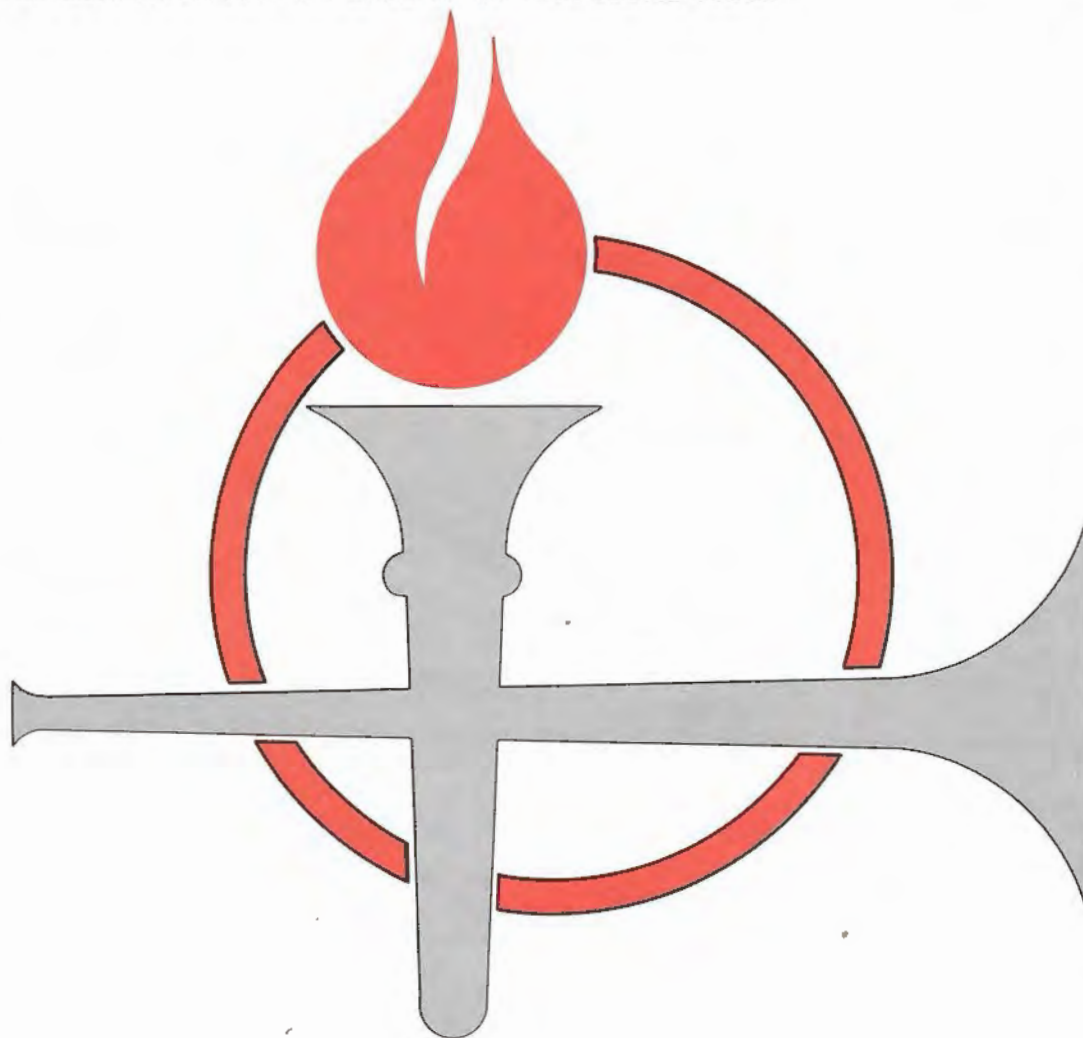


THE OUTLOOK

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

FEBRUARY 1985



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

An Unchristian Requirement

Elco H. Oostendorp

The Banner of September 17, 1984, featured the subject of homosexuality. Some have reacted very negatively to this approach, feeling that this matter is such a grievous sin that it should not even be mentioned among us as Christians. The fact is, however, that there are more members of the church who struggle with homosexual temptations than we want to admit, and it was good that *The Banner* called our attention to our responsibilities in this regard. As the Synod of 1973 said, these people need our understanding and loving concern. Little good will come of simply keeping quiet and wishing the problem and the people who personally have it would just go away.

