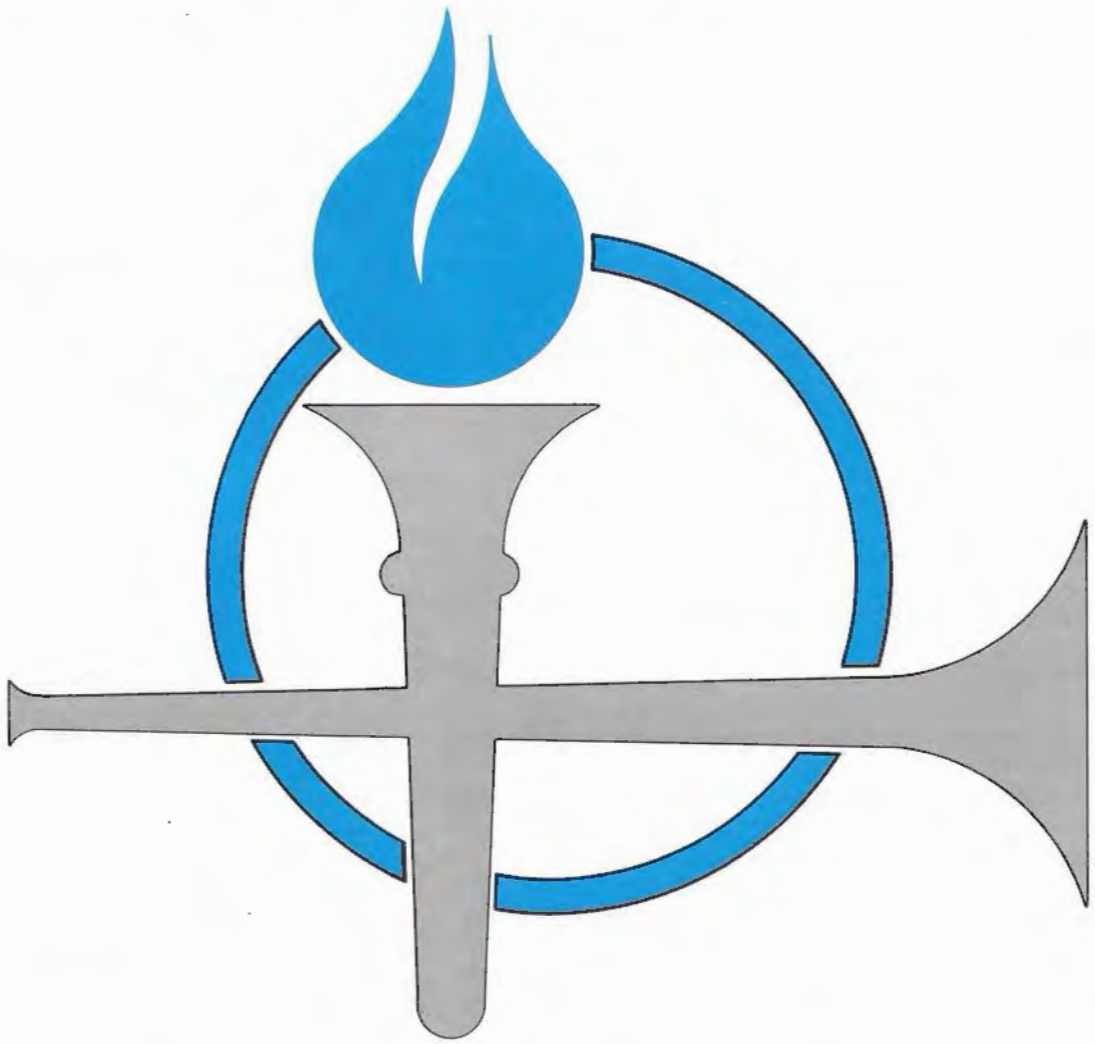
THE OUTLOOK

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

SEPTEMBER 1984



THE TIV SEMINARY
AGENDA FOR C.R. CONSERVATIVES
FIGHT OR SWITCH

Growing Christians

John Blankespoor

"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ" (II Peter 3:18).

What is healthy grows. These words I often heard while growing up on a farm. It is a basic principle in all of creation, true in the animal world, plant world and also in man's experience. Babies are expected to grow. That's natural. It is also true when sinners become Christians. At first we are babes in Christ. But we must not remain babies. We must grow. What is healthy will grow. This concept of spiritual growth we often find in the Scriptures. In Psalm 84 the Christian as pilgrim is described as going from strength to strength until he reaches Zion. Paul speaks of Christians being rooted in Christ and built up in Him, and of growing up in Him in all things. It is not enough to know that we are born again, important as that is. As new-born babes we must grow up in Him in all things. In our circles we believe that most Christians were born again when they were young, perhaps very young. Presumably then, we will have grown a lot when and if we get to be 80 years old. Even at 60 or 70 we must have grown much since we were teenagers. Christians should never quit growing, but keep on growing in the Lord. This implies that when we have reached the far side of life we don't act like "kids" anymore. As we become mature Christians we also can eat "meat"—a heavier diet, while people who still are spiritual babes can use only "milk."

We properly ask ourselves the personal question: How much have I grown in the Lord since I became a Christian? Or, if you have been an adult for some time, How much have I grown since I was young? Am I still growing? Am I *trying* to grow?

We find in these words of Peter a comforting thought, but also a sobering admonition—*comforting* because when we grow we have more of the Spirit with His fruits of faith, joy, love, confidence, peace, comfort, hope and contentment; *sobering* because, when we realize how little most people grow, we are strongly admonished to grow.

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In what way must we grow? This text says that we must grow "in the grace and knowledge of Christ." This means that we increasingly become aware of the fact that salvation is by *grace* alone, and that God therefore deserves all the glory. To grow in the *knowledge* of Christ means that we learn to know Him more experientially. "Knowing" involves a fellowship of love. Here it means that we increase in the love of Christ, so that He constantly becomes more dear to us. This implies that we increasingly obey His commandments and live by His Word.

I believe that this question, In what way we should grow in Christ, can best be answered with the teachings of the three parts of the Heidelberg Catechism.

To grow spiritually first of all means that we grow in the knowledge of our sins, knowledge that we in ourselves are hopelessly and helplessly lost sinners. Not only that we *were* that way, but in ourselves are still that way. At 50 we should know this more experientially than at 20. A good indicator of Christian growth is that our sins trouble us more, that we feel with Paul, "What I would I do not, but what I hate I do" (Romans 7). People who don't often feel this are not growing much in the Lord. With David, when we look back upon our youth, we say, "O God remember not the sins of my youth" (Psalm 25). Growing in Christ means that we daily confess our sins from the *heart*. I believe that this is a primary Biblical indicator of Christian growth.

The second indicator of growth is an increasing awareness of the fact that we are saved only by the grace of God—that the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ are our only hope. "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling." The Scriptures speak much the faithfulness of God to us as "failing" Christians.

The words, "His mercies are new every morning" become more meaningful to us. Thus the doctrines of the Bible, of the total depravity of our sinful nature and that we are saved only by grace, become living realities to us. We learn to prize the great promises of God. We know that when we have to cross the Jordan of death, His promises will not fail us. As I look back upon my ministry of many years I remember some giants of faith in different churches. What confidence some of them had in the Word of God and in His faithfulness! Growing in faith means also for us and all of His people that we grow in confidence. Young people may look to their parents and grandparents for more faith and trust than what they have. We all need to increase in faith, comfort, trust, peace and joy in the Lord.

The third part of the Catechism speaks of gratitude to God

for our salvation, as the "fruit" of faith, a "fruit of the Spirit." It refers to our Christian living as outlined in Scripture. It is not enough to know that we are saved or that we once have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior. The "fruits" must also be evident.

Negatively, this implies that growing children of God care less for the world and all it has to offer. There is to be less love for material things and less love for self.

Growing in Christ means that we fight against the sins of love for the world, the love of money and the love of self. Growing Christians are struggling Christians and a living part of the militant church.

Positively, growing in Christ means that we grow in our love for the Lord, His Word and His church and our neighbor. This implies that we also have converted pocketbooks. This implies too that we become more humble and modest before God and men. Perhaps the best way to put it is that we become Christ-like. How amazing it is, that we as saved sinners are called to become saints and live like the Lord did! The Scripture shows also that this makes us missionaries. If the love of the Lord increases in our hearts as we grow in years, we must show this in some way, also in our testimony to the world. What is healthy grows.

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In all these ways the church of Christ has often failed in the past and still fails. There is a prevailing lethargy in the life of God's people. Many are satisfied, contented, sitting in "the comfortable pew." We confess the name of Christ, are members of the church, pay the budget, but are really absorbed in the things of the world and in many respects are little different from many people who don't know the Lord. There is little interest in spiritual things. Amos warned against this dreadful danger when he said, "Woe to those who are at ease in Zion." If a young couple had a baby who did not grow at all for a whole year, wouldn't they be worried and seek the best medical help? The church of today, and all of us, ought to be more concerned about our spiritual growth . . . or lack of it.

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Finally, we ask how we can grow in Christ. Can we make ourselves grow? We can do this no more than we can do this with our bodies. We can grow physically only by using the means given, especially good food. The Lord has made us to use these means. Spiritual growth is possible only by use of the Word, the infallible Word of God (1 Peter 2:2). How much all of us need that Word, daily as well as on Sunday in church. In the Word and in prayer we are given means of growing in Christ.

To what end will this bring us? Even if we have tried to grow in Christ and are mature Christians when we come to the end of the way, we will have to confess that we have only a small beginning of true obedience. But to imperfect children, the Lord gives the assurance that what He has begun in us He will finish in the day of Christ. The Lord's faithfulness will complete it all in that final day. And the growth which we experienced in all of our lives will seem insignificantly small in comparison with the change that will occur at that time, in the twinkling of an eye, by the miraculous power of the risen, glorified Christ. What a comfort this is for the living, growing, struggling child of God. ●

THE OUTLOOK

(USPS 633-980)

Published Monthly July-August Issue Combined

"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) 698-6267.

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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 $11.50 per year, $23.00 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.

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Contents

September 1984 Volume XXXVI No. 7

The Perseverance of the Saints

Rev. Cornelis Pronk

Another fundamental doctrine of the Reformed faith is the perseverance of the saints. Briefly stated, this doctrine teaches that all who are chosen by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and renewed by the Holy Spirit, cannot fall from grace but will reach heaven.

All who are united to Christ by the bond of true, saving faith are eternally secure in Him. Nothing can separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is not to say, however, that all who profess faith in Christ will be saved. The saints who persevere until the end, not the nominal believer, will be saved. There are many who first profess to believe in Christ and who later fall away. Yet, they do not fall from grace, for they never were in a state of grace. As John says in his First Epistle, chapter 2:19, *They went out from us, but they were not of us, for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us.*

Only the saints persevere. What actually is a saint? We often have wrong ideas about this. We say of a man or woman, he or she is a saint. We mean by that a particularly pious or holy person. But the apostle Paul did not use the term saint in such a restricted sense. Many of his epistles begin like this: *to the saints in Rome, to the saints in Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi,* and so on. By using this term, Paul did not imply that all these people were perfectly holy persons. Not at all! If you read the two epistles to the Corinthians for example, you will find out that some of those saints were not behaving themselves very saintly at all.

According to Scripture, the word saint refers to a regenerated person, that is someone who is born again. Going to church alone does not make a saint. Becoming a member of the visible church won't do it either. Calling yourself a saint does not mean you are one. No, only if you are born again, you are, in the true sense of the word, a saint. You have been regenerated; God has worked a miracle in your heart. He has made you to be a new creature in Christ Jesus.

