt was endorsed by Calvin Seminary faculty, with only one faculty member dissenting. Shocking too was the fact that Calvin board of Trustees, knowing where Libolt stood, endorsed him 42 to 7. We are thankful that the Synod conducted a special interview with him and denied him candidacy by a substantial majority. One cannot help wondering how many leaders holding similar views have slipped through the channels and now occupy strategic positions in our denomination - shaping the minds of people - young and old.

Conclusion

The time has come when consistories and school boards should no longer *assume* that applicants for positions hold to the inerrancy of Scripture. It is necessary for consistories and school boards to be more *specific* in their questioning. It is not enough that an applicant affirm the "infallibility" of Scripture because infallibility has come to mean an assent only to the event character and revelational mean-

ing of Scripture. Ask the applicant to affirm the *inerrancy* of Scripture. "Inerrancy" requires a belief that *all the details* which describe the events are accurate without error. The word "inerrancy" makes the "new hermeneutic" person very uncomfortable. And, although this suggestion does not sound very sophisticated, schools and churches should ask the same questions that Rev. Peter Brouwer asked candidate Libolt at Synod 1981. Do you believe there was a tree in the garden, and a literal serpent talking to Eve? These are the questions which reveal where an applicant *really stands* on the doctrine of Scripture. Many of us would wish that the teachers of our children on college and seminary level would be asked to answer these too.

This is plain talk but that is what we *must have* today. The new hermeneutic is destroying the confessional integrity of the CRC and until it is rooted out, there will be no peace or unity in the church.

**Editor's Note: We ought to notice that it is a mistake to say (as was also alleged to the synod) that Dr. Verhey applies his critical method only to certain "details" of Biblical history. He stated (Acts 1979 p. 656)*

Incidentally, I do not "except" the resurrection from this kind of investigation. Indeed, if this kind of investigation demonstrated that Jesus had not been raised, I would become a Jew. The gospels stake their case on history, after all. But such investigation, while it cannot "prove" God took Jesus from the dead, clearly demonstrates it is not historically unreasonable to accept such a claim.

While this does not deny the resurrection it does make, not only incidental details, but the event itself historically debatable.

GIVE US THIS DAY

"Give us this day our daily bread"
Dear Father, I would pray;
Please strengthen me, for without Thee
I cannot live each day.

"Give us this day our daily bread"
Not only just for me —
In Thy great mercy fill the need
Of all who call on Thee.

"Give us this day our daily bread"
Tomorrow may not come;
Perhaps another day shall dawn
In my eternal home.

"Give us this day our daily bread"
As Thou hast in the past
O please supply our every need
So long as life shall last.

"Give us this day our daily bread"
Not wealth or luxury —
But only that with which to live
Dear God, so may it be.

Annetta Jansen
Dorr, Michigan

Time for Catechism

Peter De Jong

With the coming of fall the time approaches for our churches to resume the practice of one of our most significant and influential Reformed traditions, the religious training of especially children and young people in "catechism" classes.

A Biblical Tradition

This training is deeply rooted not only in history, but prior to that and as the real reason for it—in the Bible itself. The Lord's injunctions "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them" (Mark 10:14), "See that you do not despise one of these little ones" (Matt. 18:10) and His extremely severe warning against causing one of these to "stumble" (v. 6) have always been too deeply imprinted in the hearts and minds of every Bible-believing Christian to permit this important business of child training to have anything but a most important place. The Lord's own teaching about this point is echoed in that of his apostles to "bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

It is no accident therefore that our Reformation fathers, Luther and Calvin, four centuries ago, early devoted their attention to writing catechisms for children and that it was one such catechism designed to systematically teach the Christian faith that became the most generally used official confession of faith of our Reformed churches—the Heidelberg Catechism. The earliest minutes of the Reformed church synods in the Netherlands often reveal as much concern about having this catechism taught in the schools as having it preached in the churches.

This systematic teaching of Biblical faith and doctrine was essential to the development and maintenance of the Reformed faith in past centuries. It is just as essential to the restoration and revival of that faith today. If the Lord is going to give us such restoration and revival it will be in the way of obeying His commands to give such teaching. Neither evangelistic additions, revival enthusiasms, nor corrective synod decisions are likely to have much lasting significance if they are not accompanied by systematic, sound Biblical teaching. We need Reformation in Catechism classes.

A Movement Away From Catechism

If we are going to do something about such Reformation in our catechism classes we will have to consider what has been happening to them. Despite the provision of our Church Order that "The Heidelberg Catechism and its Compendium shall be the basis of instruction" (Art. 64c) this method was "consciously abandoned" with the adoption of a "United Church School Curriculum" which reduced such formal doctrinal teaching to two years (*Acts of Synod 1973*, p. 232). Since then although some older systematic introductions to Biblical doctrine continue to be printed and even updated by the denomination's publication agency, they are not what is being promoted, and churches that still want to maintain a systematic catechism program have largely had to look elsewhere for books designed to promote that kind of teaching. (The Reformed Fellowship supplies some of them.)

This official movement away from systematic "catechism" teaching reflects on the part of a significant number of our ministers a growing skepticism about the need for or desirability of such systematic "indoctrination." Some years ago a young minister informed me that he had discarded his catechism books, preferring to talk to young people about their problems, since he considered that more helpful. I asked him what he was doing about teaching them the Bible's system of doctrine. His retort was, "The Bible has no system of doctrine." My reply was that while the Bible gives us no formal "Catechism" it certainly does insist on teaching what the Apostle Paul called "the form of sound words" which Timothy must "hold fast" and teach (2 Tim. 1:13; 2:2). The gospel has structure which the church under the promised and given guidance of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 17) must and has sought to "hold" and "teach" throughout the centuries. If the new preacher were going to abandon all this in favor of his own practical opinions or some philosophical hobbies, I feared what would happen to his church. And that trouble, did not take long to come.

The incident I mentioned may be a somewhat extreme example, but it is paralleled by an apparent shift in the official treatment of catechism materials. Consider another example. In the November 1980

Calvin Theological Journal Jack Westerhof reviewed *Beyond Doubt: A Devotional Response to Questions of Faith*, by Cornelius Plantinga, in the Bible Way Curriculum Series of our C.R. Board of Publications, a book designed for older students. While the reviewer praised the "sparkle," contemporaneity, and lack of dullness of the treatment, he commented also that Plantinga's questioning approach was "open to all kinds of subjective decisions" and raised the question "whether possibly in this way we stand to lose or ignore some important things God has taught us. . . ." He noted the author's modest and refreshingly honest suggestion, "Use what you can, and let the rest go," and remarked, "Few will likely agree with all in this book."