Sympathy Condoning Sin

There is a real danger on the other hand, that in addressing ourselves to the needs of homosexuals we do so by taking a position that will logically lead to condoning both homosexual orientation and practice. This would seem to be the case in the Gereformeerde Kerken in the Netherlands as their position was defended recently by the two Kampen professors, Dr. Bakker and Dr. Schippers. According to reliable reports even ministers who are openly practicing homosexuals are in good standing and permitted to retain their office in good standing. To be sure Dr. Schippers said they do not approve "the gays of San Francisco" who live promiscuously, but accepting men and women who express their homosexual love in a Christian way is an entirely different matter. The church must be very careful in judging in such cases lest she be guilty of condemning those whom God accepts.

The guest editorial in the above mentioned *Banner* on "Christian Love For Homosexuals" contains much that we need to remember and practice. However, the sentence that is placed in a box and thus underlined as the main message of the article, or at least as the point that calls for special attention, provokes some questions regarding what the writer means and what the implications of this statement are. The sentence reads: "Any church that requires a life of celibacy from some of its members is obliged to create conditions under which that assignment can be pursued."

The Law Is God's

The first thing that strikes me is the reference to the fact that *the church* is said to make such requirements of its

members, but nothing is said of the fundamental basis of such requirement in Scripture. It is true, Mouw has said earlier, "We (i.e. the CRC) have said that all forms of genital intimacy between persons of the same sex are unacceptable from a biblical perspective." From the context one gets the impression that the author has his doubts about the propriety of this conclusion as the biblical teaching. How the Christian Reformed Church could take any other position and remain true to what it confesses about the Seventh Commandment in the Heidelberg Catechism defies understanding. Answer 108 says, "God condemns all unchastity." The proof texts referred to are Leviticus 18:30 and Ephesians 5:3-5. In Leviticus God charges his people not to practice any of the things forbidden in the preceding context, one of which is, "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination" (RSV). So we must conclude that it is not an arbitrary requirement that the church makes of those members who have homosexual tendencies, but in taking this position she is only being true to the Word of the Lord.

Dr. Mouw says that because the church regards homosexual genital intimacy as sinful, this means that, "for all practical purposes many homosexual Christians face the prospect of a life of total sexual abstinence." He goes on to say that this is a difficult assignment and "a burden not to be imposed lightly." This is no doubt true, human sexual drives being what they are. The stress in this connection seems to be on a *life time* of total abstinence. But the temptations and frustrations can be just as great for limited periods of abstinence. By a very similar line of argument people today are condoning pre-marital sex and sex for singles who for a variety of reasons are not able to find a marriage partner. The Bible teaches that sexual activity outside of marriage is fornication (cf. I Cor. 6:12-20). One of the sad realities of life is that that means the burden of abstinence is imposed on many beside homosexuals.

The point that Dr. Mouw makes in this sentence is that the church must be sympathetic with the struggle of the homosexuals in its membership and "create conditions under which that assignment can be pursued with strong communal support." Granting, as he charges, that such support has been all too frequently lacking, our question is, what form must it take? Apparently in the Gereformeerde Kerken many now hold that "one night stands" and promiscuous relationships so common in the gay community cannot be approved because contacts are not motivated by love, but by lust. But

a more permanent relationship between two "lovers," involving many of the commitments associated with marriage, they now regard and defend as legitimate. And it is not enough that such people live together as very intimate friends. Since they are not responsible for their sexual preferences, and sex is a good thing given by our Creator, such relationships should involve so-called genital intimacy. That seemed to be in essence the position defended by the two professors from The Netherlands. On the basis of Scripture, unchastity and immorality are sins whether committed by married or unmarried people. And the Catechism adds that people can be guilty of unchastity even in the married relationship. Even heterosexual marriage is not *automatically* "honorable in all," as the King James Version translated (Hebrews 13:4). Compare also I Thessalonians 4:1-7. Since the kind of sexual activities involved in homosexual relationships are condemned by God in His word as abominations, the fact that they are expressions of "love" and given the sanction of so-called "marriage" or some kind of contract does not make them right.

Giving Real Help

In view of these facts, the church will not help the homosexuals by condoning the practice of homosexual acts. The approach outlined briefly by Douglas A. Houck, based upon his former experience as a practicing homosexual, would seem to be the best way to reach out a helping hand (see *The Banner*, 9/17/84, p. 11).