We now turn to the term perseverance. According to the dictionary, "to persevere" means to go on resolutely in spite of opposition. That is a fairly good definition of the Christian life—To go on resolutely in spite of opposition. The saint, in spite of the opposition of his own sinful nature, the devil, and the world, resolutely goes on; on in the life, on in the faith, on in the service of God. This is what is meant by the perseverance of the saints.

Let us understand clearly, however that such persevering is not something for which the saint can take credit. It is all God's work. In His high priestly prayer, recorded in John 17, the Lord Jesus prayed:

> *Holy Father, keep through* (or in) *thine own name those whom thou hast given me. . . While I was with them in the world, I kept them in my name. . . and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition: that the scripture might be fulfilled. (vs. 11-12)*

In this prayer we learn three important truths. First, God has given to Christ a certain number of people. These are the elect, sometimes referred to by Jesus as His sheep. Second, Jesus reports here that none of these has perished and that none shall ever perish. In John, chapter 10, we find Christ saying the same thing. In speaking of His sheep, He says

> *I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all: and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand (vs. 28-30).*

Third, Jesus says that they have not perished because He has kept, or literally guarded, them. Satan has tried to snatch them from His hand, and continues to try this all through

the centuries. But the devil cannot succeed, because the Father Who is greater than all will not allow this to happen.

Do you hear this? God is greater than all. That means greater than my sinful nature, greater than the world and all its temptations, yes, greater than Satan and all his demons. That is why no one can or shall snatch yon out of God's hand, saints of the Lord! Your perseverance is due only to the sovereign power of Almighty God.

There are many who teach that the saint has to keep himself on the way, and that it is by his own efforts that he will reach heaven. But we believe with the apostle to the Hebrews (12:2), that Christ is not only the author, but also the finisher or perfecter of our faith. Yes, with the Psalmist of 138 we rejoice that the work he has in us begun, shall by his grace be fully done.

Robert L. Dabney, the great Presbyterian theologian of the southern United States in the nineteenth century, has put it this way:

> *The sovereign and unmerited love of God is the cause of the believer's effectual calling. Now as the cause is unchangeable, the effect is also unchangeable. That effect is, the constant communication of grace to the believer in whom God had begun a good work.*

When the Lord first began that saving work in the heart of the sinner, He was not motivated by anything attractive in him. He knew that the sinner was totally depraved, an enemy of grace. Therefore any subsequent sinfulness in the backsliding saint could not be a new motive for God to withdraw His grace. God knows what to expect. He is not surprised when he sees His people falling into sin. That does not mean that He condones it! On the contrary, He chastises His people for their sins by temporarily withdrawing His Holy Spirit. But as Dabney says: *if God has not intended from the first to bear with it, and to forgive it in Christ, he would not have called the sinner by His grace at first.*

To say it in other words, the causes for which God determined to bestow His electing love on the sinner are wholly in God, and not at all in the believer; and hence, nothing in the believer's heart or conduct can finally change that loving purpose. Martin Luther says:

> *God's decree of predestination is firm and certain; and the necessity resulting from it is, in like manner, immovable, and cannot but take place. For we ourselves are so feeble, that if the matter were left in our hands, very few, or rather none, would be saved; but Satan would overcome us all.*

From this we learn that Christians do fall into sin at times. Indeed, it is a common occurrence. Even the best of men backslide temporarily. As long as the saints are in this world, their state is one of continuous warfare. They often lose the battle. Yet, they are never completely defeated. It may seem for a time that there is no faith left at all, yet, where there is a true work of the Holy Spirit, there can be no final falling away.

When the backslider comes to himself, he confesses his sins and asks forgiveness, which is then freely granted. Everyone of God's elect is like the prodigal son in this respect, that for a while he is deluded by the world and led astray by his sinful lusts and passions. He tries to feed on the husks, but they do not satisfy. Sooner or later he will cry out: *I will arise and go to my Father, and will say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee.* And he meets with the same wonderful reception: tokens of unchanging love and a Father's voice that melts the backslider's heart. *This my son was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.*

The Bible is full of examples to show that God forgives His backslidden saints. David's sin of adultery and murder, and Peter's denial of His Master have been recorded to illustrate that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.

But be careful not to pervert this wonderful truth. Don't say, all is well with my sonl, if your life is not in harmony with God's law. Don't comfort yourself by saying: I may live in sin and still be saved in the end. There is something more important in the life of David than adultery, and that was his repentance. There was something more important in Peter's life than his denial of Christ, and that was his bitter weeping.

How do we know that both David and Peter were true saints? Because we not only catch them in the act of sinning, but we also find them on their knees repenting. When we hear David crying: *against thee, thee only, have I sinned,* and Peter weeping bitterly, when the Saviour, his Saviour, looks him straight in the eye—then we know that they are children of God, and not before. For here we have the mark of a true saint. He may fall into sin many times, but he cannot live in it; he cannot be happy in his sin. He will come back to the Lord with tears, confessing his sins and pleading on His mercy.

Are you a saint? A persevering saint? How can I know, you ask? Have you ever wept for your sin? Have you ever cried for mercy? Are you striving, or as Jesus literally says, "agonizing," to enter in at the narrow gate? That is the gate of repentance, self-denial and crucifixion of the flesh.

This is what it means to be a persevering saint, fighting the good fight of faith, running the race that is set before us. Yet, in such a way, that we are wholly dependent on the Lord for strength to fight and to run.

He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Therefore we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

> *I've found a friend, oh such a friend! He loved me ere I knew Him;*
> *He drew me with the cords of love, and thus He bound me to Him.*
> *And round my heart still closely twine those ties which nought can sever,*
> *For I am His, and He is mine, forever and forever.*
>
> *I've found a friend, oh such a friend! He bled, He died to save me;*
> *And not alone the gift of love, but His own self He gave me.*
> *Nought that I have I call my own, I hold it for the Giver:*
> *My heart, my strength, my life, my all are His, and His forever.*
>
> *I've found a friend, oh such a friend! So kind and true and tender;*
> *So wise a counsellor and guide, so mighty a defender!*
> *From Him Who loves me now so well, what power my soul can sever?*
> *Shall life or death, or earth or hell?*
> *No, I am His forever!* ●

Rev. Cornelis Pronk is the pastor of the Free Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan. This is one of a series of radio broadcasts in January and February of 1983 on the Five Points of Calvinism. Copies of the whole series may be obtained from The Banner of Truth Radio Broadcast, 950 Ball Ave. N.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49503.

TOWARD A Biblically Reformed Church

Peter De Jong

Decisions of the latest Christian Reformed Synod have startled many people. They make it plainer than ever that we who by the grace of God want to hold and maintain the Biblical and therefore Reformed Faith will have to do much more than try to expose increasing errors of faith and life. We will have to redouble our efforts to state positively (as well as negatively) what the Biblical Faith is and requires. At a National Presbyterian and Reformed Fellowship meeting in Atlanta before the new Conservative denomination (PCA) developed, another attendant remarked that they sought to be a Reformed church, but that they had gotten so far away from being one that they hardly knew where to begin. The plight of our denomination is becoming surprisingly similar. When even a synod majority needs special study committees to help them decide such elementary questions as whether Christians should pay taxes or whether little children should take the Lord's Supper, we obviously have to begin trying to reteach the Biblical faith and life from the ground up.

The Issue Isn't Women's Rights But The Bible's Authority

Much more significant than the fact that a Liberal minority have succeeded in driving through the synod the church order change* required to legalize admitting women as deacons into their governing consistories is the fact that in getting that decision they have succeeded in setting aside the Bible as our authoritative guide to church practice. The decision was made at the cost of ignoring, contradicting and sometimes deliberately perverting the Bible's plain teaching. Any listener to the debates must have been struck by the fact that conservative opposition usually appealed to the Scriptures while the liberal promoters usually did not even attempt to do so.

The decisions of the last synod have, no doubt, startled many people. They become much less mystifying if one considers the fact that developments in the church have long been moving in the direction of such an anti-Biblical decision. What we are seeing in 1984 is only a most recent and most flagrant example of dismissing the Bible's authority as irrelevant to our church life.

That our churches are now officially doing this could hardly be made more obvious than it was by the editor of their church paper, *The Banner* in his January 23 propaganda issue. One of the key Bible passages that has often appeared in the discussion is that found in I Timothy 2, the apostle's outline of the way the Lord would have His church organized around its special offices, ending with the explanation (3:14, 15) "I am writing you these instructions so that . . . you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth." Because the passage contains the prohibition, "I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man" (2:12), the editor frankly stated, "There is no doubt in my mind that Paul was prescribing a restricted role to women in the service of worship when he wrote. . . . 1 Tim. 2:12. "Paul could appeal to what was in his day a common moral judgment. . . . But when such an appeal could no longer be made, the special apostolic prescription is also removed." When one can so casually dismiss the authoritative ruling of God's Word, as first the editor and now the synod (although with certain ambiguities) have done, can the church which is officially doing the dismissing still consider itself to be "the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth"? Or is it, according to its own confessed and generally forgotten definition (Belgic Confession Article 29) becoming "the false church" which "ascribes more power and authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit itself to the yoke of Christ"? That is the question which the synod decisions compel us to face.

An Honest Objection: All Christians Are Prophets!

At this point we can anticipate and need to face an honest objection. The apostle Peter on Pentecost (Acts 2:16ff.) explained, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. . . . Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days and they will prophesy.' " Doesn't this mean that since the Holy Spirit's outpouring on Pentecost, all believers, men and women alike, are called and should be permitted to exercise whatever "gifts" the Holy Spirit has given them in all church offices including that of "preaching"? This is perhaps the most plausible and has become the common argument to which advocates of the present movement appeal.

In order to try to understand and evaluate it we need to quickly review the Bible's doctrine about mankind ("Anthropology," if you like the technical term). The Bible teaches that man (including both men and women) was created in the image of God to know, love and serve Him as His prophet, priest and king. After the fall into sin, mankind lost the ability to properly know, love and serve God. To save and restore him God promised and sent His Son, the Christ (meaning "annointed" to, "our chief Prophet", "our only High Priest" and "our eternal King" (*H. Catechism* XII). Christ, in saving us restores us to this believer's office of prophet, priest and king (*Catechism* question and answer 32; compare Ephesians 4:24, Colossians 3:10). This restoration to office, the office of the believing Christian, applies to all Christians, both men and women, as the scriptures (Acts 2; compare Galatians 3:28, "There is neither . . . male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus") and the creed, (the Catechism, "Why are you called a Christian? Because I am a member of Christ by faith and thus a partaker in His anointing. . . .") make plain.

The Neglected Office

This office of the believing Christian, which is the basic office in the Christian church, was through over a millennium of Roman Catholic Church development, increasingly obscured and almost disappeared from sight, as the church came to be thought of as primarily the clergy. A common representation portrayed the church as a ship of which the clergy were the crew; members were merely passengers (who went along for the ride and paid the fare). In the Protestant Reformation there was a return to the Bible's teaching about the calling and office of the believer. Think of Martin Luther's appeal to the priesthood of believers to challenge the rule of the clergy and pope. Soon, however, that office of the believer, misused to justify a peasant revolution, was obscured also in Protestantism, so that the church again came to be regarded as primarily the special offices. A 1965 introductory catechism book, *Teach Me Thy Way,* written by Snapper and Spykman, and issued by the C.R. Board of Publications, in its chapter dealing with church offices (23), devoted most of 4 pages and 4 illustrations to the pastor, the big officer, 9 lines and 1 illustration to his assistants, the elders, and about the same amount to the deacons, finally admonishing the children to love, respect and pray for these important people who are "doing Jesus' work!" It is ironic that this unconscious caricature of the church, so like that of Roman Catholicism, even concludes with a quotation of Ephesians 4:11, 12a "and he gave some to be . . . pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints." One would never suspect that that quotation, terminated so abrubtly, goes on in the Bible (vv. 12-16) to describe the purpose of all of this structure of special offices, to prepare all of the believers to fulfil their varied calling and office, the great office of serving Christ as Christians in the world!