The book had been called to my attention previously since it was also being used by our young people. In looking it over I noticed, beside the freshness of approach, some curious things. The head of each page lists beside Biblical references also references to the creeds. Among those creeds frequently cited is the "Confession of 1967." Have you heard of that confession? It is the new creed to the United Presbyterian Church which is so Liberal that conservatives in that denomination found it impossible on its basis to effectively oppose the admission of a minister who denied the deity of Christ!* My curiosity whetted by this appearance of the Liberal creed in our official catechism book, I noticed further that the Author's Preface acknowledged his particular indebtedness to "Dr. Douglas E. Nelson, who is the primary, if hidden, author of a sizable share of this material." Dr. Nelson is the long-time pastor at "First United Presbyterian Church of New Haven, Connecticut." In appreciation of his debt to Dr. Nelson who "first taught me that the Christian believer seeks understanding very often in the interrogative mood and that a faith beyond doubt is not yet beyond question," the author dedicates his book to him (pp. xi, xii).

As one looks over the book he notices for example, that in the section on "Male and Female" the women's liberation line is clearly adopted — as it is in the U.P. churches which outlaw churches and ministers who have Biblical scruples against ordaining women.

While such materials as this may be useful or provocative in helping people to understand doctrinal questions, when they are published as *textbooks* for teaching doctrine, hasn't the whole idea of a Divinely revealed system of truth which we must hold and teach been lost from sight? While facing questions may have a useful place in church teaching, our Divine calling is not to "minister questions" but to faithfully convey God's answers. The churches' official textbooks should teach the things the churches unitedly believe, as traditional catechisms always attempted to do. If such a book is characterized by all kinds of subjective opinions with which few in the church can fully agree, can it be a satisfactory textbook?

Reformation of Catechism Classes

As the "catechism season" begins, ministers, elders and parents who are genuinely concerned about

a Reformation of faith and life cannot simply follow the common or official policy and uncritically order denominational materials. We will have to prayerfully plan courses that will attempt to systematically teach the faith "once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3), and we will have to seek out, study, and select, or produce, and use textbooks and helps that are designed to serve that purpose. ●

**Note: the Presbyterian Journal in reporting on the Presbyterian controversy has noted the bearing of the new creed upon it. For a systematic criticism of the subversive character of that creed see Dr. C. Van Til's The Confession of 1967, Its Theological Background and Ecumenical Significance, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co. Philadelphia, 1967.*

HELP ME TO LOVE THEM

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

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

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

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

Here am I
in a world of hurting people
but with Thee
all things are possible.

May I see these
through the eyes of Christ
who had compassion
on the multitude.

O God
strip me of my pride
remind me of your grace
use me
to bring these
to the foot of the cross.

Annetta Jansen
Dorr, Michigan

Rebuilding the Waste

Peter De Jong

"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

The Reformed Fellowship is a company of people who are concerned about the reformation and revival of the Church. Our periodical has expressed and served that concern for three decades. The Biblical history of the return of the Jews from their Babylonian exile as we read about it in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah as well as in the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah conveys a good deal of inspired instruction to us for that kind of enterprise.

T.S. Eliot on Nehemiah and the Church

It is instructive, not to say at times entertaining, to notice the way in which the famous modern poet, T.S. Eliot, alluded to that Biblical history. The poet was converted to the Christian faith in the latter part of his career and he sought to live and serve the faith in the demoralized Church of England. James Wesley Ingles remarked in an article in the October 13, 1961 *Christianity Today* (p. 6) that Eliot's "Most explicit statement of Christian themes is to be found in the choruses from *The Rock*, a pageant performed in 1934, which he helped to write on behalf of a fund for the repair of old churches in the London diocese."

Thomas Stearns Eliot saw the church as unwanted in the increasingly godless and decaying society. In London he "was told: we have too many churches, and too few chophouses." The country too now is only fit for picnics.

And the Church does not seem to be wanted
In country or in suburbs; and in the town
Only for important weddings.

Eliot recalls

II

Thus your fathers were made
Fellow citizens of the saints, of the household
of GOD, being built upon the foundation
Of apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself
the chief cornerstone.

*

You, have you built well, have you forgotten
the cornerstone?

Talking of right relations of men, but not of
relations of men to GOD.

*

Of all that was done in the past, you eat the
fruit, either rotten or ripe.
And the Church must be forever building, and
always decaying, and always being restored.
For every ill deed in the past we suffer the consequence:
For sloth, for avarice, gluttony, neglect of the
Word of GOD. . . .

*

The Church must be forever building, for it is
forever decaying within and attacked from
without:
For this is the law of life; and you must remember
that while there is time of prosperity
The people will neglect the Temple, and in time
of adversity they will decry it.

*

CHORUS: We build in vain unless the LORD build
with us. Can you keep the City that the LORD keeps
not with you?

IV

There are those who would build the Temple,
And those who prefer that the Temples should
not be built.
In the days of Nehemiah the Prophet
There was no exception to the general rule.
In Shushan the palace, in the month Nisan,
He served the wine to the King Artaxerxes,
And he grieved for the broken city, Jerusalem;
And the King gave him leave to depart
That he might rebuild the city.
So he went, with a few, to Jerusalem,

*

Jerusalem lay waste, consumed with fire;
No place for a beast to pass.
There were enemies without to destroy him,
And spies and self-seekers within,

When he and his men laid their hands to rebuilding the wall.
So they built as men must build
With the sword in one hand and the trowel in the other.

V

O Lord, deliver me from the man of excellent intention and impure heart; for the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.
Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite and Geshem the Arabian; were doubtless men of public spirit and zeal.
Preserve me from the enemy who has something to gain: and from the friend who has something to lose.
Remembering the words of Nehemiah the Prophet: "The trowel in hand, and the gun rather loose in the holster."
Those who sit in a house of which the use is forgotten: are like snakes that lie on mouldering stairs, content in the sunlight.
And the others run about like dogs, full of enterprise, sniffing and barking: they say, "This house is a nest of serpents, let us destroy it,
And have done with these abominations, the turpitudes of the Christians." And these are not justified, nor the other.

*

But we are encompassed with snakes and dogs: therefore some must labor, and others must hold the spears.¹

Recurring Problems of Reformation

Especially intriguing in Eliot's poem are his observations about the way in which the experiences of Nehemiah and the returned exiles in the enterprise of rebuilding Jerusalem are and will be repeated in the experience of people who in other times are involved in restoration of the Lord's church.