Finally, the sentence under criticism seems to imply the assumption that there is no possibility for a homosexual to change. "A life of celibacy" does not necessarily mean an entire life-time, but in the context of the rest of the article that is a natural interpretation. In another article in this *Banner* Dr. Melvin Hugen answers the question "Is Change Possible?" affirmatively. He states, "Every year a higher percentage of those seeking sexual therapy shifts from the category of being told 'you will have to live with it' to 'we can help, maybe you find healing'." Scripture and experience of many repentant sinners who found salvation through faith in Christ shows that the grace of God can also free men and women from this sin and bondage. For the church the classic text will be I Corinthians 6:9b-11, "Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, *nor sexual perverts*, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (RSV). As we read that list of sins it is improper for anyone to look down upon any particular group of sinners mentioned, because by nature we all have weaknesses in some area. It is only by grace that we can be saved through faith. The church which imposes the "burden" of celibacy on homosexuals also proclaims the grace of God of which Paul speaks in Titus 3:4-8 when he says, "when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and the renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life. The saying is sure. . . ."

Rev. Oostendorp, who has long provided us with "News and Views," is a retired Christian Reformed minister living at Hudsonville, MI.

THE OUTLOOK

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

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In Memoriam

Louis Praamsma — January 1, 1910 - December 2, 1984

Riemer Praamsma

He sometimes expressed the wish that he had known his father better and yet no one was ever more influenced by his father. Dr. Louis Praamsma left us with some biographical notes. Some of the reading is deeply moving. We see the death room of a 39-year-old teacher, Riemer Praamsma; standing beside him is his 6-year-old son, Louis. The father gives a Bible to his son who has just learned how to read. "Louis, this is your Bible, read me now Psalm 25:4 and 5."

"Make me to know Thy ways, O Lord, teach me Thy paths, Lead me in Thy truth, and teach me, for Thou art the God of my salvation, for Thee I wait all the day long."

Louis never forgot. He stayed true to the humble prayer taught by his dying father. After he suffered a severe heart-attack Louis Praamsma preached farewell in Fruitland on the text "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness" (2 Timothy 4:7, 8). He had stayed on the pathway indicated by his father and now declared, "The greatest thing I can say is that I kept the faith."

What will I say of my father? He was a man of so many contrasts.

A learned man, he yet loved to teach and preach in such a way that everyone understood. On the level with learned professors — yet as children we loved it when, as warplanes flew over Nieuwolda, father Praamsma told stories, simple stories to his children in the basement of a Groninger pastorie. We did not mind these bombardments at all. The children in Wagenborgen loved his Bible stories too and remembered them the next week as father once more hiked the 3 kilometers from Nieuwolda to Wagenborgen. Some call these children retarded, but, to my father, their chaplain, they were special children and they remembered his stories in a special way. Father took his work in Wagenborgen so seriously that he almost made it his career.

Father was a wise and thoughtful man, yet at times very impractical. He found his way through a labyrinth of scientific works, yet could not find his way with a lapel mike on the pulpit.

He was a man of authority, yet never once did he spank his children. Father was kind, and yet how much we respected him!

His friends loved him, and yet he became unpopular, a "persona non grata."

He was never sophisticated, "loved snert and herring", but he knew about the highest wisdom of God.

He was a man who showed others the way, yet got lost driving through the city.

Although he was so human, God called him to be a leader. While this was not always easy for him, he reckoned first of all with his Lord.

The early years of his ministry 1935-1944 were spent in Nieuwolda. Here he could be called a man of the liberation theology, for church people liked it the best when father preached on Judges or Kings and more than subtly hinted at the hour of liberation from German oppression. In those years he also found time to write his doctoral dissertation on Abraham Kuyper and to become a doctor of theology. The last book father wrote in Canada — still to appear in January 1985 — also deals with Abraham Kuyper and is entitled: *Let Christ be King*.*

The middle years in the Netherlands 1944-1948 were years of popularity. Father was minister in Stadskanaal, "Kenoal" as the Groningers called it. He had good friends there, enjoyed the occasional chess game — and found that the Kenoalers were spontaneous and loving people. On the national level he was also respected; Synod meetings and synodical committees coveted his advice.

1948-1958 were the final years in the Netherlands. As he told me himself, many leaders of the Gereformeerde kerk started to exclude him from their associations as father refused to advocate and promote the World Council of Churches which held one of its most famous meetings in Amsterdam in 1948. At the same time father discerned the thunderclouds of a gathering storm and with all his power he warned leaders in the Netherlands to stay faithful to the word of God. In later years professors and leaders would

say "We don't know what is happening in the Netherlands; we are hit by a tornado." Father Praamsma with his keen historical insight and love for the church had foreseen these future developments. To him the tornado was not an unexpected hit, for he, already in the fifties, saw that a climate was developing that would have disastrous moral and theological consequences in the sixties and seventies. A prophet is always somewhat of a suffering servant. In these years my father suffered disappointments when his work as a busy pastor in the city of Groningen and as a leader in the Netherlands was not always appreciated.