The Present Reaction

The traditional and general neglect of this office of the believer, and concentration of church attention on special offices has especially in our time produced a reaction into the opposite direction from this erroneous tradition. Now the office of the believer, instead of being overlooked is coming to be regarded by many as the only office, and used as a ground for denying the proper existence of any other offices and especially, of denying the existence of any authority in them or in the church!

The 1972 and 1973 Caricatures of the Church

A prime example of and an especially mischievous contributor to this kind of reaction is found in the long report of a synod committee on Ecclesiastical Office and Ordination presented in 1972 and its even longer edition in 1973. It carried this reaction to the length of claiming that the only authority of offices in the church is that of service as even Christ's authority is characterized by only "the authority of the supreme servant" (*Acts* 1973, p. 707)! (His "iron" rule of the nations of Ps. 2:8,9; Rev. 12:5 is ignored.) The 1973 Synod criticized the neglect of "authority" in the committee's first report and instructed it to correct that deficiency. The committee, instead of complying, reported the next year with 20 more pages of argument for its notion that the only authority was service. The 1973 Synod then tried to patch up the glaring holes in this ostensibly Biblical study by adding some statements of its own regarding the Bible's teaching about authority, rule and obedience. (It is worth noticing that two of the authors of these 1972 and 1973 reports were Drs. Anthony A. Hoekema and Willis P. De Boer who, as the only two representatives of the more recent study committee at the 1984 synod, bear a good deal of responsibility for this synod's actions on their report.)

The Bible's Order or Our Disorder?

Is it not true that the Bible does not give us a complete church order with detailed rules regarding church life and worship? Indeed, it doesn't! But it does give us inspired instructions, as we have seen, about "how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:14,15). These include the requirements for holding the special church offices of elder and deacon. The Reformation was at this point also, a return to believing obedience to the Word of God. Our Church Order is nothing but a conscientious effort to return the church to obeying God's Word with respect to its (1) Offices, (2) Assemblies, (3) Its Task and Activities, and (4) Its Admonition and Discipline. In establishing this order our churches were following the lead of John Calvin who in his lifelong effort to help the church find its way back to the clear teaching of God's Word, devoted the last of the four books of his Institutes to the subject of "the Means of Grace: The Holy Catholic Church."

This whole mass of Biblical teachings, not only regarding eligibility for office, but regarding virtually all church life and activity we are seeing more and more cynically brushed aside as out of date. In 1973 the Synod, following the shabby anti-authority report already mentioned, decided that "the Bible leaves room for the church to adapt or modify its particular ministries in order to carry out effectively its service to Christ and for Christ in all circumstances" (*Acts* 1973, p. 64; applied to evangelists, *Acts* 1976, p. 62). Despite its pious sound, this simply means that the church officially assumed the right to multiply or alter the number and functions of offices as it might see fit! That is what it has more and more proceeded to do, if "necessary," in defiance of Scripture, Creed or Church Order! This is the easy route by way of which we have more and more rapidly come to leave Biblical and therefore Reformation teachings about church offices, assemblies, the churches' proper task and

activities and its discipline far behind. In our May *Outlook* Rev. Henry Vander Kam informed us that in our churches' seminary, of whose Board he used to be president, the Biblical teaching about the church, "Ecclesiology, has not been taught... in the department of Dogmatics for the last 15 years!" How much more evidence do we need before we are compelled to acknowledge that our denomination is fast becoming one which "ascribes more power and authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit itself to the yoke of Christ" (Belgic Confession Article 29 on "the false church")?

All reports on our recent synod call attention to the radical division apparent in its membership and the contradictory character of some of its decisions especially on this matter. A Liberal minority by stacking committees and parlimentary maneuvering overrode the convictions of a large majority of our church members. Our Lord has committed us to pray, work and fight for a church faithful to His Word in confession, order and practice. That means that our churches and members will have to do everything they can to reverse the wrong course our denomination is taking. If that cannot be reversed, we will be compelled, like our forefathers and many contemporaries, to work for such a church outside of the unfaithful denominations. ●

** It ought not to be overlooked that legalizing the opening of offices to women requires not only a change in the Church Order, but also a change in the creed, the (Belgic) Confession of Faith. Notice Article XXX, "when faithful men are chosen, according to the rule prescribed by St. Paul in his epistle to Timothy." Notice also the "himself," "him" and "he" in Article XXXI. Will this too be revised, or will the denomination further demonstrate its indifference to its creed by ignoring this point. This might serve as grounds for protest.*

Candidacy and Ordination

Timothy Monsma

(In addition to teaching duties, Dr. Monsma is also serving this year as Administrative Dean of Mid-America Reformed Seminary at Orange City, Iowa.)

A Classic Prerogative

How is a qualified theological student declared a candidate for the ministry, ready for calling by the churches? In the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, one is under the care of the classis from which he comes during his seminary years. This classis (his home classis) examines him and declares him eligible for call from the churches of the denomination. In the Presbyterian Churches of this country, one is monitored by his home presbytery during his seminary years, and his home presbytery also examines him and declares him a candidate. In the Reformed Church of America, this preparatory examination to declare a person a candidate is

also done by classis. In every case the final examination (in distinction from the initial exam) is given by the classis or presbytery which will ordain the candidate into the ministry.

The Christian Reformed Church Order says, "A major assembly shall deal only with those matters which concern its churches in common or which could not be finished in the minor assemblies" (Article 28). Other Reformed Churches are able to "finish" the matter of declaring candidates in their minor assemblies (classes). This establishes the fact that it can be done in Reformed communions. While it might be argued that declaring a candidate is something that concerns all C.R.C. churches, this is not strictly true, for only those churches with vacancies are concerned with candidates and their availability. Furthermore, on principle grounds, why should Synod attempt to do that which obviously can be done at the classical level? By taking the matter of candidates into its own hands, Synod robs the classes of that which is rightfully theirs and goes contrary at least to the spirit of the Church Order in Article 28.

Relegated to a Synod's Committee

To compound the problem, the C.R.C. Synod has found the examination of candidates too burdensome to handle. She has therefore placed this task into the hands of one of her "committees," in this case the Calvin Board of Trustees (This is the term used to describe the Calvin Board in the *Acts of Synod,* 1977, p. 128).

Reformed church government recognizes three legitimate ecclesiastical gatherings: the consistory, classis, and synod (four if particular synods are added). These bodies appoint committees to assist them in their work but the committees cannot be identified with the bodies that appointed them. For example, a committee cannot admit people to communion, bar them from communion, administer sacraments, call ministers, etc. This is the task of the local congregation acting through its consistory. There are also ecclesiastical functions reserved for classes or synods that they cannot delegate to committees. For example, only a classis can depose a minister or admit congregations into its fellowship. Only Synod can establish fraternal relations with other denominations. Committees cannot do such things.

Why then do we commit the very important work of examining prospective candidates to a "committee," which is not an ecclesiastical body?

A Highly Partisan Body

In the case of this "committee," the Calvin Board of Trustees, there is an added difficulty. This "committee" has a vested interest in defending the professors and graduates of a particular school: Calvin College and Seminary. It spends most of its working hours supervising the work of that school as well as appointing those who teach there. It and the school enjoy a generally cozy relationship. If the "committee" should find any candidate to be defective, this would reflect poorly on the professors who taught this student, and this in turn would reflect poorly on the "committee" that appointed these professors to teach.

To summarize the argument so far, Synod has taken the work of giving the initial exam of potential candidates away from the classes and put this work into the hands of a "committee" of Synod. But the objectivity of this "committee" is cast into doubt because this "committee" spends most of its time maintaining the school whose graduates it now examines. In 1981 Mr. Clayton Libolt was examined by this "committee" and found to be ready for candidacy. But Synod thought otherwise. Is it possible that Synod's evaluation was more objective than that of her "committee"? This writer believes it was.

An Antiquated, Illogical Tradition

How did the Christian Reformed Church arrive at the custom she now follows? The C.R.C. of the nineteenth century had its roots in the *Afscheiding* (Separation) of 1834 in the Netherlands. The *Afscheiding* people in the Netherlands had founded a seminary at Kampen. They allowed the Board of this seminary to examine the graduates and also declare them candidates for the ministry. This practice was terminated in the Netherlands in 1892 in order that candidates both from the Free University and from Kampen might be treated equally in the newly formed *Gereformeerde Kerken* of the Netherlands. The early American immigrants simply copied the practice of the *Afscheiding* Churches in the Netherlands, and their descendants have continued to do it long after the practice was abandoned in the Netherlands. The C.R. Synod examined candidates directly from 1938 to 1961 (except for the war years), and then reverted to examination by the Calvin Board once again.

A Desirable Correction

Are we justified in continuing a practice that may have seemed wise when the Church was small, but is hardly appropriate for a Church of our size and diversity? I think not. In saying this I am not criticizing Calvin Seminary or her Board, but the Synods that have seen fit to give the Calvin Board this added responsibility. Let Synod give the task of conducting the exam for candidacy back to the home classis of every student. We still have a remnant of classical interest in students in that many of them receive classical financial aid from their home classis. Let this interest be strengthened by way of giving to these classes also the prerogative of conducting these initial examinations.

What I am here suggesting was proposed by a Synodical Study Committee already in 1946. At that time a committee of the Revs. J. Beebe, N.J. Monsma, and E. Van Halsema proposed that the examination for declaration of candidacy be done by the various classes. But this report came to Synod on the last day of its session and action on it was postponed. It was never adopted.

In the meantime the Reformed Church in America not only continues the practice of examination by the home classis of the student; at its June 1984, Synod held in New Brunswick, it has even waived the requirement that prospective candidates be certified by the professors of Western or New Brunswick Seminaries. The Reformed Synod made alternative arrangements for the candidacy of students who choose not to study at the denominational seminaries. I suspect that many C.R.C. leaders who would want the Calvin Board to retain strong jurisdiction over all C.R.C. ministerial candidates, also want the C.R.C. to draw closer to the R.C.A. These leaders now must ask whether they wish to draw closer to the R.C.A. in respect to ministerial candidacy as well. The ecumenical outlook proposed by some leaders conflicts with their parochial outlook in regard to seminary training and candidacy.

Next month some comments will be made on the Synodical rule that requires a final year of schooling at Calvin Seminary from all those seeking C.R.C. ordination.

An Agenda for Conservatives

Edward E. Heerema

The conservatives in the Christian Reformed Church lost a major battle at the Synod of 1984. It remains to be seen whether they have lost the war. Even though a sizeable majority of the membership of the church is opposed to having women occupy the special church offices (also the office of deacon), synod nevertheless took a significant first step toward opening the offices to women. And unless this movement is halted promptly, the church will soon have women elders and ministers. The fact must be carefully noted that Synod 1984 recognized the reality of the biblical principle of headship. And yet synod refused to assert that this principle, declared to be operative in family and church, means that women cannot hold the offices of minister, elder or evangelist. This refusal on the part of the synod is a clear signal as to what lies ahead.

What is to be done? Do we sit in our corner to weep or pout, feeling sorry for ourselves and wringing our hands over the plight of the church? By no means. We must act — act firmly, effectively and as unitedly as possible. At the same time we must act responsibly, wisely and in love for our Lord and His people. But act we must.

What can we do? Below I present a program of action which articulates many of our concerns which I believe is responsible, and can, with God's blessing, bring renewed health and vitality to our troubled church. I divide this agenda into two parts, namely, one, for immediate action, and two, for long-range action (though not necessarily delayed).