Recently our attention and support have been invited by a movement to establish a new independent Reformed theological seminary for training of pastors.² That movement has gotten a good deal of attention and has received wide-spread and enthusiastic support. It is also arousing opposition, some of it rather reminiscent of that which Jerusalem's rebuilders encountered. We recall the efforts to compromise that ancient rebuilding project at its very beginning. When that was refused, there were misrepresentations and slander. And there was ridicule. Sanballat said, "What do these feeble Jews?" His associate, Tobiah the Ammonite, chimed in, "If a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall" (Neh. 4:1-4 cf. also 2:19). The builders encountered plenty of politicking, and then threats. And there was an effort to divert Nehemiah from his purpose by engaging him in dialog (Neh. 6).

The Biblical account is especially instructive in showing us how those concerned with church reform

and restoration must face such obstacles. Especially prominent throughout Nehemiah's book are his prayers — prayers when he heard the news about Jerusalem, prayers when he considered what to do and spoke with the king, and prayers when he faced ridicule and threats: "Hear, O our God; for we are despised . . . Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands." And Nehemiah and his builders refused to be deterred from or delayed in their enterprise. A point in the story which especially needs to be stressed in our time is one noted in Eliot's poem. The Jerusalem builders were not afraid to be militant when they faced their opponents. A perceptive observer remarked some time ago that one of the reasons why conservatives lose their churches is that they are trying too hard to be "nice." We must remember to speak "the truth in love," as the Apostle enjoins (Eph. 4:15), but that involves us in a spiritual war (Eph. 6:10-19). The time has come for plain and sometimes sharp speaking against the subversion of Biblical doctrine and life that has been going on in our Reformed circles. As we welcome the beginning of a new theological school to promote that Biblical faith and life we must not hesitate to defend the project against the charges that no such effort is needed. Let this and similar efforts proceed with the conviction of Nehemiah, "The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build" (Neh. 2:20). ●

¹T.S. Eliot: *The Complete Poems and Plays 1909-1950*, Harcourt, Brace and Co. New York, pp. 96-105.

²It is interesting that the organizational meeting in Chicago was opened by the chairman, Rev. Edward Knott, with a reading from the post-exilic prophecy of Zechariah 4. See the article on "A New Reformed Seminary" in the June, 1981 *OUTLOOK*.

COMMUNION

*Communing with God in the morning
When the day is beginning to dawn;
Seeking His help and His guidance
Enabling me to go on.*

*Communing with God in the noontime
In the toil and heat of the day;
Claiming the words of His promise,
"Lo, I am with you always."*

*Communing with God in the evening
When the time has come to rest;
Trusting in His loving-kindness
Knowing He sends what is best.*

*Communing with God at midnight
When the world around me is still;
Praying that He will protect me
Knowing He always will.*

Annetta Jansen
Dorr, Michigan

The Dutch Report on Biblical AUTHORITY

Peter De Jong

Last month Rev. Henry Vanden Heuvel reported that for the present the continuing policy of the Christian Reformed Churches with respect to the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (mother-churches of many of our members) will be one of fraternal relations as though we shared a common faith. Despite their decision to condone homosexual practice within their churches, which prompted one of our classes to call for a break in relations, our denomination's synod was persuaded to continue such relations, although with a protest against that decision. That decision was discussed as though it were an isolated issue, as Professor Stek argued, a minor ethical matter which would not justify a break in church relations.

I observed in an article in our April issue ("Time to Break Fellowship"), that that decision about homosexuals is one of a number of symptoms of a radical sickness that is destroying the whole of those churches' faith and life. The character of that sickness is revealed with remarkable clarity by those churches' published report on "the nature of Biblical Authority," which I reviewed in the article.

On Feb. 20 the committee for contact and dialog of the Netherlands Reformed Churches published the following conclusions regarding that report. (These are relayed to us by the March 28 *Reformatie* and I give a free translation.)

With the acceptance, unanimously and without criticism worth mentioning, of the report on the nature of biblical authority as a confessionally responsible view of Scripture, in the opinion of this committee, a new low has been reached in the developments within the GKN (Reformed Churches of the Netherlands). To its regret the committee can come to no other conclusion than that the Reformed synod with this report, has switched course and, after indi-

vidual theologians had preceded it, has left the track of a Reformed view of Scripture. In a time in which modern Biblical criticism sweeps over the churches as a flood, the report breaks down the necessary resistance to it instead of building it up.

Despite all assurances to the contrary, the report means a break in principle with the manner in which the churches of the Reformation have constantly understood the authority of the Scriptures, as it is confessed, for example, in Articles 3-7 of the Netherlands Confession of Faith (Belgic Confession).

We read further:

Through the large role which the report assigns to theological science, it, in fact, takes God's Word from the church members and it makes of the Bible a book which can be read and understood only with the help of a theological elite — the modern cleric.

With the report in hand the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands can still loftily give to theologians such as Prof. Kuitert, Dr. Wiersinga, etc., soothing warnings not to go too far with their views. But there can be no thought of a principled and powerful denial of their false teaching after the acceptance of this report, because the synod and these theologians — although at some distance from one another — are traveling the same road, the road that leads away from the confession of the Scriptures as the totally trustworthy and authoritative Word of God and leads to the destination of the complete subjection of God's Word to human reason and human experience.

As far as the position of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod is concerned, the view of Scripture expressed in the above mentioned report is in flagrant conflict with the foundation of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod which says regarding the Bible, "The Scriptures in their totality, as in every part, are the infallible and ever continuing Word of the Living Triune God, having absolute authority in all matters of faith and life."

Furthermore, the report accepted by the Reformed synod gives no indication whatever that the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands were willing to listen to the urgent statements which the Reformed Ecumenical Synod issued in 1976 regarding the errors within the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. Regrettably, in this respect also, one has to speak of the hardening and sharpening of the stance of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands against the Reformed Ecumenical Synod.

How long will we keep up the pretence that the differences between us and those Dutch churches only concern minor, secondary issues?

Rev. Henry Vanden Heuvel reported in the *Outlook*, "What was amazing to this reporter was that Professor Stek saw the issue as just an ethical matter, whereas the advisory committee and even the fraternal delegate knew it to be a matter of Scriptural interpretation." We cannot deal with our differences about homosexual practice without dealing with the bigger, more basic difference among us which is exposed in the Dutch churches' report on the authority of the Bible.