Finally the Canadian years, 1958-1984. What a relief it was to father that among the immigrants and pioneers he was no longer considered an arch-conservative or "the last of the Mohicans." But there were disappointments in Canada too. A severe car accident on highway 401 left father lingering at the very threshold of death for several days. That was the end of 1960. After that came the appointment as professor in church history at Calvin Theological Seminary in 1962. This fulfillment of a life-long dream once more turned into a disappointment. After a year he had to quit. His health had deteriorated since 1960 and he suffered a mild depression caused by high blood pressure drugs. Although students had much appreciated him, father returned to the Canadian pastorates of Fruitland and Collingwood. Then, in the seventies, the "beloved child of God", Louis Praamsma, experienced the truth of the earnest words of Scripture, "For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves and chastises every son whom he receives" (Hebrews 12:6). Reoccurring heart-attacks, coronary artery disease and his inability to have bypass surgery created a situation in which father's faith was tried and purified as all his activities were severely curtailed.

His children and friends will miss him for his wisdom, warm personality, love and friendship. His wife, who always gave him encouragement, inspiration and considerate counsel, will miss him the most as she will remember him each day; and the pain will not ease until Louis and Nelly see each other again in glory. At the same time all of us are encouraged by the example of his faith.

He never deviated from the path his father laid out before him.

His writings are a remaining legacy — hardly explored. Throughout the years he kept on writing, article after article and book after book. How could he do so much writing, in sickness and in health, as a busy pastor (knowing all the names of the members of his congregations) and serving such large congregations?! His writings are characterized by lucid clarity and firm authority, as he shows us in a decisive way how to be "ordinary reformed." And you always knew that he stood for every word he wrote down. For example, father Praamsma always warned against (Neo) Pentecostalism, as he knew that many of these extraordinary "special gifts", "healings", etc., found no sounding board in the ordinary Christian experience. He drew the lines from the early church and from the time of the Reformation to our present day and therefore could expose many a modern novelty or fad as a rather old-fashioned heresy and admonish us to remain true to our Christian and Reformed principles and hold on to whatever is valuable in the heritage of the church of the ages.

He showed us most of all the beauty of our heritage. How excited he could get as he read some paragraph in an old history book. And as we read his books about Calvin, the Reformed church, and his last major work covering all of

church history and soon to be translated in English, we cannot help but get excited too about "the community chosen for eternal life out of the entire human race from the beginning of the world to its end."

As the sons of Louis Praamsma we hope to go in his footsteps, to stay on course ("Koers Houden") so that "the Gold may not grow dim." Most of all we pray, "Lord, make me to know Thy ways; teach me Thy paths."

**Note:*

Dr. Praamsma has long been a member and supporter of our Fellowship and writer for our publication, as well as a personal friend. This biographical sketch was kindly provided by a son, Rev. Riemer Praamsma, pastor of the Grandville Avenue Christian Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, MI.

Especially prominent among Dr. L. Praamsma's many writings, we list the following:

Dissertation: Abraham Kuyper Als Kerkhistoricus (Kok, Kampen, 1945).

Het Dwaze Gods (a history of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands since the beginning of the 19th century) (Zomer en Keuning, Wageningen).

Calvijn (a biography of John Calvin) (Zomer en Keuning, Wageningen).

De Belijdenis In De Crisis (Zomer en Keuning, 1952).

Het Water Was Veel Te Diep (imaginary correspondence between himself and a friend in the Netherlands about Dutch church life) (T. Wever, Franeker, 1972).

De Kerk Van Alle Tijden (4-volume church history) (T. Wever, Franeker, 1979). This is translated and being published in English by Paideia Press, Jordan Station, Ontario. Volume 7 of the English translation was the first to appear under the title The Church In The Twentieth Century in 1981.

Dr. Praamsma's last book is to be published in January of 1985, Let Christ Be King (a biography of Abraham Kuyper), by Paideia Press.

Dr. Praamsma was a long time editor of the Groninger Kerkbode. His column was called Korte Kanttekeningen. He also wrote a number of poems.

TELEVISION-ITUS

A strange disease has stricken us;
Its symptoms are quite rare.
Its victims seem to fume and fuss
And have a vacant stare.

The males of mankind gleam and beam
With vigor and delight.
They crow and cackle, blow off steam,
About the latest fight.

The feminine gender misty-eyed
Gawk at the picture screen.
Forgetting dishes should be dried,
They watch a coy love scene.

Of course, there are good programs, yes,
Though few and far between.
This picture box we must confess
Is far from pure and clean.

It's odd — the movie we condemn
As bawdy, vile, unfit.
So Satan moved the movies to
The rooms in which we sit.