Agenda for Immediate Action

1. Individuals, consistories, and Classes should protest the action of the Synod of 1984 on three counts:
   a. The decision to open one of the church's special offices to women and in so doing failing to do what Synod 1975 called for, namely advancing "compelling biblical grounds" for changing the church's long-standing practice of excluding women from the ecclesiastical offices recognized in the Church Order. In this connection it should be noted that the recommendation by the majority of the study committee to open the office of deacon to women was not really in harmony with the argumentation of the majority in the body of the committee's report, a curious disparity noted by many.
   b. The decision to ratify the change in article 3 of the Church Order so as to allow women to serve in the office of deacon.
   c. The failure of Synod 1984 to declare that the biblical principle of headship, acknowledged by Synod, bars women from holding the offices of elder and minister and evangelist.
2. Overtures and communications should be sent to Synod 1985 asking for clarification of the decision of 1984 to open the office of deacon to women, with special attention given to the qualifying clause, "provided that their work is distinguished from that of elders." Many sticky and troublesome problems must inevitably be encountered on this score, especially in the councils of smaller churches. For instance, shall male deacons sitting on the council continue to be permitted to speak and vote on matters fitting the category of elders' work, while female deacons sitting on the same council shall not speak and vote on such matters? And what will happen when the category of "elders' work" is not sharply definable in a particular instance? The occurrence of highly unpleasant and divisive hassles seems inescapable, with the result that before long the synod will be asked to drop the qualifying clause.
3. Overtures and communications should be sent to Synod 1985 asking for a careful study (with recommendations) of the recommendation of the minority report brought to Synod 1984 by Thea Van Halsema. This recommendation, brought by a discerning woman, is very much in harmony with the role Scripture throughout gives to women and is also very much in harmony with the argumentation of the majority of the study committee reporting to Synod 1984.
4. Overtures and communications should be sent to Synod 1985 asking for a declaration that the biblical principle of headship, acknowledged by Synod 1984 as operative in family and church, means that the role of women in family and church excludes their holding the offices of elder, minister and evangelist. I believe that this principle also means that women should not serve as deacons in the Christian Reformed concept and practice of that

office. But if the restricted role of women deacons as set forth in the decision of 1984 can be adequately clarified and maintained, then limiting such overtures and communications to elders, ministers and evangelists will suffice at this point.

5. Overtures and communications should be sent to Synod 1985 asking for a thorough examination of the editorial policies of *The Banner* and of the performance of the present editor. *The Banner* is an official organ of the denomination and is not the voice of some group in the church or of its editor. Editorial policy and practice under the present editor have contributed significantly to dissension and polarization in the church.
6. Overtures and communications should be sent to Synod 1985 asking that Report 44 on *The Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority*, acted on by Synod 1972, be placed in the archives of the denomination with the understanding that this document shall no longer have a place in the church as a viable instrument of instruction or guidance. More than a decade after this document was acted on by Synod it is still being debated as to its precise meaning and intent. This document with its lack of clarity and its ambiguity has not brought concensus among us as to the nature and extent of biblical authority, but has rather brought dispute, disharmony and confusion. A popular rewrite of this report for the purpose of "reaching also the general membership of the churches" as called for by Synod 1972 has never appeared. It would seem obvious that the report's lack of clarity and its ambiguity made the writing of a popular version too formidable a task.
7. Overtures and communications should be sent to Synod 1985 asking for a re-evaluation of Report 44 on *Ecclesiastical Office and Ordination.* This report first appeared at the Synod of 1972 but was returned to the study committee. The report was acted on in 1973 with significant changes made in the wording of some of the recommended "guidelines for understanding the nature of ecclesiastical office and ordination." Synod 1973 also adopted a set of corrective "observations as a framework within which 'the guidelines...' are to be understood." This very flawed report with its dubious history at two synods reduced office under our Lord Jesus Christ to a mere "function" and reduced ordination to mere "appointment." This report has been and is being used in the church (see *The Banner,* June 18, 1984, pp. 16-17) in ways that fail to reflect the dissatisfaction which marked the church's handling of this material in 1972 and 1973. This report must be re-evaluated. I do not suggest that it be repudiated, because its emphasis on church office as service is salutary and always pertinent. This report, like the other Report 44, has also failed to bring clarity and concensus on critical elements in the church's life, but rather confusion.

A comment is called for at this point regarding the relationship among some of the above proposals. There would seem to be a measure of contradiction among some of them. For example, if Synod 1985 should heed the protests called for under item 1, then there is little point in moving to item 2, which asks for clarification of the 1984 decision. I doubt that Synod 1985 will rescind the action of 1984. At the same time these protests should be sent as a matter of principle and to let the synod know what is the mind of the church. I hope all of the above matters will be brought to synod soon.

Long-Range Agenda

1. An Advisory Council For The Concerned in the Christian Reformed Church should be set up so that guidance and direction may be given to the conservatives in the CRC. The conservatives in the CRC are often left wondering just what went wrong. How could a church that is opposed by a large majority to opening any of the special offices to women (see *The Banner* of Jan. 23, 1984, pp. 8-10) do what it did at the Synod of 1984? The Reformed Fellowship might well take the lead in the setting up of such an Advisory Council.
2. Public meetings should be held throughout Canada and the United States alerting the members of the churches to the state of affairs in our beloved Church and what can be done about it. One item that could be discussed at such meetings is the kind of churches that ordain women and what happens to such churches' loyalty to Scripture and to their statements of faith. The record of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. is a case in point as well as the sad deterioration of the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland. (Some conservative Presbyterian Churches in this country have had women serving as deacons for many years, but in such denominations the deacons do not sit on the ruling body of the church.)
3. The conservatives in the CRC must find ways and means to make clear to the theologians in the denomination that they must assume a much more resolute and unmistakably confessional role in addressing the problems that confront the church in today's confused theological and spiritual climate. There has been widespread and longstanding disappointment at the lack of firm and clearly directed leadership by the church's theologians in the doctrinal controversies that have visited the CRC over recent decades. I refer to the infallibility debates of the fifties, the debates on the love of God in the sixties, the questions raised by Verhey, the Libolt affair, and the issue of women in office as fairly obvious illustrations of the point. And the role the theologians played in the production of the two highly unsatisfactory Reports 44 has left much to be desired. In this connection the members of the faculty of the new Mid-America Reformed Seminary must be encouraged in every way to make their positive contribution to the discussion of issues that confront the church.

Conclusion

Some people may feel that they detect a hint of schism in the above material. Let no one dismiss these suggestions by waving that red flag. At this point I could well raise the question that Elijah brought up to Ahab, the question as to who are the real troublemakers in Israel. The intent of these proposals is in no way schismatic. Their intent is to try to get the Christian Reformed Church to take a hard, clear-eyed look at herself to see where she is going. I happen to regard the solid conservative core of the membership of the CRC as one of the finest and most devoted bodies of Reformed people in the world. It grieves me to see such people grow increasingly frustrated and feeling more and more like strangers in the church they have loved and served. It grieves me to hear an elder say, "It's too late." It grieves me to hear an elder say when I raised a question about the action of his Classis on a certain matter, "I can't stand any more ulcers. I am happy to serve Christ's Kingdom in other ways now." It grieves me to hear of churches that are ready to give up and to leave the denomination. It is my hope and

prayer that these devoted Christians will not think of separation but will rather think of joining with others in an earnest and coordinated effort to reform the church. Yes, let us join hands to reform the church, to reform the church in that sound manner in which a truly Reformed church must always seek its continuing reformation so that it may be the true church of Jesus Christ that it professes to be.

Many humble members of the church may feel that they are of the same mind as that set forth in this article, but they feel helpless. "What can I do?" they ask in perplexity and frustration. Let no member of the church feel that he can make no contribution. Each member must bear in mind that he means just as much to his Lord and Savior as the best-equipped thinker in the church. Furthermore, each member can talk, talk first of all to God. Let him be much in prayer for the church and its faithful witness. And he can also talk to his fellow-members. He can also talk to the elders and pastor of his church. Even if the member suspects his pastor is not receptive, the member's witness must be heard. Perhaps a group in a church can choose a spokesman to express its concern to the elders of the church. Such members must not give up too easily. Faint hearts don't win struggles in the church. We would do well to reread Luke 11:10. Let us not think of quitting, but rather let us think of persevering.

Then there are those who might like to forward an overture or communication to synod but feel they are incapable of formulating such a document. The feeling is understandable but does not have to prevent action. Help in formulating such a document can be gained from several people in the church. A sympathetic pastor in your church or a neighboring church may give help. Or the expenditure of the price of a postage stamp or phone call to someone in the denomination you have come to trust may give you the help that is needed. Let no one have to say somewhere down the road, "I am sorry that I did not do my part."

May the great Head of the church have mercy on us, bless us and guide us.

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The Real Tragedy of the Showdown SYNOD

Arthur Besteman

A denominational leader with whom I had lunch last year remarked, "The synod which acts on the headship issue will be a watershed synod." More recently the editor of *The Outlook* in an article which has reeeived much favorable comment referred to the 1984 synod as "The Showdown Synod." More recently the synod which just met has been called "The Single Issue Synod."

The Synod of 1984 will long be remembered and discussed as the synod that opened the office of deacon in the Christian Reformed Church to women. This is a decision which is causing deep concern and even dismay to many members of the church. While I would not want for one moment to minimize the seriousness of this decision, yet I want to point out that the decision in itself is not the real tragedy which occurred during the 1984 synod. There is a much deeper cause for alarm which became apparent during the days that synod met this past June.

Before synod met the editor of *The Banner* had written in the January 23, 1984 issue, "There is no doubt in my mind that Paul was prescribing a restricted role to women in the service of worship when he wrote I Corinthians 14:34 and I Timothy 2:12. However, the reasons for the restrictions were local, cultural, and therefore temporal." The editor acknowledged that a new hermeneutic was needed in order to justify opening the offices of the church to women. The delegates to synod were reminded of the statement of the liberal theologian Dr. Harry Kuitert of the Netherlands who has written, "You cannot read Paul any other way than that he denies ecclesiastical office to women." This does not matter to Kuitert who relegates the words of the Apostle Paul to a past time.

And now the Christian Reformed Church was faced with a decision. What happened? On Monday, June 18, Synod adopted the following: "That synod declare that 'the headship principle' which means that the man should exercise primary leadership and direction-setting in the home and in the church, is a Biblical teaching recognized in both the Old and the New Testament." A principle had been adopted which was rooted in the teaching of the Bible. One of my seminary professors used to say, "If you say 'A' you must also be ready to say 'B.'" But Synod was not disposed to do so, for on Tuesday, June 19, the delegates rejected a

recommendation which flowed naturally out of the biblical principle which had been adopted the day before. Synod rejected the recommendation "That synod declare that the headship of the man in the church implies that women should not be admitted to the offices of minister, elder, or evangelist." And then later on the same day the delegates proceeded to vote to allow women to hold the office of deacon.

How could this happen? As the hours of debate concerning the headship report lengthened there was a growing awareness in the minds of many delegates and visitors that the Word of God was being ignored by many of those who were arguing for opening the offices of the church to women. Rather than seeking to base their case on the testimony of Scripture, appeal was being made to the fact that women possess gifts which qualify them for office and therefore they should be granted the opportunity to use their gifts. Reference was made to the services of women in office in other denominations. The fact that they were serving well was presented as an argument for permitting women to serve in the offices of the Christian Reformed Church. Still others made appeal to "fairness" or "justice" as they pleaded for the opening of the offices to women. But where was the appeal to the Bible? This is the question being asked by many who were participants in or observers at the Synod of 1984. When those who opposed the opening of ecclesiastical offices to women appealed to Scripture to support their position or asked for answers to questions based upon the Bible there was too often only a stoney silence as response.