Adopted Sons of God

What a glorious thing that we have been chosen unto salvation! But, there is more. Our wealth in Him cannot be measured. He also foreordained us (or elected us) unto adoption as sons! Being saved has not only a negative aspect, that we will not suffer eternal punishment, it has many glorious positive aspects. We are now sons of God by adoption. This is the clearest term the Bible is able to use to describe our relation to Him, but it is not wholly adequate. Scripture also speaks of us as "born of God" — adopted, yet born of Him. Peter even speaks of the divine nature being imparted to us. However, we understand the Apostle's terminology. As adopted sons we have all the rights and privileges of sonship. This adoption occurred through Christ. This was His good pleasure. God delights in the salvation of His people.

Salvation

The election of God had as its purpose to save His people. This salvation was accomplished. However, the ultimate purpose of His election was "the praise of the glory of His grace." His goodness, His love, His grace is magnified by the election of His people. They may never lose sight of it. His goodness, love and grace is seen everywhere but most clearly in the salvation of His own. He has bestowed all of this on us freely in Jesus Christ. His grace is so great — and He has made us the recipients of it! We have indeed tasted that God is good.

Bought by Christ

As the multitude of thoughts crowd in upon each other as he is describing the glorious salvation which is ours, there is a slight change of emphasis found in verse 7. No, the shift in thought is too small to warrant a new paragraph, but he now emphasizes the work done by Christ in our redemption. Before this he had emphasized the Father's work in choosing us to salvation. Now he speaks of the fact that this redemption has been wrought through the blood of Christ. It is a *redemption*, i.e., a ransom has been paid. Our redemption has been *bought!* The Old Testament already spoke of the ransom which would have to be paid and Jesus spoke of the fact that He had come to give His life as a ransom for many. Silver and gold did not suffice as a ransom. The required payment was enormous — nothing less than the *blood* of the Son of God. But, have no fear, His payment was sufficient. Our trespasses were thereby forgiven! We were purchased unto Himself and no one else had any claim on us from that day on. By that payment He revealed the riches of His grace. And this grace is so great and so rich that it has not only purchased our redemption but it filled His people so that they receive all wisdom and prudence. He has not impoverished Himself when He paid the price of our sin. His riches know no bounds. There was plenty left so that He gave His gifts to His people. Their redemption is not only negative, i.e., that they were freed from something, no, its positive side is so beautiful — He has enriched

them so that they now have all things. He made these riches to abound to us. He gave them the wisdom — the proper use of knowledge — and the insight into the wonders of salvation.

A Mystery Revealed

This wisdom and insight are so necessary because He has now made known unto us the mystery of His will. Paul uses this term frequently in his letters. He does not mean something mysterious, but, rather, a making known those things which had not been revealed in former ages. The people to whom he is writing have received a far clearer revelation than former ages had received. These revealed things they must now understand and for that purpose He has given them an abundance of wisdom and insight. In the new revelation of the fulness of redemption He has made known His good pleasure. He rejoices in making known to His people the beauty of their salvation. His purposes now become clear. The Old Testament saints may have wondered at His purposes time and again. The saints of the New Testament times will have a clearer view.

With the coming of Jesus Christ into this world and the work which He has done for our redemption, the purposes of God are realized. This coming of our Lord has brought the dispensation of the fulness of the times. The day of shadows is past. The mystery is now revealed. It is a wholly new and different age. All things are summed up in Christ. He is the One who draws all things together in the whole universe. So many things seemed to be separated before. Men were not able to understand that everything had a purpose. Christ is the One in Whom all things come together. All things are summed up in Him, that is, He is the Head of all things. The world which had fallen into sin and thereby ruined the orderliness originally found in it is restored in Christ. The Christ is of far greater significance for the world than the bringer of redemption in the narrow sense.

God's Heirs in Christ

Christ has been made Head over all things for the benefit of the church and therefore the Apostle, together with other believers, can rejoice in the fact that "we were made a heritage." The recipients of His redemption are also the heirs of all the other benefits found in Christ. God includes all the things which have happened in the past, are happening today and what will happen in the future in His all-embracing plan. He not only makes His plans, He also carries them out. Nothing can foil His plans. Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. This gives stability and certainty to the lives of believers. We were in that plan of God and He does everything according to the counsel of His will. He has a glorious purpose in mind: that we should be unto the praise of His glory. Here he refers to the purpose of all things as they were intended from the beginning of creation. He created all things to bring praise and glory to His name. This purpose seemed to be thwarted by the entrance of sin into the world, but all things are renewed with the coming of Christ. He reversed the

disorder which sin had brought into the world. It has cost a huge price, but God's original purposes are realized! Those who fall heir to these benefits wrought by Christ have had their hope centered in Christ even before all things have been brought to their conclusion. Certainly, their faith is genuine, but all things have not yet been accomplished. Much more is still to come.

Heirs by Faith in the Gospel

He has spoken of the fact that he, together with the believers to whom he is writing, are the heirs of all the blessings wrought by Jesus Christ. How can they know that they truly are such heirs? They had believed the word! That word is the truth! This is said because there were many false 'gospels' at that time as well as in our day. This word of truth was the gospel of their salvation! It is only through belief in the word of truth that salvation will be obtained. You were then sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, he says. This Spirit had been promised and all promises are realized in Him. The Spirit had authenticated the word which they had believed. In fact, their believing was already His work. The Spirit testifies within them to the truth of the gospel of salvation. The Spirit testifies of Christ. He gives assurances as well as the knowledge of the truth. He wrote the word — he is its best commentator.

The Holy Spirit — A Down-Payment

At the conclusion of this section he calls the Holy Spirit "an earnest of our inheritance." The Spirit is the first instalment of our inheritance. The first payment has been made and this is the assurance that the whole inheritance will become ours. We must remember: we are still battling sin, the second coming of our Savior must still come and the bliss of heaven still awaits us. But, the full salvation will come because we have already received the down payment! His promises shall surely come to pass. His purposes shall be realized. He will fully redeem His own possession. This is typically Pauline language. It is also the language of the first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism. God made us. He bought us. We belong to Him.

Paul began this section with a doxology and ends it with the words "unto the praise of his glory." He is straining human language to reveal his thanks for what God has done for him through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. Salvation is so beautiful! We owe all to Another. How can men take it lightly!

Questions for discussion:

1. What is Paul's view of his office?
2. Is election of practical benefit for the believer? Is Christian doctrine always practical?
3. How much is involved in our adoption to be children of God?
4. What does it mean that He has summed up all things in Christ?
5. What does the phrase "in Christ" mean?
6. What does our inheritance include?
7. Can people be saved apart from believing the word?

THE WEALTH OF BELIEVERS

Lesson 2

Ephesians 1:15-23

Paul has finally come to the end of the long sentence contained in the previous eleven verses in which he has extolled the salvation revealed by the Triune God. He has stressed the work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All these works must be seen by the people of God to appreciate the fulness and the beauty of the salvation which has been revealed.