Simon C. Walburg

From Missionary Monthly.

Roman Roads in the Sky

A Look at Computer Technology from a Reformed Perspective

Douglas Vos

Long ago at creation, the Almighty God in all His wisdom ordained that the treasure of micro-electronics would remain hidden in the world until the time was right for it to be discovered. Man's history features many such scientific discoveries. Early in the Old Testament days man discovered that by blowing across a reed or by plucking the long strings of a harp he could make music and play sweet-sounding melodies before the Lord. Man early discovered too how to transcribe his spoken words onto paper and later, how to reproduce them for distribution by means of the printing press. More recently man has learned to send his voice and pictures of himself through the airwaves to radio and television receivers.

Our main concern in this article is with the discovery of micro-electronics and what it means for Christians as we approach the end of the twentieth century.

Threatening Obstacles and the Sovereign God

Some Christians may talk as though "science" could ruin or thwart God Almighty's plans. They seem to think man's discoveries might surprise Him as much as they do us and act as though God didn't know that man would one day design computers that are capable of tasks that startle even our widest imaginations. Even Reformed Christians, who are supposed to grasp the doctrines of God's sovereignty and providential rule over the earth sometimes wish that technology would slow down; fearing that when man invented the computer and started experimenting with artificial intelligence, he had gone too far.

What does Scripture teach us about these things? Does God's word tell us anything useful with a view to computer technology and related developments by which we may become men of understanding, able to discern right from wrong, and able to use such new knowledge unto His glory? Indeed it does!

In Psalm 2, the nations are described as "imagining vain things." What are these "vain things"? Verses 2 and 3 further characterize them: "The Kings of the earth . . . and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, 'Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.' " In our modern world not only nations, but also multinational corporations have achieved enormous power. The telecommunications giants

believe they can manipulate governments by million dollar bribes and the big oil sheiks believe they hold the destiny of the Western World in their hands by the twist of a valve. The competition today is to see who can build the fastest and most powerful super-computer and launch more telecommunications satellites into outer space. Some computer experts tell us that their industry will soon be 100 times larger than the largest industries today (such as the oil or automotive producers). When the heathen man gets his hands on these inventions, he begins to think he is all powerful. Men in government may dream of controlling the actions of citizens by tracing the flow of all money through a vast network of computers. Some feel that the total control of mankind by the anti-Christ through a network of computers is a certainty taught by Scripture. That Satan does use wicked men to exploit computer technology is a fact, because Satan uses everything he has in reach for his purposes. But Satan cannot dethrone God. God is still sovereign. He ultimately decides the usefulness and overrules the use of all things in His creation. Fared with the arrogance of enemies, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh!" (Ps. 2:4). He directs all things including the invention and use of computers and the efforts of conspirators to misuse them to achieve His purposes. As Christians we must be alert to ways these new inventions may be used to serve our Lord's Gospel and Kingdom and use them accordingly. What are some of these ways?

Electronic Bibles

Several years ago a lot of publicity was generated when the Zondervan Corporation used computers to compile a concordance for the NIV Bible in weeks instead of the lifetime compiling a concordance formerly might require. The publishing of the NIV with the Thompson chain reference system was also achieved very rapidly with the aid of computer.

Today, the complete NIV Bible is available for anyone to use with an IBM-PC or similar computer. Many doctors, lawyers, and business people, as well as pastors, are using such tools to study the scripture. The KJV text of the Bible has been available for several years for many types of computers. There are, in fact, a number of small software publishing houses springing up specifically for the purpose

of providing the scriptures in computer readable form for the consumer personal computer market. The Word Processor is the KJV Bible for Apple, IBM, CP/M, Commodore, Radio Shack, and other computers. Other software packages featuring the complete text of the Bible are also available, selling under such names as Scripture Scanner, CompuBible, Bible Search, and Verse by Verse. By the time you read this article a new product is supposed to be out from a company called Computer Bibles International that features three English versions of the Bible, as well as the original Greek and Hebrew text. This gives the user the ability to find the usage of any words in Scripture instantly, with their etymology displayed side by side on the screen, or printed out on the computer printer. The cost of these items? A lot less than you might think.

The Pastor's Helper

Of course, churches that are using computers are using them mainly in the traditional tasks of word-processing and accounting, but some churches are exploring new areas as well. For instance, church libraries can be organized very efficiently with the computers quick sorting ability. The computer then becomes the pastor's helper in finding needed material for sermon illustrations, quotable quotes, or exegetical notes.

Instant Prayer Letters from Overseas

Our organization, the Christian Computer Users Association, is working toward the goal of having an international computer network to speed vital information to the people it concerns. Such a computer network would be accessible via home computers such as those available for under \$300 today.