This cavalier attitude to the Word of God is frightening and constitutes the real tragedy of the Synod of 1984. Dr. Francis Schaeffer entitled his last book "The Great Evangelical Disaster." In this book, written by the author after he became terminally ill and published shortly before his death, he describes the great evangelical disaster as "the future of the evangelical world to stand for truth as truth. There is only one word this — namely accommodation: the evangelical church as accommodated to the world spirit of the age. First, there has been accommodation on Scripture, so that many who call themselves evangelicals hold a weakened view of the Bible and no longer affirm the truth of all the Bible teaches. . . ." Dr. Schaeffer says the great evangelical disaster is that the evangelical church has accommodated to the world spirit of the age. Within the Christian Reformed Church we have seen that accommodation at the 1984 Synod. Because a valid case could not be built upon Scripture for the opening of ecclesiastical offices to women, appeal had to be made to many other things including what was happening in the world around us.

A colleague who was a student at Calvin Seminary during the early 50s recalls well the reaction of his professors to the declaration by Pope Pius XII in 1950 of the teaching concerning the assumption of the Virgin Mary. The professors were quick to point out that this was the first time that the Roman Catholic Church had made a doctrinal pronouncement without at least some semblance of appeal to Scripture to support its teaching. Has the Christian Reformed Church now begun to do the same thing? This is a question which will haunt the minds and hearts of many concerned members in the days ahead. It is a question which must not be ignored.

Others will be writing on the pages of this periodical and I am sure in other magazines also suggesting various courses of action which can be pursued by those who cannot accept the decision of synod to open the office of deacon to women. Let us listen to what they have to say.

I ask that many join in praying for reformation. I use the word "reformation" deliberately. During the past decade there has been a weakening of the church's position in regard to Scripture and its authority. This weakening has been reflected in various crucial synodical decisions made in recent years including the decision just made to open the office of deacon to women. When there is a weakening of a church's position in regard to the authority of Scripture, the only remedy is reformation, a correction of the error that has crept into the church.

Many are despairing, some are threatening radical actions in response to the decision of synod, still others are talking about leaving the church or waiting to see when the schism will take place. I remind those members of the church who are so deeply grieved and troubled and who are asking, "What can we do?" that Jesus Christ is the Head of His Church and that His Spirit is almighty. Therefore I urge you to pray for REFORMATION.

Rev. Arthur Besteman is the pastor of the North St. Christian Reformed Church of Zeeland, Michigan and the secretary of the Reformed Fellowship.

Prayer

Henry Vander Kam

PRAYER

Lesson 1 Psalm 141:1-2, Ps. 142, Acts 9:11

Introduction

This season we will deal with the subject of "prayer." This is not only a very important subject but it is also one concerning which there is a great deal of ignorance. Although the disciples of our Lord have been brought up in the religious homes of that day, these mature men ask Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray!"

We will not deal with successive Scripture passages in these outlines this season because the subject matter does not lend itself to that. Instead, we will seek to illumine various aspects of prayer as they are revealed in various Scriptures, and the last outlines will deal with some of the prayers which are found in both the Old and New Testaments. We will not deal with the Lord's Prayer because that was treated in a previous series by this author on the Sermon on the Mount.

Objectionable Prayer

Prayer is an intimate outpouring of the soul to God. As a result, it is dangerous to criticize prayers. Yet, this must often be done if we would be true to the Scriptures and our Confessions. Many today seem to talk to God as an equal. Sometimes one gets the impression that they hardly consider Him equal. Some give the impression that they have a direct insight into the will of God and we hear them pray: We know you are going to do this! Others love to speak of the fact that they are uttering "just a little prayer." I, for one, do not know what a "big prayer" is! One even hears today that the first personal pronoun is used while they are praying in a group. Some who pray in public inform the Lord of various things. They will even tell him, when quoting a verse of Scripture, where it is found! So we could go on. A good case could be made for the thesis that some "gossip" in prayer. They will pray for someone and thereby tell the group concerning this person's evil deeds—while seemingly praying for his repentance and the forgiveness of others. To say that these things must be avoided is saying the obvious, but they are too common in our circles.

It is important that we learn how to pray because our prayer life reflects and affects our spiritual life and the public prayers uttered in worship services will affect the obtaining of a blessing by those who have come to worship. It is possible, for example, to listen to a sermon which is really Scriptural and Reformed and, during the same service, to listen to a prayer which exudes mysticism and fundamentalism. We must learn what the Scriptures have to teach us on this subject.

Appropriate Prayer to God

True prayer acknowledges the God to Whom we pray as the One who is infinitely far above us. He is the Source of all good. He is the Source of all blessings. We may not conceive of Him as being so like us that we talk to Him as we would to the man down the street. Jesus taught His disciples to pray. True, He is our Father, and that is a great blessing for His people, but He is the Father who is enthroned in the heavens! We must also know ourselves and our needs when we pray. This is the only way whereby we come in the proper frame of heart and mind. It is the only way whereby we will come in the proper humility.

Definition

The question has often been asked, and is still being asked, "*What is prayer?*" I suppose that the best answer we are going to be able to give to this question is that prayer is having communion with God. This definition may not cover all the various aspects of prayer, but it will do for our everyday life. In order to have communion with another it is necessary that each speaks but that each one listens too. God has spoken to us in His Word. We better listen to Him first before we begin to speak. Prayer meetings in which the Word of God is not heard, are dangerous! We can only know Him properly through the revelation He has given of Himself. Our prayers will then find much of their content in that word which He has spoken. The late Prof. Volbeda used to tell us: "Your prayers must breathe Biblicity!" The Word will guide us in our prayers. The special needs which an individual may have are not addressed by the Scriptures but the Scriptures inform us concerning Him to Whom we pray and concerning our basic needs!

In our prayers we are, of course, not to be preoccupied with ourselves. We may never do that and certainly not in our prayers. God must receive the praise and glory of all our life and surely also of our prayers. Later we will deal a little more fully with the approved content of prayer.

Why Pray?

All the creatures our God has made look to Him for all things, but only man, the one who was made in His image, is able to pray. Man is engaged in his highest activity when he prays. The question is sometimes asked, and if not asked, is at least close to the surface, why should we pray? Is it even proper? God knows all things, hence we don't have to tell Him anything. God has also determined all things. He is also the unchangeable One. Why should I, then, pray to Him? Surely, the old motto, "Prayer changes things," is theologically incorrect! These are the questions which have

bothered people over the centuries. In order to receive an answer to these questions we must again listen carefully to the word of God rather than to our own logic. He has commanded us to pray and regardless of the logic men use to excuse their lack of prayer, they are disobedient! It is indeed a comfort for us to know that God does not change and that is the reason we are not consumed, yet, we may never think of God as like an impervious rock! Again and again in the Old Testament we read that "it repented the Lord," and He did not do those things which He had said He was going to do. After the one prayer of Hezekiah He added fifteen years to his life. There are many other examples. Is it proper to pray? Without prayer a believer would die spiritually! When Ananias is understandably afraid to approach Saul of Tarsus, he is told: " Behold he prayeth!" God has met this former enemy of the church of Christ and has turned him completely about. He has been converted! No one is able to fight against God and win. Ananias, if you want proof of his conversion, he is on his knees before his God! He has been humbled. No longer do you have to be afraid of him. He is now a fellow-believer; in fact, you now come together before the throne of grace! He has been rendered helpless. I have met him and he now realizes that he must come to Me for all things—even his life. When a person becomes sincere in his prayer he is harmless—he is a brother. With this information the Lord strengthens Ananias to his difficult task. Beautifully He teaches us what it means to pray.

Isn't it too bad that the prayer of Paul during his three days of blindness has not been recorded for us? There are other instances in which the Bible is silent regarding important episodes in the life of believers, such as the meeting of the resurrected Lord with Peter alone on the Resurrection day (Luke 24:34). But, it is not strange that the Bible maintains a silence regarding such experiences because they are instances of intimate communion. These are not revealed for our curious probing.

Old Testament Teaching

The entire Scriptures teach us about prayer. The New Testament is much richer than the Old in such teaching, but prayer has always been essential in the spiritual life of God's people regardless of the time in which they lived. In the Old Testament there are naturally more symbolic references to prayer. In the tabernacle and in the temple the altar of incense had an important place. The rising smoke of the incense symbolized the prayers of God's people rising to His mercy seat. Psalm 141 also speaks of the prayer of the believer rising as incense before the face of God. That incense, or its smoke, was closely connected to the altar of burnt offering. The sacrifices had to be brought to show the penitence of the one sacrificing, but, the mere sacrifice might be brought with a heart which was still far removed from Him. The prayers of God's people would show the sincerity of the sacrifice which was brought.

In Psalm 142 the poet pours out his heart to his God. He has undergone many bitter experiences. These he now lays before the eyes of God. He does not intend to list the reasons why he is suffering so many reverses and difficulties. We must rather see what a comfort it is for the child of God to bring all his needs before the God who is able to afford help in time of need! Prayer is not a psychological crutch which causes the person who prays to feel better after he has it off his chest! This is the way prayer is explained in many circles today. The believer has a different experience. The life-line between him and his God is established in prayer! God speaks in His word and the believer responds in thanksgiving and prayer.

A wonderful gift has been given to us in the very fact that we can and that we may pray. The person who prays is never alone. The person who prays cannot remain despondent regardless of the circumstances. He has communion with his Father Who is Maker of heaven and earth and upholds all the things He has created. The confidence and the joy which return to the heart of the believer are such as cannot be described to others who have nowhere to go with all of their difficulties. Only the believer can pray. Are there atheists in the fox holes of Bataan? No, but there are also no atheists in hell—everyone there too will know there is a God! We must know Him to Whom we pray—but, He has revealed Himself! May we learn to pray properly.

Questions for Discussion

1. Is it possible to err in prayer as much as in doctrine? Do you think that the name of God is often used in vain in prayer?
2. Is the congregational prayer a very important part of a worship service? If it is, why do we hear a great deal about the quality of the sermon which was preached but seldom hear anything about the prayer which was uttered?
3. What is a father's role in the prayer life of a family? Is it proper to have even the smallest children pray—so that they may learn by doing?
4. How must we know God to be able to pray properly? He is a Father to His people; but must we also stand in awe of Him?
5. Is silent prayer in the home just as good as audible prayer?
6. Why is it that many God-fearing people find it very difficult to lead in prayer? How can this difficulty be overcome? ●

PRAYER: THE CHIEF PART OF GRATITUDE

Lesson 2 **Psalms 50:14, 116, I Cor. 14:15**

The Heidelberg Catechism emphasizes that prayer is the chief part of Christian gratitude. Even though we are familiar with this statement of the Catechism, it seems that this teaching is not often practiced. We have all kinds of ideas of prayer. Thereby we may have all things for the asking. Accordingly our prayers are often preoccupied with the material world, our bodies etc. But, that prayer is the chief part of gratitude is difficult for many to imagine.

Priority of Praise

We are able to show our gratitude in various ways. The law precedes the treatment of prayer in the catechism. By obeying the law we reveal our gratitude and our love for our Lord. "If ye love me, keep my commandments." When the individual commandments are kept, we show our gratitude. Yet, prayer is the *chief* part. This truth must color our whole view of prayer. If we really believe that therein we show

our thankfulness as in no other way, our prayers will be reformed. No longer will we approach God with a long list of our wishes, but, with overflowing praise. Of course we may ask for things! But, they are not the main things—if we truly believe what our confession states.

Prayer Psalms

It is noteworthy in the Scriptures that many of the Psalms are prayers. The statement of the catechism seeks to raise our prayers to such a height that they become Psalms! When we enter our place of prayer the praise of God is to be uppermost in our minds and hearts. God is placed first. Then we will also experience the real blessedness of prayer. Neither will we sing anymore: Teach me the patience of unanswered prayer, because He always hears us.