Thanks for the Church

Paul had worked in this church at Ephesus for some time — but that was about four years ago. He worked diligently here and his labors were also crowned with success. Many had come to the faith in this important city. Its church is the first of the churches mentioned by John in the book of Revelation. When John speaks of this church in revelation 2, it had lost its first love. At the time in which Paul is writing to this people that love is still very much in evidence. Therefore he rejoices in the news he has heard from this church while he himself is in prison. Their faith in Jesus Christ is evident to everyone. They also live their faith because they show their love to all the saints. (The great danger which this church faces some years later when they have lost that first love is that their faith has then died.) Faith shows itself in love and by means of the true love one is able to deduce that the true faith is present. The Apostle rejoices in the good report he hears and that he is thus able to see the continuing work of the Spirit of God in them.

How often this Apostle mentions the fact that he gives thanks for the faith of the people he is addressing. This is genuine. When he looks back to the time when he came to Ephesus and compares it with the present time, there is indeed reason to rejoice and give thanks. It is true, Apollos had worked there, but his view of the gospel needed correction. When Paul arrived in this city some of the people admitted that they did not even know that Pentecost had come and that they had been baptized with the baptism of John. Paul had a great deal of work to do here and he was given two years to do it. Ah, how that work had been blessed! He is in prison now but he has time for prayer and does not forget this church.

Prayer for the Church

What does he pray for? No doubt he prays that the church may fare well and that it may be kept in the truth. This would be the natural prayer of this former pastor for this church. But, he tells us specifically what he prays for concerning this church. He makes it very clear to them to Whom he prays. He prays to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory. Strange isn't it that he should speak in this way? Why doesn't he say: I pray to God for you? Remember how he has emphasized the attributes of God in the verses 3-14. Every part of that revelation is important, and must also be recognized in the prayer life of His people. His people don't just pray! Some have the idea today that God is standing

at their elbow and is ready to do the bidding of the one who "prays" as though He is his servant. No, we come to the God of Jesus Christ. He is the Father of glory. Let there be awe in prayer!

Prayer for Vision

What does he pray for them? The content of his prayer sounds rather strange to us. He prays that God may give them His Holy Spirit so that they may have wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. Certainly, only the Spirit of God will be able to give such wisdom in the revelation He has given of Himself so that they may come to an understanding of Him. They do have this knowledge, but he wishes them to increase in this knowledge. All their knowledge of Him must come by revelation. Let them then work diligently with the revelation they have received and may the Spirit of God illumine their minds.

Paul continues his train of thought in verse 18, but again uses some strange language to make clear what he has in mind. He prays that "the eyes of their hearts may be enlightened." That is the only way they will come to the proper knowledge of God and of His gifts. By the term "heart" the Scriptures refer to the core of man's being. Now, to see with the heart and not only with the physical eye is the concern of the Apostle in this verse. The "eye" of the natural man's heart is blind. He cannot see anything but that which is observable by the physical eye. Believers are of a different nature. That which eye has not seen is nevertheless believed! They do not only live by that which the natural eye is able to see. The Spirit of God has given them a vision which others are not able to perceive. Only if the eye of the heart is enlightened will they be able to realize the hope of His calling. What does the natural man know about an inner call? Only if the heart's eye is enlightened will he be able to understand the riches of the glory of God's inheritance in the saints. Together with all other believers they have this assured knowledge. This is the essence of faith! You can tell someone about the hope you have, but if his heart's eye is not enlightened you are speaking in riddles in his estimation. The believer's life is so much richer than he is able to imagine.

God's Power

The believer is dependent on the enlightenment of the heart's eye for all the spiritual benefits he receives. By that enlightenment the hope is real, the faith is placed on a solid foundation and the believer recognizes the tremendous power of God which has been exerted in order that we might obtain salvation. The power of God is usually spoken of in regard to the mighty works we see in nature. This is Biblical too. The book of Job speaks of the powers of God as they are shown in the mighty storms which rage over the earth and in His creation of powerful creatures, and His power displayed in the orderliness of all things. However, when we deal with the subject of salvation we usually emphasize the love and grace of God. This too is Biblical. Time and again the Bible speaks of the great love He had for those whom He

had chosen and that their very choice revealed His grace. But, the power of God which has been revealed in the salvation of His people may not be overlooked. His power also makes our hope sure — no one shall snatch us out of His powerful grasp.

This power of God is shown especially in the fact that He raised Christ from the dead and caused Him to be seated at the place of power in the heavens. We may never become so accustomed to the knowledge of the resurrection of Christ that we fail to see the marvel of it. It seemed as though death would reign and have the preeminence as long as the world would stand. However, God reached down with His almighty power and raised Him from the dead, thereby conquering death for all those whose heart's eye has been enlightened. It is also well for us to note how often Paul speaks of the exalted and ruling Christ of the present time. The church has not grasped this fact fully even to the present day! Several churches have to meet together on Ascension Day in order to make it worthwhile to have a service! What a shame! Paul becomes ecstatic when he thinks of Christ's present position because that is the guarantee of his present safety and future goal!

Christ's Ascendant Power

Christ, he says, is ascended far above all the powers you may imagine. No one can compare with Him. He is not speaking now of human rule but the rule of angels too. Human rule is often praised and its might revered. But, human rule and might is not found in the heavenly places nor is it named in both this world and the next. We know from the Scriptures that the angels are powerful and that their power and rule exceeds that of men so far that it cannot be measured. An angel stands on the threshing floor in David's time and slays thousands in Israel and it seems as though nothing can stop him. Angels will have a prominent place at the time of the return of our Lord. But, Christ stands far above them all! God gave Him authority over all things. By virtue of the fact that He rose from the dead He says: All authority is mine both in heaven and on earth! No, He does not stand as a beggar before men to ask whether or not they will have Him! All authority is His and He exercises it! This makes the lot of the believer glorious. There is absolutely nothing which can prevent his hope from being realized. Surely, we must see Christ's love and grace displayed, but we have a very warped view of salvation if that is our only basis of hope. Paul emphasizes both the aspects of love and power and we must do the same, or we impoverish ourselves.