Imagine for a moment, a missionary in North Africa typing his prayer letter into a portable computer on Saturday afternoon. He then compacts the letter to less than 50 percent of its original length. Then, using either the phone or a short-wave radio, he transmits the letter in about 12 seconds to a waiting computer in North America. The North American computer calls up 10 churches (during the night when rates are low) and sends the message to each church. The waiting computers in each church re-expand the letter to its original length, and print out copies to be distributed on Sunday morning. The whole process takes about 15 minutes, and costs around two or three dollars per session. Such an overnight instant prayer letter service, if shared by many missionaries and home churches would only cost between \$500 and \$5,000 per congregation to set up, depending on how sophisticated the local church wanted its equipment to be. This idea can be implemented using technology readily available from your local computer store. Nothing out of the ordinary (technologically speaking) is required. The reason why such a system is not now being used by our churches is:

1. People are not aware the technology exists.
2. North American Christians are not really that concerned with bringing the gospel to every nation.
3. They think of using computer technology mainly "for business."
4. All of the above.

Using Today's "Roman Roads"

During the time of the "pax Romans" the Roman roads

were built for the dominion of the Roman Empire, but they became useful for the apostles in the expanding dominion of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ!

The apostle Paul used all these facilities to advance the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ unto the heathen (Gentiles).

In II Timothy 4:13, we see that Paul relied on a personal courier service for the delivery of some of his most important messages. "When you come . . . bring my scrolls and especially the parchments." How much easier it would be today to transmit the complete document that Paul wanted from one computer to another in less than 3 minutes over the phone lines. This writer is convinced that if Paul were alive today, he would be using a personal computer for word processing of documents and telecommunications to quickly dispatch the vital messages to the churches. If Paul did not use the computer himself, he would have friends such as Tertius supporting his ministry through their technical abilities (Romans 15:22). Our problem today, however, is not a lack of Roman roads or Tertius-type connections, but a lack of people with a vision like Paul's. What we need today are people who will have the vision to develop a technological "blitz" against the entrenched, wicked, humanist hordes that are presently destroying the earth and raping the bride of Christ. We need a technological "blitz" with biblical (Reformed) theology directing and motivating it.

As the strangle-hold of humanism tightens around Western society, those who have traditionally held to "human will or human choice" theology are beginning to question the wisdom of their presuppositions. A neutral position will not do if one is in the midst of a battle. Indeed, the "neutral man" is the one with arrows in his back. The Christian must either serve the sovereign God or serve the "sovereign man." But where can the common man get answers to his basic (really theological) questions?

Several groups are talking about putting the complete writings of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and other Reformed writers on computerized database. They do have an ulterior motive, perhaps, since this is the greatest body of literature with no copyright restrictions, but the fact is that they have actually had high level talks about it. This is an amazing thing: Reformed Christians could have started such a database years ago, but few that this writer has met are even thinking about it. Why? Why can't Reformed Christians wake up and see that this could be a glorious hour? What could a computerized database of biblical theology do for the Church and society? In the hands of God, it could help to transform this nation's Christian colleges and seminaries which presently are often nothing more than institutions of baptized humanism. Judgment begins with the house of God. Unless we are willing to work and pray to reform the church in our day, how can we expect to transform society?

A database of solid Biblical answers to life's most difficult questions is a thing greatly to be desired, but it is not the total solution. Yet we ought to ask ourselves this question: What if our Reformed fathers had neglected the use of the printing press?

For more information on using computers in your local church, write:
The Christian Computer Users Association
1145 Alexander S.E.
Grand Rapids, MI 49507

Mr. Douglas Vos of Grand Rapids is founder of this association, which is dedicated to helping Christians use computer technology to serve Christ's Kingdom.

SOLOMON'S PRAYER AT THE DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE

When David died the people of Israel could look for a big change in the government of the land. The "man after God's own heart" had left the scene. Israel had prospered and had been victorious under the reign of David. What kind of a son will now succeed him to rule over this great people?

A Momentous Occasion

Solomon felt his own inadequacy. When the Lord gave him a choice of various gifts he might have, he chose wisdom. This wisdom is soon revealed when a mother comes to him with another woman, each claiming the same child as her own. It is again clearly shown when the queen of Sheba comes and asks him all manner of difficult questions and he has ready answers. But, perhaps his wisdom is nowhere shown more clearly than in the building and dedication of the temple of God. It is an immense undertaking for that day to build such a building as the temple. All of the most skilled craftsmen in Israel are required for the construction. The overseer of all is Solomon! When the building is now finished there is a great celebration of dedication and Solomon utters a prayer which has become a classic. The two records of this prayer are too long to do them justice but the beauty of the prayer and the evidence of the deep spirituality of the one who is praying will become clear.