In Jesus' Name

Although many people consider prayer to be a simple thing, we soon discover that prayer is difficult if we follow the Biblical pattern of it. Gratitude is not easy for us. One has to come a considerable way into the Christian life to reach gratitude. It is the third part of that which is necessary for us to know. First we must realize our sin and confess it. Then we must know the redemption which we receive through the blood of Jesus Christ. Then comes our gratitude! Only the person who has tasted the redemption which we have in Christ is able to pray. Jesus emphasizes this fact when He teaches us that we will only be heard when we pray in His name. How can one approach the throne of God in prayer if he does not know Jesus Christ? Those who only use the blessed name of our Saviour in oaths cannot pray! Yet, almost everyone speaks of the times they have prayed.

Petitions and Thanksgiving

It has oft :n been said that need teaches one to pray. When the need of the individual becomes so great that he does not know where to turn, he prays. There are even examples of this in the Scriptures. Peter cries out when he is about to be swallowed up by the waves: "Lord help me!" Wasn't this a prayer? It certainly was. However, although we cry out many times when we are overwhelmed by the need of the moment, this is not the kind of prayer which is "the chief part of gratitude." It is true that we are not always able to pray a well structured prayer and one which contains all the things which are proper to prayer. But, this should not blind us to the necessity of expressing our heartfelt thanks to God in prayer.

Need usually doesn't teach one the proper prayer. God demands of us that we come to Him and that we come to Him in the proper way. We learn how to pray from Him, "at His feet." Then it becomes prayer which is acceptable. The Psalmist says in Psalm 50:14: "Offer unto God the sacrifice of thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the Most High". Our prayers are to be sacrifices of praise. That is the way we render true thanksgiving to our God. Then we do not only show gratitude for the things we have received, but we show gratitude for Him! True thanksgiving is a matter of the heart. What can we give to God? How can we enrich Him? It is high time that we get away from the notion which is all to prevalent, that we do much for the Lord! Whatever we do for Him we owe to Him. The Psalmist in Psalm 116:12-13 shows us the proper way. He also asks: "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits to me?" His answer—"I will *take* the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord." He responds to the Lord by taking more! In this way we discover what true gratitude is.

Thoughtful Prayer

Our grateful prayer is often blunted by our mistaken idea of what true prayer really is. Many have a "mystical" view of it. The Apostle Paul shows us that that is not the right attitude. It is marvelous beyond human comprehension that a sinner is able to approach the Maker of heaven and earth and that he is guaranteed an audience with Him. Yet, we must beware of a mistakenly mystical and subjective view of prayer. The Corinthian people had many gifts. Speaking in tongues seemed to be somewhat common in this church. But, in spite of their many gifts, they also had more problems than any other church to which the Apostle ministered. Concerning prayer Paul says: "I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the understanding". Prayer must not be left in a sphere where the understanding is not able to enter. Prayer, to be truly our highest form of gratitude, must be exercised by the whole man including his mind. Some have said that we cannot really study prayer or dissect it. It is a living thing and if it is dissected—it dies. If that were true one would not be able to preach on prayer. Our Lord teaches us differently in John 17. He does not teach that mystical view which has banned the understanding from the arena of prayer.

Our Lord's Lesson: The Lord's Prayer

The more sincere and the deeper the prayer, the less is asked. We must never lose sight of the teaching of the Lord's prayer regarding this matter. Not only has our Lord taught His disciples to pray a beautiful prayer, He also taught them by means of the order of the various petitions. First He places the things of God and His praise. We may not overlook this. Although the physical needs of the one who is praying get a turn, they are by no means first! To put the matter bluntly, many pray and give the impression that prayer is the cheapest way to obtain things! Young people often ask: What may we pray for? This is a question which we hope to answer in a later outline. Suffice it to say now that many of the things prayed for reveal a view of prayer which is far from placing gratitude first.

If prayer is "the chief part of gratitude which we owe to our God," all our prayers should reveal this confession. When a man comes into the presence of God he must know what he is doing. He ought to listen carefully to the word which God has spoken before he opens his own mouth to speak to the Most High God. We are taught in the Scriptures again and again that some did not come to God in the proper manner. The two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, are examples. They had just recently entered the work of the priesthood. Then they came with "strange fire" into the presence of God (Lev. 10:1). It is not easy to determine why it was "strange fire" and various interpretations are given. I think, however, that the text itself makes clear they brought this fire which He had not commanded. They went their own wilful way. They come with censers as types of the prayers of God's people, and He did not accept these prayers. Although this should have been a day of rejoicing in the life of Aaron because his sons could now do the priestly work with him, it became a day of grief because God destroyed both of them. He hereby taught Israel and all those who will later read His revelation that they may not play fast and loose

with the prayers which are brought into His presence.

"In Everything Give Thanks."

If prayer is to be the chief part of the gratitude which believers are to bring to their God, what does this suggest about the frequency of their prayers? Are we always so thankful that we have to take time out to express it in prayer? That is the way we ought to be! We must learn to follow the order which has been taught us in our confession. When we know, really know, Who God is and when we really know our own deepest need, we will give unceasing thanks! Then our prayers rise from the beginning to the end of the day. "What shall we render to God for all His benefits to us?" Let us not forget any of them.

This view of prayer (that it is the chief part of gratitude) answers many other questions which come to our minds. Unbelievers often view prayer as being harmless and even profitable for little children, but not for the thinker. He should know better than to believe that his utterances will be heard by anybody and that these utterances are going to have any effect. But, this is not true. We must do much self searching to realize our needs and to realize how much we receive of which we are unworthy. Such a realization moves men to gratitude. It moves them to a gratitude even though others may pity them for their lot. While believers are able to be thankful in the prosperity which their God sends them, they can also be thankful in the many reverses which they may have to endure. Prayer, when properly understood, will reveal what kind of people we are.

We have proceeded on the assumption that we have much for which we are to give thanks. No doubt, this thought is widely accepted. Yet, often say: We cannot be thankful enough! Try it! Be sure you know the way we are to give thanks. We must learn to pray! When our prayers rise as incense before God, He will hear us—He will have mercy on us—He will open the windows of heaven upon us so that we will not be able to contain all that He gives. Then the child of God bows his head and prays. His prayer is always: "How good Thou art!"

Questions for discussion:

1. How would you describe the content of most of the prayers which you hear and which you yourself, utter? Do we usually follow the guidance of the Catechism?
2. Must we also be discerning when we listen to the prayers of others? Should the congregational prayer bring *your* needs before the throne of grace?
3. If we must listen carefully to prayers uttered in public, does this entail the danger of taking a blessing away from us?
4. Should we pray according to the occasion? Should all the needs of Christendom be mentioned in our mealtime prayers? Have you ever heard someone pray for many things at mealtime *except* for a blessing on the food?
5. Do you think people often bring "strange fire" before God in their prayers? What do you think of "prayer requests"?

VIEW POINT

LICENSING
Students and Candidates

J. Tuininga

I have never been happy with the policy of having the Board of Trustees of Calvin College and Seminary license candidates for the ministry in the Christian Reformed Church or give students license to exhort in the churches. Now that this procedure has been "tightened" and updated, I am even more unhappy. It seems to me that Reformed church polity would dictate that classes perform these tasks rather than a church board. Since when do boards lord it over classes and local consistories? That's putting the cart before the horse.

In line with Reformed church polity, the procedure should be as follows: Let the governing board of any reputable seminary (not only Calvin) say to the churches: We present to you these students who have completed (part or all, as the case may be) the necessary academic requirements at our institution. You take them and examine them to see whether they meet the necessary qualifications for the ministry in your church. And then any worthy classis (or even consistory, for that matter) could easily determine whether they meet the necessary academic requirements and whether they are Reformed in their thinking. On that basis they would decide to ordain (or license) or not to ordain. It doesn't matter so much as to which seminary these men attended. As long as the men qualify as ministers or exhorters in a Reformed church, that is all that is required. (I have never liked the rule either, that students at other seminaries must attend Calvin for one year. That is unnecessary at best and paternalistic at worst.) It is the product that counts, not where he has studied. And the products will recommend (or not recommend) the institution at which they studied.

A few comments found in the 1957 *Acts* of Synod (in connection with the issue of particular synods) are apropos here:

> When the Board of Trustees conducted this examination there was dissatisfaction, rightly so, because the elders had no share in it.... We propose that this be done in classes.... Let the executive committee of the Board of Trustees assign to each of these classes a number of prospective candidates.... Let these classes report their actions, each to the particular synod of which it is a part. In this way...the examination could be made thorough and respectable and the work of these classes could be controlled by the particular synods.

Later we read this:

> The evil of boardism is the concentration of too much power in the hands of a few. Committees entrusted with a task must have an amount of power to act, but this should be properly controlled. Such committees, though not necessarily intentionally, have a way of acquiring more and more power.... Our three big boards, The General Home Missions Committee (now the Board of Home Miss. J.T.), The Christian Reformed Boards of Missions, and the Board of Trustees of Calvin College and Seminary, wield a tremendous power. Each of these is in charge of work of far-reaching consequences...As a matter of fact, the work is largely done by the executive committees; the rest, by dint of circumstances, have little actual control in the matter. This is not a good situation.

These comments are as relevant in 1984 as they were in 1957. Since the present machinery is all neatly in place, and since ecclesiastical wheels tend to grind very slowly, I don't foresee a sudden change in the situation. But that does not remove the fact that the present situation with respect to ministerial candidates is not only unjust to a degree, but also violates the best principles of Reformed church polity. It is time we think about changing the rules.

Christian Renewal on the AACS

It has been heartening to many of us involved in the OUTLOOK to observe the increasing forthrightness in promoting the Reformed faith and opposing what endangers it which is becoming apparent in the pages of *Christian Renewal* since its reorganization, change of name (from *Renewal)* and move to Canada. This development appears in many of its articles, in their stance on social and political matters, and in their opposition to the current drive to override the Bible's teaching on women in church office. It appears also in the recent writing of the editor dealing with the problems of the AACS.

The acronym AACS stands for the Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship. It began a number of years ago (under a different name) in the circles of our Reformed Fellowship to advance the Biblical claims of Christ in higher education, and claimed the interest and support of many of us. In the course of time it evidently underwent a significant change of direction, especially in the attitude toward the Bible expressed in a number of its writings. At the request of the Reformed Fellowship board I wrote a number of articles about this subject in the mid 70's and a booklet, *Some Questions and Answers About the AACS,* which the Fellowship printed.*

In the Feb. 6, 1984, *Christian Renewal* its managing editor John Hultink placed an editorial on "The AACS and those Troublesome Conservatives." In that article he recalls with warm appreciation some of his earlier years with that association and the excitement of its early conferences.

He recalls the beginning of the AACS, as "the same people who pioneered churches, grade schools and a fledgling labor association, put their hearts and hard-earned dollars to work for Christian higher education."

He observes that these people are "of a predominantly conservative bent of mind.... conservative in a positive, reformational sense of the word. They want to conserve their beginnings, their foundation, their principles, fully realizing that without a firm, biblical foundation all organizational efforts will sink away in the quicksand of relativism.

"They are not well-educated folk, these immigrants. But they are a deeply religious people who take their calling in life seriously. They are a reformed people who take their stand upon the confessions for the church, confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord over all of life. They do not want to cling blindly to the past, nor do they want to revere that which is old, simply because it is old. That would be dead conservatism of which these people want no part. But at the same time, they harbor a deep respect and love for biblical principles which are timeless. They are not caught up in the maelstrom of the new theology which subtly shifts the accent from Christ to the Christian, and elevates its own views above the plain teachings of Scripture."

Editor Hultink takes exception to remarks of Calvin Seerveld, professor at the AACS' Toronto Institute for Christian Studies, who criticized conservatives saying that the AACS had been "left by friends who couldn't take our weaknesses."