Sovereign Head

Christ has all things made subject to Him and He has also been made the Head over all things. This is the complete picture of His absolute sovereignty. Now the Apostle tells us what is the immediate purpose of this sovereignty. He has been given all this authority for the benefit of the church. As I said before, Ephesians stresses the nature and importance of the church as virtually no other book of the New Testament. Later (5:25-33) he will speak of the

Head-body symbolism. Here he speaks of the fact that Christ has received all rule for the benefit of the church. No one can, therefore, understand the history of the world apart from the history of the church. The church stands at the center of all things. That church is His body. This is already preparatory to the things Paul is going to say about the church in chapter 5. Much is made of personal salvation today—know Jesus as your personal Savior! Of course, this cannot be denied. But, the nature and importance of the church is minimized in many circles today! "You will not be asked to which church you belonged on earth"! Many seem to know that this question will not be asked. I think it might be one of the first questions asked! Did you belong to my body or not? Did you belong to the false church or the true church? Christ loves His church for which He gave His life. He loves that church so much that He rules everything in this world for the benefit of that church. We must get back to those things said about the church in the Scriptures and what is therefore said about her in the Belgic Confession.

The final words of this chapter give some difficulty. Paul has spoken of the church being Christ's body and then adds "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." Let it never be said that Christ is not sufficient unto Himself. Yet, he here speaks of that church being the fulness of HIM, even though He fills all in all. The best interpretation seems to be as follows: Christ is presented here as the head of the church and the church is presented as His body. Keeping this figure in mind, the closing words of this chapter become clear. The head is not complete without the body, and, of course, the body also would not be complete without the head. In other words, the church is here spoken of as complementing the Christ! As Christ, as Messiah, He would not be complete without the church—His body. This again reveals the importance of the church.

Marvelous things have been spoken concerning the salvation of His people in this chapter and the important place of the church. These are the things which he will explain further in the coming chapters of this glorious book.

Questions for Discussion

1. How are faith and love related?
2. According to Paul, the believer sees things the unbeliever does not see. Can there then ever be a true discussion between them?
3. Why do we emphasize so little the power of God in our redemption? Do you think this might make a greater impression on the unbeliever than if we always talk about love?
4. The rule of Christ really began with His ascension. Why do you think believers generally pay so little attention to the Ascension of Christ? If we pay so little attention to it, do we preach a complete gospel?
5. How important is it to which church you belong? Should it be worth going a few extra miles to join one church instead of another? Someone wrote: the church is fellowship. What do you think of that? ●

JOB goes into the depths

John Blankespoor

After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. He said, May the day of my birth perish, and the night it was said, a boy is born. That day — may God not care about it . . ." (Job 3:1-3).

Many of God's saints have been sorely tried throughout the history of the church as well as in the age of special revelation. Martin Luther reportedly had agonizing struggles with the devil. John Bunyan had intense personal conflicts and John Calvin was tried in body and soul with severe physical ailments. Often the most godly of men are severely tempted and tried. In the Old Testament Job stands head and shoulders above others in being faced with severe trials.

God's purpose in Job's life-story was to demonstrate to the devil and mankind the genuineness of Job's piety — the work of God's grace in him. The devil claimed that Job was a pious man because he was so richly rewarded. Satan's charge would be proved false. The book of Job became a theodicy. It raised the question of why the righteous suffer and gave an answer, justifying the ways of God with men and leading His children to acknowledge His sovereignty.

In one day Job lost all of his possessions and all of his children died. But Job persisted in the faith. Satan was not satisfied. He alleged that if Job were also deprived of his health he would renounce his faith and curse God. The devil was permitted to take

away his health. He underwent almost indescribable suffering. The devil knew no mercy. Job was stricken with boils from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. His form and face were so disfigured that even his friends did not recognize him. Ulcers covered him inwardly and outwardly and emitted such a repulsive odor that people were driven from his presence. He sought refuge outside of the city on a heap of ashes, seeking to counteract the intense itch. The sufferer was haunted by horrible dreams and unearthly terrors and harassed by a sense of choking. His wife was estranged, his relatives failed him, his friends forgot him and young children despised him. "Have pity on me, O my friends," he cried out, "for the hand of the Lord has touched me." But they had no pity.

Although Job's physical suffering was intense, his spiritual suffering was greater. This was aggravated by the attitude of his wife. Who ought to have been closer to him than his wife, or could have been more helpful? Instead, she was a liability. Her advice was, "Why take all this? Curse God and die — Put an end to it by suicide!" To curse God would mean that Job was "done" with God — exactly what the devil had predicted. Godly Job's answer showed how his faith sustained him. "Shall we receive the good from the hand of the Lord and not the evil?" In all this he still did not "sin with his lips."

Job's response was neither fatalism, nor irrationalism, as some might think. He knew that the Lord who controls all things was his God. Submission was his proper response.

* *

Job received some visitors, four friends. They had heard about his plight and came to console and help him. At first they did not even recognize him. Seeing him in his agony on the ash pile they sat down for 7 days watching him but saying nothing. When conversation began the question was why God makes Job suffer. Why does God make the Christian suffer? The largest part of the book is devoted to discussion of that question, and, finally, to its answer. Isn't this the question people still ask especially when confronted by an extraordinary amount of or a strange kind of suffering? Why do sincere Christian people at times suffer more than others "not so good"? I believe that because Christians in affliction are often troubled by this question, the Holy Spirit in much of this book (chapters 3-31) helps them find the answer to it.

For Job's first three friends who speak the answer was simple. Suffering comes because of special sins. They made harsh accusations against Job. Not only must he have committed gross sins; he was also too proud to admit them. There were in his life hidden and early sins. He must have neglected to help the poor and widows. Against the numerous accusations raised in the heated discussion, Job maintained his integrity. God was not punishing him on account of such sins. Of this he was firmly convinced.

In the conversation with the friends Job revealed much about his attitude, depression and problems.

"Even to this day is my complaint bitter, my stroke is heavier than my groaning. Oh, that I might know where I might find Him? That I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before Him (God)." Submerged in his troubles, he accused God of destroying the righteous with the wicked and of laughing at the trials of the innocent. He set himself up as a critic over God and denied His justice. In his despair he cursed the day of his birth. He even longed for death, although at times he seemed to see nothing beyond the grave. He said that there was more hope for a tree when it is cut off than for a man when he dies. A tree may bring forth shoots again, but a man does not. Elsewhere he confessed, however, that he knew that his Redeemer lived. Through these conversations, Job gives us a glimpse of the ups and downs, the highs and lows of the soul of a Christian wrestling with the problems of suffering and of life itself.

How long did this last? The Lord does not tell us. We do know that the day came when Job was delivered from his sickness and given double blessings, including material things and the enjoyment of children.

* *

We must observe that although Job sinned grievously, he did not curse God as Satan had predicted he would do. James speaks of the patience of Job. But was he patient? He often appeared to be the opposite. The word "patience," however, might better be translated "perseverance." Job endured severe affliction. He persevered in that he did not curse God. He continued to seek an answer in his struggle with affliction.