For this occasion Solomon has had a platform built which was five cubits (7.5") wide and five cubits long and three cubits high. This was made of either brass or copper and Solomon took his position on this platform. In this way he would be visible to all the people and they would all be able to hear him. He now assumes a posture in prayer of which we have not read earlier in the Biblical account. He *kneels* as he prays and spreads out his hands to the heavens. What a sight! The ruler of the people is going to lead the whole nation in prayer! The ruler is on his knees before One who is the great Ruler of the universe (II Cron. 6:13)! The temple will be a delight to the children of Israel for many years and the impressive ceremony at its dedication will linger with them as long as they live.

The Address

There will be seven distinct petitions in this prayer of Solomon. However, before one petition is uttered he extols the greatness of the God to Whom he is praying. There is no God to be found anywhere who may be compared to the God of Israel. There is no other God. The heathen may think that their deities will be able to help them in certain situations, but their hopes are futile. The greatness of Israel's God is seen in the facts that He has made all things and that He keeps covenant! No other God ever makes a covenant with the people whom he rules. Israel's God does make covenant. He keeps His promises and shows lovingkindness. This is a God who enters into communion with His people. Solomon mentions the fact that God has been faithful to the promise which He made to his father David. And, at this point in the history of Israel, he prays that all the promises made to David may go into effect. The Lord had promised David that his would be a dynasty, i.e., his children should

sit on the throne of Israel through generations if they would fear Him and keep His commandments. Solomon here prays for the faithfulness of all of his own posterity. Only if they are faithful will they rule.

But, who is Solomon and what is it which he has built that he should think that Jehovah, the God of Israel, will dwell with men? Will God dwell on the earth? The heavens, Hebrew — heaven of heavens, because this language has no comparative or superlative degree — cannot contain Him! He is too great to be limited to any created place. How then shall this house which Solomon has built house Him? Suddenly this great and beautiful temple becomes very small and insignificant in comparison with the One for Whom it is built. However, He has promised that His name would dwell there. Oh, let God now hear the prayer of His servant! Also when the whole people of Israel come to this place to offer their prayers, Lord hear them. Now is introduced the refrain which we will hear throughout this prayer: hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling place; and when Thou hearest, forgive. In this refrain he speaks of the riches of the experience of faith. With Him hearing is forgiving and forgiving is hearing.

Now we come to the seven petitions which Solomon speaks. He is here following an example clearly taught us by our Lord Jesus Christ in the perfect prayer. There is room for petitions, but first we are to realize to Whom we come and we must also realize our own limitations.

Removal of Sin

The first petition which Solomon utters is rather difficult to understand. He speaks of a situation in which a man has sinned but the sin cannot be proved. He does not say what manner of sin it is because that is immaterial to what he has in mind. Even though men cannot prove the sin which has been committed by this "someone," God does know. Such an individual must then come to the altar of God. He must there confess his sin *so that the sin does not rest on the whole people!* God will then judge the one who has committed the sin and the taint of sin which exists as long as the real sinner is not known will be removed from the whole people. So shall sin be done away and the righteous will not suffer for the unrighteous.

A Defeated People

In the second petition the king pleads with his God concerning his people when they are defeated by enemies. The many difficulties which arise out of this state of affairs are, of course, well known. Whenever a people is defeated, great suffering comes upon them. There is suffering in every part of life. They were defeated because they had sinned against God! Otherwise they could not be defeated in this "theocracy"! But, when a segment of the people then turn to the temple and seek the name of God and ask forgiveness, may He bring each one back to the land he has received in his family inheritance. If God's people only repent!

Drought

In the land of Palestine the people were totally dependent on the "former" and the "latter" rains in order that there might be crops. Israel did not have a Nile river which made the whole land fruitful. If the rains do not come — because the people have sinned — the livelihood of the majority of the people will be affected at once. Solomon does not attribute the lack of rain to mere natural phenomena, but to the sins

There is a more recent version of this "you can't really read the Bible without the experts" policy around now. It uses terms such as "time-conditioned," which means that the Bible, like all else, arose in a certain historical situation, and this situation must be understood in order that we may really understand what it says. That has been covered in this journal many times over, and regular readers know that it is not the position of *OUTLOOK* to endorse this kind of thing. We believe that Scriptural truth is eternal. We are happy to use anything that will aid Bible understanding, but we will not be governed by any other principle than the perspicuity of Scripture. Its message, we believe, is indeed plain to the understanding.