"The Institute...is not, as Seerveld puts it, 'at the point of bankruptcy' because its 'conservative' friends can't tolerate its weaknesses. The Institute's 'conservatives' readily concede that they also are prone to many weaknesses. They confess that forgiveness must of necessity play a leading role in the life of the Christian. *But that decidely is not the problem.* It is not a 'holier than thou' attitude which has driven the 'conservatives' out of the AACS fold.

"The reasons 'conservatives' have for years been withholding their financial support from the AACS are more honorable than that. The 'conservatives' perceive, rightly or wrongly, that the AACs has become, in notable instances, unfaithful to its beginnings. Much of the heady, unifying spirit of the Unionville days is gone: debilitating divisiveness and disagreement on matters of principle have taken center stage. The AACS suffers from the worst of all possible spiritual maladies—it has become a house divided against itself....

"For more than six years now the AACS has sapped its spiritual vitality through internal disagreements which are not being resolved. A loss of unanimity of direction and purpose has resulted in endless discussion of issues which should be taken for granted among Christians. Staff members apparently not satisfied with teaching the fundamentals of Christian learning attempt, with prophetic zeal, to persuade its 'conservative' constituency to adopt its radical views—views which in many instances are perceived to be at odds with the reformed faith...." "That is why with heavy hearts, fully realizing that Christian higher education is not an option but a covenant obligation so many" conservatives' have withdrawn their support. In good conscience they sincerely believed they could not do otherwise."

The February, 1984, *Christian Home and School* contains a biographical sketch of the career of John Hultink, from his immigrant origins, early work experience, attendance at Calvin, and affiliations with the AACS, of which he was for a time a travelling promoter and an employee of its Wedge Publishing Foundation. Disappointed with publishing, he began a successful real estate business, only to return to publishing, establishing his own Paideia Press. From that agency is issuing an increasing number of Reformed classics, often translated from the Dutch. From his "Book Manor" overlooking the vineyards of the Niagara Peninsula he is also the managing editor of *Christian Renewal.* Published 22 times a year, subscriptions are $17.50 per year ($30.00, 2 years) at P.O. Box 777, Jordan Station, Ontario LOR 1SO or P.O. Box 770. Lewiston, NY 14092. PDJ ●

*The booklet, *Some Questions and Answers About the AACS* is available from the OUTLOOK office at 40¢ per copy; 3 for 1.00; 10 for $2.00; 100 for $15.00.

An Open-Ended DECISION

Syburn M. Voortman

Though I firmly believe that I Timothy 3:8,12 and Acts 6:3, along with other passages, close the office of deacon to women, defending that position is not the purpose of this viewpoint.

Wishful Thinking

My present concern is the erroneous dream that, despite the decision of 1984 concerning women deacons, we will not have women elders and ministers in the near or even foreseeable future.

Many members of the Christian Reformed Church believe just that. I have heard many make statements to that effect. One relatively young member, who is not averse to women deacons and is mildly opposed to women elders and ministers, commented: "We won't have women elders and ministers in my lifetime." A prominent leader in our denomination is rumored to have remarked that he is for women deacons but would be opposed to it if he thought it would lead to the opening of the other two offices to women.

I believe that some delegates to this last synod were operating under this delusion. One delegate said: "I voted for women deacons, not women elders and ministers." Furthermore, the synod did decide "that the man should exercise primary leadership and direction-setting in the home and in the church," and that the ordaining of women deacons is to be on the condition that "their work be distinguished from that of elders." Surely, these decisions imply that the remaining two offices should remain closed to women; do they not? With some justification a delegate could now say: "That's what we decided, that's what I voted for, and that closes the other offices to women."

To me this appears to be just wishful thinking and a delusion. Logically it might seem tenable, but in practice it will not hold up.

Inevitable Sequel

In Reformed circles where the Reformed view of the offices prevails, the opening of one ecclesiastical office to women has always resulted in the opening of all the offices to women and will inevitably do so. Note the history of the Reformed Church in America. Starting with women deacons and elders, it soon thereafter had women ministers. Will our history be different?

In fact, some consistories have already defied synods by ordaining adjunct or non-voting women elders. Some churches have even permitted or requested women to preach or exhort in their pulpits. This was all before this synod lifted the moratorium on ordaining women deacons.

Our seminary and college professors have been very influential in shaping the thinking and practice of our denomination. They have been the spawning bed of such controversial notions as theistic evolution, the universal love of God, and the new hermeneutics, all of which have become prominent among us. Where do they stand on the issue of women in all the offices? I have heard several of our college and seminary professors state in public meetings and/or on the floor of synod that they felt strongly for women elders and ministers and hoped that the day of their ordination would soon come. At a public meeting, prior to the synod, one seminary professor suggested that consistories go ahead and ordain women elders and let those in the church who oppose it protest via consistory and classis to synod. "This," he said, "will give synod a concrete case to adjudicate and will place the burden of proof on synod to show that it is contrary to Scripture." At the same meeting this professor advocated first getting women deacons and then appealing to the sense of the deep unity of all three offices to open all of the offices to women. Also, in answer to a question from the floor, he predicted that we would have women elders within five years. I know of many of our professors who openly and passionately teach, speak, and write in favor of women in all the offices of the church.

This past synod gave considerable evidence of what is to come. Significantly, it refused to say "that the headship of man in the church implies that women should not be admitted to the offices of minister, elder, and evangelist." This leaves the door open. Notice, too, that Synodical Study Committee Minority Report II, which argues for women in all the ecclesiastical offices, found favor with many delegates at synod.

Finally, if I Timothy 3:8,12 and Acts 6:3 could be ignored by this last synod, what is to stop future synods from ignoring the Scriptural passages that close the offices of minister and elder to women?

This isn't the end of the campaign to put women in the offices; it is just the first battle. Those who want women in all the offices have just begun to fight. They won a battle and intend to press on to complete victory. Just ask them.

A Call To Action

To think that the struggle will stop with getting women deacons is being hopelessly naive. Those of us who believe that the truth of God's Word is at stake must also enter the fray.

How can further erosion of Biblical practice be prevented? It seems to be that the only way to stop the otherwise inevitable opening of all the offices to women is to have the decision of this last synod concerning women deacons revoked.

What can we do? For starters, I urge you to protest the decision of 1984 and to request a revision of the decision by the Synod of 1985. Base that protest and request on the fact that 1984's decision is unbiblical, in conflict with Article 30 of *The Belgic Confession* and opposed by a vast majority of the membership of the Christian Reformed Church. (See *The Banner* of January 23, 1984 for statistics on the membership opposition. Surely the conscientious opposition of by far the most church members should have a restraining influence against the ordaining of women deacons, a practice which by no stretch of the imagination can be said to be required by Scripture.) Channel your protest and request for revision through your consistory and classis; if it is turned down, present it to the Synod of 1985 yourself. If we do nothing, the steamroller campaign for women in all the offices will just roll on. Let's begin trying to roll things back.

God grant that next year's synod be inundated with such protests and requests from individuals, consistories and, hopefully, classes. Please work on yours. ●

An Appeal to CONSERVATIVES

Henry Vanden Heuvel

Ever since Synod 1984 decided in favor of women in the office of deacon, there have been discussions throughout the denomination as to what to do. Many people who are dismayed with the direction of Synod at this past session, are convinced that this is only the first step in the process. In a couple of years, Synod will approve women as elders, women as ministers, and women as evangelists. For one of the cardinal principles of the Church Order is the equality of the offices. So it follows that if women can be deacons, they can also be elders, evangelists, and ministers. The reasoning among many conservatives in the Christian Reformed Church is that the church has started on a path that can only lead to all out liberalism. Now is the time to get out and find a church that is still true to the historic, reformed faith. If that is not satisfactory, now is the time to form one's own denomination.

We respect the convictions of those who have decided to do either of those two things. There have been several

movements in recent years, each of which has been led by dedicated, conscientious ministers of the Christian Reformed Church. Anyone who knows what has been happening in the past twenty years in the Christian Reformed Church knows the justification for such decisions to separate.

However we ought to sound a word of caution. One of the great tactics of any enemy in combat is "divide and conquer." Those who would lead our church to open all the offices to women would like nothing better than that the opponents would all leave for more conservative churches. We must not simply give in to their desires. We must stand together in an effort to bring our church back to the historic, reformed interpretation of Scripture that has guided our church since its beginnings.

When one thinks about what has been happening in our church, and the decision of many conservatives to leave the church, one comes to a strange conclusion. That conclusion is this: Who wants to change the historic, reformed position of our church? Do we conservatives who have fought against a weakening of the standards of truth that have stood for so many years? Do we desire to turn our church into a carbon copy of the other mainline denominations in the United States and Canada that have sold their heritage for a more respectable place in modern society? The answer is most certainly no. We are not the ones who have changed. Nor is the Bible any different from what it was thirty or forty years ago. The ones who are seeking to change the church are those who have been affected by the Women's Liberation movement in this country and elsewhere. They are the ones who are not satisfied with the historic, reformed position of the church. Given that situation, who are the ones who ought to be honest enough to say that their church no longer satisfies their desires? Certainly not those who are seeking to maintain the historic, reformed position of the church. It is rather those who want to change. Let them be honest enough to say, "Let's join another denomination where our ideas are acceptable and accepted."

But of course they are not doing that, nor is it likely that they will do that. Rather they want to have the strength of the Christian Reformed Church, and still change it to conform to their ideas. And, we might add, have us pay for it. And that is the rub. That is where you and I as conservatives ought to ask ourselves some very practical questions. How long may we continue to support organizations within our church that openly support positions that are contrary to the historic, reformed interpretation of the Scriptures? This is a decision that every person must make for himself. But it is a decision that is possible for us to take. It is also one that ought to be taken before we simply pull out of the church.

Those who are angry at what is happening in the church should band together for mutual support and discussion as to what they can do. Remember that fragmentation is not in the best interests of the church of Jesus Christ. It will not strengthen the church. It will only weaken it. Let us rather unite together to seek ways and means to let our voices be heard, and to change the direction of the church we love. Remember that we are bound only by Scripture and our own consciences. The Church Order protects the inviolable conscience of every believer. Do not give the church over to forces that want to change it into what it never was intended to be.

Rev. Henry B. Vanden Heuvel is the pastor of the Bethel C.R. Church of Zeeland, Mich., and president of the Reformed Fellowship.

WE MUST KNOW what we believe

J. Tuininga

We are trying to revive some interest in things creedal and confessional in the CRC by promoting the so-called "Contemporary Testimony." Some are hailing this as a great document, and according to some spokesmen, part of the reason for this document is the lack of knowledge of our present creeds among our people.

Now I must confess that we in the CRC, generally speaking, are no longer very literate when it comes to matters confessional, and even many of our leaders are no longer very articulate on this score. That is cause for concern. While a few decades ago, few of our parents and grandparents had much in the way of formal education, they knew the confessions of the church, and could defend the Reformed position when that was called for. Today, on the other hand, many more of our members have a high school or college education, but their knowledge of the church's creeds is often dismal. Some even say that they are too difficult to understand.

At the same time, I don't believe for a moment that a new "contemporary testimony" is the remedy. Certainly not if it has the caliber of the present document by that name. *"Daar kan je alle kanten mee op,"* as they say in Dutch (you can make it say anything you want.)

I have a few suggestions as to how we can improve the knowledge of and appreciation for, our present creeds:

1. Restore the confessions to a place of honor in our *Bible Way* church-school material. And have the children *memorize* the questions and answers of the Heidelberg Catechism. Even people who have more appreciation for the *Bible Way* material than I do have told me that, generally speaking, the reference to one of our creeds is relegated to a footnote, which can easily be (and often is) overlooked. Here we are nuturing the very problem that we want to overcome by means of the *Contemporary Testimony*. Let's shut the tap before we start wiping the floor. And let's really begin in earnest to implement Arts. 63 & 64c of the *Church Order* again.