Job sought an answer *in this life*. Though he was weak he persevered in faith. The Bible promises God's blessings to those who in affliction obediently persevere in faith in Him. Do we not often see handicapped believers become effective "preachers" of the Lord's grace as they experience God's blessings abundantly "poured out" upon them in affliction?

Later we see Christ who in His perseverance in affliction towered above all other mortals including Job. With the fuller New Testament knowledge of salvation under the guidance of the Spirit of Pentecost, we are led, in Christ, to persevere, to reach forward to victory over affliction. Paul speaks of rejoicing in our sufferings, because we know that sufferings produce perseverance and perseverance Christian character, and character, hope (Romans 5:1ff.). Listen also to James as he says, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." Isn't that encouraging? Where God as our Father in Christ is acknowledged, and we humbly submit to and wait for Him by the power of the Spirit, He grants showers of blessings. We see that at the end of the book of Job. Count such trials pure joy, says James. They develop spiritual millionaires. (C)

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

REFORMED PEOPLE IN HUNGARY (MAY)

Dear Pastor:

Will you please pass on the following information to the Rev. Vigh or make a supplement/addition in a next issue of *Outlook*.

There were a few things which were not correct in the last issue. The article itself was excellent, very commendable; he must have had his finger on the pulse of the Ref. Church in Hungary. The article was very well written and the actual situation was realistically portrayed.

I was informed and did some history reading which resulted in:

1) Rev. Vigh speaks about closing of one (1) seminary; however there are two and both are closed.

a. Reformed Seminary in Papa (allegedly closed for financial reasons; Dutch Reformed Churches offered the money to keep it open, but this was not accepted).

b. Reformed Seminary in Sarospatak (was closed because an awakening of true Reformed Faith started to develop).

Both seminaries were closed in 1951 after having served the Hungarian Reformed Churches for 400 years.

2) 60% of the ministers are over 60 years of age.

20% of the congregations have no ministers.

A substantial number of churches have young student ministers who are supporting the orders of the communist government with regard to Church and religion.

3) I think that the year in which Admiral de Ruyter freed a number of Hungarian Reformed pastors, teachers, etc. was not correct. 41 Reformed ministers/teachers were brought on foot to Trieste, Austria, there to be sold to slave buyers from Naples; some went to prison, and some on the galleys.

The Dutch Consul, Mr. G. Hamel Bruinink interfered on behalf of the ministers (better martyrs for the sake of the Reformed Faith) at the various courthouses and requested important government people from various countries to put pressure on the judges. On February 11, 1676, Mr. de Ruyter, with his small fleet, entered the harbour of Naples and shot the steeple off the Cathedral. He invited important priests and notables of the city on his ship for heavy negotiations and took them prisoner

until they handed over 26 pastors from the galleys and five (5) which were in prison.

It is very interesting to read about this part of history. When Mr. de Ruyter was thanked by the representatives of the pastors who received their freedom he stated: "Do not thank me. I am only a tool in the hand of the God which you and I serve; He is your Liberator, together we may thank and praise Him for what He has done."

Sincerely yours, Mr. P. Speelman,
Speelman's Bookhouse Ltd.
Rexdale, Ontario, Canada

A LOOK AT BOOKS

SHEPHERDING GOD'S FLOCK: I — THE PASTORAL LIFE by Jay E. Adams. Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1974. 156 pages, paperback. \$3.75. Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien, pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa.

Here is a very practical and valuable book for students and pastors alike. While it is essential to know the Biblical principles for pastoral work — and these are here — it is necessary to know the nitty-gritty of it, too. This is also here. Too often we emphasize the former at the expense of the latter. There is no student who, though he hopefully possesses common sense, will be able to meet all the varied mountains of the pastor's life with confidence and the understanding of how to do it. Not even the seasoned minister has all the answers. We can *always* learn. Dr. Adams primes the pump; he sets the mind working.

He deals with the personal needs of the minister — an area we sometimes pass by because we feel pressed by others' needs. He also deals with approaching those calls to new congregations. It must be remembered, of course, that he speaks as a Presbyterian. Finally, he writes about that part of the work called "calling." He gives some helpful insights and suggestions.

No reader will nod a yes to every suggestion. Yet, these are valuable to get us thinking. I had one big problem as I read: how many hours is a minister supposed to have in a day and how many days in a week? While all his suggestions are perhaps very basic, there is a limit to time. Somewhere along the line there are societies to lead and catechism classes to teach as well as two or more sermons to prepare. Perhaps in a small congregation made up of

younger families there would be more opportunity for this varied labor which he suggests. But when the congregation numbers 700-1100 members things *must* be different.

Anxiously I await other promised books in this series. Thankfully, at last there is an attempt at making study books available for teaching pastoral work not only to students but to those of us ministers who have fallen into some self-made ruts.

THE NEW TESTAMENT: AN INTRODUCTION TO ITS LITERATURE AND HISTORY, by J. Gresham Machen and edited by W. John Cook. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust. 1976. 386 pages. \$8.95. Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien, pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa.

This is not a reprint, but a first-printing. We should be grateful to the Trust and editor Cook for making available what was heretofore available only in some dust-covered periodicals published by the Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath School Work in Machen's day.

In fifty-two chapters the reader and the student are given an overview of the New Testament. After a number of chapters which give the necessary background to the New Testament, the history of the church as it is outlined in *The Book of Acts* is discussed. Following this each of the New Testament books is introduced as to author, date of writing, destination and content. Characteristic of Machen's writings is the readiness to tackle the problems connected with the books of the New Testament, while at the same time practical points are not overlooked. The last twelve chapters deal with the theology and practice of the New Testament Church.

Today this book has several uses. It is written simply enough so that the man in the pew can use it to learn more about the New Testament. In this day of Biblical illiteracy it will open a new understanding of Scripture for him. Societies willing to study would find it a helpful guide — and a profitable one, too — for several seasons' work. Teachers of Biblical introduction in our schools could also use it for a text. Our advanced high school students would be greatly benefited by its use.

All in all, this is a valuable volume!

THE PAULINE ESCHATOLOGY by Geerhardus Vos. Foreword by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1979. 374 pages, paper. \$7.95. Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien, pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa.

Once again this helpful exegetical volume has been reissued, this time with the addition of an eight page textual index — an excellent addition. The name Geerhardus Vos needs no introduction. The quality of his work makes him almost peerless. F. F. Bruce has called this volume "a rare exegetical feast." He is correct.

In a day when we are getting a barrage of speculative volumes on eschatology, Vos' volume offers a fine study of a portion of the New Testament teaching to counteract them. He wrote about the interaction between eschatology (doctrine of the last

things) and soteriology (the doctrine of salvation). He continues by discussing the precursors of the Lord's return, the Man of Sin, the resurrection, chiliasm, the Judgment and our eternal state. Added is an appendix called "Eschatology of the Psalter."

Anyone studying or preaching on last things would be well served by studying this work by Vos, written from an A-millennial viewpoint.

THE GREAT WORKS OF CHRIST IN AMERICA (or, **MAGNALIA CHRISTI AMERICANA**) by Cotton Mather. Edin-burgh: The Banner of Truth Trust. 1979. 2 vols, xli + 626, 682 pages. \$29.95 the set. Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien, pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa.

Cotton Mather (1663-1729) was a third generation American Puritan and pastor of the well-known North Church in Boston. His intent was to provide in seven books the ecclesiastical history of New England from 1620 to 1698. Each of the books provides another insight into New England history. Book I tells of the planting and progress of the colony. Books II and III record the lives of governors and ministers of the colony. Book IV contains the account of the beginning of Harvard College along with lives of its important graduates. Book V is particularly about the theological and practical decisions of New England. Book VI tells of God's providential care toward New England, as well as the triumph of God's grace there. Book VII recounts "the wars of the Lord" or the struggles which faced the New England churches, such as antinomianism and the Indian War.

While the writer does not follow the pattern of modern historical writers, his work cannot be passed by as insignificant. It is a rich treasury of information about the founding of New England and it reflects the ideas and concerns of the founding fathers. In it is a wealth of insights, both historical and spiritual.

It is good that the publishers have made these volumes, so long out-of-print, available once again in such a fine format.

THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST: AN EXPOSITION OF EPHESIANS 3:1 TO 21 by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1979. 315 pages. \$9.95. Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien, minister of the First Christian Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa.

No one can read the works of this well-known minister-author without sensing that he knows the Lord and the Lord's Word. His works ring with true piety. Of course, there are times when there will be disagreement with what he forthrightly affirms. Yet, this should not keep us from finding the precious gems of Christian truth scattered liberally on every page.

This volume presenting expositions in Ephesians is no different. Expertly he helps the reader see the many facets of God's truth found in the third chapter of Ephesians. Perhaps we can best characterize his sermonizing method — these were preached in London's Westminster Chapel — as a combination of exegetical and topical. You never leave a text without having seen its many implications, as well as its literal meaning.

In a day when good preaching is hard to come by across the world, this volume could serve to fill the gap for those starving for the Word.

SACRED RHETORIC, or A COURSE OF LECTURES ON PREACHING, by Robert L. Dabney. Banner of Truth, Edin-burgh, 1979. 361 pages. \$10.95. Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien, pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa.

After so many years characterized by the demise of good preaching, a recent news magazine predicted a great future for it. But how many will really know what it is to preach since many seminaries have been emphasizing counseling and related subjects at the expense of preaching? Here is a book that can go a long way in helping us recapture the art of good preaching. It is not like so many of the "practical books" available today. It shows us preaching as it has been viewed historically throughout the history of the Church. While Dabney, a Southern Presbyterian theologian of the nineteenth century, writes many necessary and practical comments about the text, the development of the sermon, the preacher's style and gestures, and many more important aspects of sermonizing and delivery, he is eminently spiritual, but not in a sticky or super-pious way. Again and again he emphasizes the exalted importance of preaching and the importance of honesty on the preacher's part. The last chapter on the offering of public prayer is a gem.

Thanks, Banner of Truth, for making this century-old gem available again.

MATERIAL AVAILABLE FROM REFORMED FELLOWSHIP

Catechism Books

| | |
|--|--------|
| Learning to Know the Lord by P. Y. De Jong . . . | \$1.25 |
| Introduction to the Compendium by P. Y. De Jong (revised) | 1.25 |
| First Book of Christian Doctrine by Hylkema & Tuuk | 1.45 |

Bible Outlines

| | |
|--|------|
| Daniel by John Piersma | 3.00 |
| Sermon on the Mount by Henry Vander Kam | 3.00 |
| Amos by Henry Vander Kam | 2.50 |
| Signs of the Times by Henry Vander Kam | 2.00 |
| I Timothy by Henry Vander Kam | 3.00 |
| II Timothy/Titus by Henry Vander Kam | 3.00 |
| I Peter by Henry Vander Kam | 3.00 |
| I John by Henry Vander Kam | 3.00 |

| | |
|---|----------|
| The Christian Reformed Church by P. Y. De Jong | 1.50 |
| A Decade of Unrest by Paul Ingeneri | 1.50 |
| Crisis in the Reformed Churches, by P. Y. De Jong. A hard-cover collection of essays on the Synod of Dordt by De Jong, Praamsma, Kistemaker, Klooster, Woudstra, Palmer, Murray, Runia, and Van Til — bargain at | 2.00 |
| Twelve Theses on Reprobation by Edwin Palmer | 1.50 |
| Is this the Bride Christ Bought? by Laurie Vanden Heuvel and Phooey on the Church Order by Edwin Palmer | .50 |
| Some Questions and Answers about the AACS by Peter De Jong | .40 |
| Our Testimony each | .25 |
| | 5/\$1.00 |
| Creation According to God's Word by John C. Whitcomb | .25 |

Order from

REFORMED FELLOWSHIP 4855 Starr St., S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49506

REFORMED FELLOWSHIP, INC.
4855 Starr St., S.E.
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN 49506

Gordon Ritsema
3016 Shanandale Dr.
Silver Springs, Maryland 20904

SECOND CLASS
POSTAGE PAID AT
GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.

ANNUAL MEETING

OF **REFORMED
FELLOWSHIP, INC.**

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1, 1981

AT

Kelloggsville Christian Reformed Church

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

2:00 P.M. BUSINESS MEETING

Speaker: JOHN VANDER PLOEG, JR. of Kalamazoo, MI

Topic: "A Layman Reflects On Synod"

6:30 P.M. BANQUET (Punch Bowl at 6:00)

Kelloggsville Christian School, 624 52nd St., S.E.

Order your reservation for Banquet no later than

September 15, 1981, by writing to:

REFORMED FELLOWSHIP

4855 Starr St., S.E.

Grand Rapids, Mich. 49506

8:00 P.M. Speaker: REV. NELSON KLOOSTERMAN, pastor of

Immanuel CRC Sheldon, Iowa

Topic: "A New Seminary: Its Need and Wisdom"

**EVERYONE
INVITED**