Also, in this connection, let's get away somewhat from the "discussion fad," and have the students learn both by memorization and by solid teaching. Children can memorize today just as well as we could in our day. Let's stress the

what more than the *how* in catechism teaching.

2. Let consistories, classes and synod insist that Art. 54b of the *Church Order* be adhered to. I hear from quite a few chnrches that regular catechism preaching is a thing of the past. How can we expect our people to know the Catechism, and to appreciate it, if our ministers treat it so lightly? Here again, we are feeding the very thing we say we want to fight — creedal indifference and ignorance.

3. Let *The Banner* editor show some more enthusiasm for our present creeds, and let him use his position to teach our people the crucial importance of knowing the historic confessions of the Reformation. Remarks made by him in the past about our creeds come across to me as if our present confessions were beautiful museum pieces, but not very relevant today. Not even worth putting into a modern translation. Such remarks do nothing to enhance a love for the creeds among *Banner* readers.

4. Finally, let parents exercise their duty and privilege in seeing to it that their children get to know the creeds of the church, and let them remind their elders and ministers as to their duties. Sad to say, too many parents do nothing about the situation either. Too often they don't even help their children with their catechetical instruction. But correction has to begin here if it is going to begin anywhere.

As a church we have valuable creeds. Let's use this rich treasure, for our sake and the sake of our children.

Fight or Switch

A Laymen's Perspective

Roger Key

In the past several months, much has been written about the problems within our beloved denomination, particularly regarding the question of women's ordination and what to do should it be approved by Synod. Now that the decision has been made by Synod, the question still remains, What do we do about it? that is those of us who view that decision as totally against Scripture's guidelines. In answer to that question, I believe the time has come to cease fighting and switch; to begin anew along with all who can be summoned to return to the Authority of Scripture as a main beginning point. This is a most serious statement and I offer the following personal experience as a guideline for doing so at this time.

Fifteen years ago I accepted a new position which meant a move to a different area from where I had been born and raised. We became members of the RCA due to several factors, including the traveling distance required if we were to remain in the CRC. Our first several years in the RCA were very pleasant ones; we grew spiritually, had a good solid minister, and enjoyed being very active in our church. We didn't really pay much attention to what was going on in the denomination because it really didn't seem to affect us as a local congregation, just as I'm sure the vast majority of CRC members feel today. However, my beloved friends, it will and does affect the local congregation, sooner or later, like a cancer spreading from a small beginning. Our minister retired and we called another who seemed to also have good qualifications and a solid commitment to the Reformed faith, however, such was not the case and he, along with a weak consistory, gave occasion for many changes until the church became like the denomination, largely apostate. Oh yes, it grew numerically, but the growth was due to promotion, accepting any belief into the membership of the church, acceptance of continued sinful living with no discipline, etc. After trying to fight this situation for two years and after many sleepless, prayerful nights, we decided to leave and made the commitment to travel a number of miles to a Christian Reformed church with a minister truly committed to Scripture's teaching, regardless of popular opinion.

What is my reason for relating this experience? It is because I believe very strongly that the CRC is following the RCA very swiftly in making the same decisions a few years after them and the RCA has made the same decisions as the other apostate denominations before them. We do not seem to learn from history.

This leaves us Christians who want to stand solidly on the authority of Scripture with the following options:

(1) We can stay within our local churches and try to get them to change. This is a most admirable stance, however, it has been largely unsuccessful so far and has also been unsuccessful in other denominations to a large extent.

(2) We can affiliate, where possible, with a local conservative congregation and hope the Synodical decisions won't affect us. This idea sounds reasonable, however, it has not been true historically, nor in my own experience.

(3) We can break away. I respectfully submit we pursue this option. Why now, at this particular time? Because somewhere, sometime, the line must be drawn and I feel this is the time to rally together. We have allowed heretics to stay in our seminaries and colleges because we didn't want to cause a stir. We have allowed some strange doctrines to be proclaimed from our pulpits. Our synod has made some dubious decisions regarding movies, dancing, etc. These same decisions have been made in other apostate denominations and we should learn from them. Apostacy within a denomination does not happen overnight but rather, slowly, a little thing here, another decision there, more gradual tolerance for sin, until there are very few persons left who remain faithful to scripture.

I fear if the break is not made now, we will continue to drift away from Scripture's authority just as so many other denominations before. I believe what the church needs today is for the ministers and others with real leadership capability to organize, form a new denomination, and offer the laymen the opportunity to begin anew.

If it isn't done now, I fear we will again witness history repeating itself. Let us rally the church as Joshua did with the words, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

RISE UP, OH MEN OF GOD.

The Reformed Theological College OF NIGERIA TODAY

Willem Berends

It has been eleven years since the R.T.C.N. was founded, and the *Outlook* readers may be wondering what has happened to this institution. At your editor's prompting, I will try to acquaint you with what has been happening during these years.

When we joined the college in 1975 there were just two classes, and with three teachers, that was all we could handle. This meant that we could receive new students only every second year, because the certificate course we were offering took four years to complete. Our students at that time had only two years of education beyond primary school (Grade School) and needed a lot of individual attention. But then, with Nigeria's new emphasis on education, we were beginning to get more applicants who had finished secondary education (High School). It was clear that a more advanced course was needed, especially since there were more educated people sitting in the pews. The church needed pastors who could meet the needs of their flocks. And so, with the coming of a fourth teacher, a new diploma course was begun. Candidates for the courses were accepted in alternate years.

With the growth of the student body and the teaching staff, there was also a need for more buildings and facilities. Accordingly, some teachers who had gifts other than teaching found themselves building houses, repairing generators, installing water pumps and so on, while trying to keep up their teaching at the same time. The church also began to draw heavily on our manpower resources, appointing teachers to various committees and executive positions. This was time consuming, but at the same time it did keep teachers in touch with what was happening in the church. For example, as the teacher teaching missions, I was appointed to be the treasurer of the Mission Board.

At the end of the seventies it became clear that a still more advanced course was needed. Many of the pastors were applying to go abroad for further studies, and this was very costly. We therefore began to look for a way to start a degree program. In this we were helped by the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA). Our first requirement was obvious, we needed a faculty capable of teaching at degree level. Therefore we sent some of our teachers abroad for further studies in the fields in which they would be teaching. More buildings were also needed. The Women's School had shared our classrooms, and because they often brought their babies with them, this was rather disturbing. A new building for the Women's School was therefore built in another corner of the compound.

Another big need was for our library to be extended. For this we had to wait until our librarian finished her studies in the States, and had caught up on the backlog of new books. When the books were all catalogued and tallied it appeared that we had only half of the required number. And so we are looking for a way to find another three thousand theology books. With the strict import restrictions in force in Nigeria today this will not be an easy task, unless we receive these books as gifts.

If you have been wondering whether the institution of this theological college was justified, I hope the above information showed you that the College has a function in the Tiv church that could not have been met in any other way. Over half of its present pastors have graduated from this college. It is very doubtful that the facilities in existence before the school began would have produced even half this number of new pastors. The participation by the teaching staff on the various church committees has also been of real help to the church. And finally it is to be hoped that this REFORMED Theological College will not only keep the N.K.S.T. Church true to its heritage, but will also make its distinctive influence felt throughout the West African Christian community.

Rev. Willem Berends, after eight years of teaching at the Reformed Theological College of Nigeria (the Tiv Seminary), is now engaged in language study with a view to pioneer evangelistic work in new areas. He is loaned to the Nigeria work by the Reformed churches of New Zealand. A new teacher will be needed at the seminary. Our Reformed Fellowship is continuing to provide books, as they are requested, for the seminary library. The Tiv seminary has some seventy students and seven teachers, of whom three are missionaries.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Internal Warfare

We as a Christian Reformed Church have been blest beyond many of our fellow Christians. Our ministers are commissioned to bring God's Word in all of its fullness. Our elders have the duty of seeing that this is done. We have Christian education in elementary and high schools, colleges, and seminaries. Missions are high on our list. We have much work to do and must first pray that all things might be done in accordance with God's will. May we ignore the teaching of Scripture, and proceed to work and plan for the ordination of women in church offices?

A Gallop poll taken in 1963 said, "65 percent of Americans believed the Bible was infallible." In 1982, when a survey was again taken, 27 percent believed the Bible infallible. Is this an indication of what is also going on in our churches? The desire to place women in consistory rooms and in pulpits is so strong in some Reformed circles, that the authority of Scripture is being challenged. Read these texts and there are many more. I Corinthians 11:3, "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." I Corinthinas 14:34, "As in all congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the church. They are not allowed to speak but must be in submission, as the law says." I Timothy 2:12, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, she must be silent."

Now some say these texts do not apply to us in the 20th century. Then man decides which fits our situation or which doesn't. The women's liberation movement or the ERA is not taken from Scripture. From anyone who adds thereto, God will take away his share in the tree of life. Our synods need our prayers. We are at a critical time. Let the Scripture be our guide. Let us do what is right before God, and not what seems right in the eyes of man. Unity is a very desirable thing in the church, but it is never to be enjoyed at the expense of Truth. Let us remember what Paul wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit . . . in regard to women in church office.

In His Matchless Name,
Henry Mast,
Volga, S.D. 57071

Who Am I?

Glenn P. Palmer

What is beauty? Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and for me, the beholder was the most powerful man on the earth, King Xerxes or King Ahasuerus, as some people call him. I am his queen. I am modest and I reserve my beauty for the king. When I was ordered by seven eunuchs to display my beauty to the people and the nobles, I refused to come. I did not want to be insulted or disgraced by a drunken king. After all, he had been drinking for seven days and was "in high spirits from the wine." On learning of my refusal, the king was furious and burned with anger. Therefore I was banned from the court and never again permitted to enter into the presence of the king. My name is _____.

● ● ●

I would love to work with my hands, but I cannot see. Thus I sit here begging on Route 5, that is, the Jericho-Jerusalem Road. But what is all that commotion?

"Sir," I shouted, "What is that commotion?"

"That is Jesus, son of the carpenter, Joseph," someone answered.

"Son of Joseph?" I thought. I shouted, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." If I could only see where He was. But the crowd shouted to me to be quiet. Apparently they could not hear what Jesus was saying. That meant that Jesus must be within hearing distance. I redoubled my efforts and shouted at the top of my lungs (for only He could heal me), "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Then, before I knew it I was told that Jesus wanted to see me. I threw down my cloak, and jumped to my feet. Because of my faith, Jesus healed me and now I see. Hallelujah! I immediately followed Jesus. My name is _____.

● ● ●

I am a powerful official who tried to prevent the Jews from rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. I accused the Jews of preparing to rebel against the king. But still the walls went up. Then I "became angry and was greatly incensed." I ridiculed the Jews and my friends taunted them by saying that "if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones." I plotted against the Jews, but Nehemiah prayed and posted a guard, so that we were once again foiled. The wall was up, but the gates were not yet in place. Then I sent a message to ask Nehemiah to meet me on the plains of Ono. Nehemiah refused, and I sent another messenger. Five times I sent messengers, and five times he refused to meet me. (You cannot deny that I was persistent!) When Nehemiah went back to the Persian court, my daughter married into the high priestly family. Ha! And Nehemiah thought that I was beaten. But then Nehemiah returned and my son-in-law was driven away. (He who laughs first, laughs best.) Who am I?

Peer pressure was as prevalent in the Bible as it is today. How many of us when we were children have not made fun of a bald man? "Did he polish his head this morning?" we would snicker. "Old cueball," we would laugh. Fortunately we did not live in the Bible times. Then 42 youths were mauled by two bears because they had called a prophet of God, "Baldhead." Who was the prophet.? ●

Lt. Glenn P. Palmer is stationed in Belgium. His address is USDAO Embassy, APO, NY, NY. 09667