The importance of all this is evident when we consider the fact that while the Scripture says that deacons, like elders, ought to be men (I Tim. 3), today all kinds of churches say they may, including our denomination, also be women. When the "ordinary church member" looks puzzled, maybe even protests, he gets a synodical study committee which, in part, will say:

What was Paul trying to say to the first-century Christians in Ephesus by his statement to Timothy that he was not permitting a woman "to teach or to have authority over men?" To answer this, we must seek to learn what we can about the circumstances and problems of the Christian community in Ephesus (Acts of Synod, 1984, p. 361).

In brief but scholarly fashion Vander Goot deals with the problems indicated above. He does this in some 108 pages under the title placed over this section. His position is stated at the outset. It reads:

The main contention of this essay is that prior to and outside of the scientific study of the Bible in the Christian community of faith, interpretation is already there and that this existing phenomenon of interpretation and immediate confessional response to the Bible is what should fund the theoretical enterprise of theology and biblical studies.

This little book will not put all questions to rest, of course. Anything like this is subject to pause and reflection as well as some dispute. But the thrust and the competence of this effort can only comfort those who share Prof. Vander Goot's respect and love for the sacred Scriptures as God's special revelation.

150th ANNIVERSARY OF A REFORMATION

By now we all know that it was 150 years ago (Oct. 14, 1834) that some 137 believers signed an Act of Secession or Return in a small place named Ulrum in a small country named the Netherlands. It is not easy, however, to convince long-time residents of North America (or Australia, New Zealand and South Africa) that their spiritual rootage is found in this decision of these few people.

The Netherlands has more than one good Christian daily (thanks to Abraham Kuyper?), and one of these is the *Reformatisch Dagblad* (Reformational Daily). Thanks to Mr. Simon Bax, church editor for this paper, we were given a copy of its special supplement commemorating (not celebrating!) the Secession of 1834. It is a typographical gem, full of pictures of people and places connected with this movement and full of very good articles dealing with the significance and results of this reformation of the Lord's church.

All who know anything about the Secession of 1834 know that it resulted in all kinds of dispute and disagreement. There was difference of opinion within the movement between those who thought it right to stay in the official church, and those who thought God willed that they leave. That difference still exists. A rather vigorous group of more than 400,000 exists within the Hervormde Kerk (sometimes known among us, inaccurately, as "the state church") as a conservative, confessional witness to what they believe is properly confessed as the Truth. They are organized into a kind of society (the *Gereformeerde Bond*, Reformed Alliance), and they have been able to maintain their orthodox character.

Those who followed De Cock, Scholte (founder of Pella, Ia.), Brummelkamp, Gazelle Meerburg, and Van Velzen out of the church have split into several different communions. An interesting feature in the special supplement shows pictures of twelve church buildings in one place, Urk, all used by conservative Reformed congregations belonging to different denominations.

Some have concluded from this that the motives of the seceders were obviously faulty and impure. To Prof. W. van't Spijker, teacher at the *Christelijke Gereformeerde* seminary in Apeldoorn, was assigned the task of saying a good word for the seceders. In his article he pleads that these young ministers (all but one in his first charge!), did intend the welfare of the church. I enjoyed these lines:

(Our translation)

... the movement as such was directed toward restoration of the church. The seceders were convinced, as were their Reformed fathers, the Reformers, that it pleases God to use the church in the ministry of grace.

Church and grace belong together. The offices and sacraments exist for the sake of grace. For that reason the seceders sought restoration of the church not as an end in itself. They sought church restoration in the interest of the continuation of God's work of grace. And grace for them was nothing else than sovereign grace. Its confession they found stated in the Canons of Dordt...

The official church in their day had done away with the Canons. The official theology had attempted with all kinds of arguments to deny the actual official authority of that creed. But the seceders clung fast to Dordt and her confession, not merely because they endorsed the letter of this confession, but because they respected its essential intent, which was nothing else than a full recognition of the totality of God's grace of sovereign election in Christ.

Whenever we now ask, "Why did a break come between the ruling church and its prevailing theology and the Secessions we can only answer that people saw once again the awesome break between God and sinful man, a break no longer honored or preached by that church or its official theology. The Secession responded to a longing again to confess the free grace of God as the sole source of our salvation.

It seems to me that we could well afford to read and re-read the lessons of this crucial moment in the history of our own Reformed tradition!

Note:

Rev. John H. Piersma, who has consented to provide us with "Comment and Opinion," is a retired Christian Reformed minister and long-time member of our Fellowship board. He lives in Lansing, IL.

MEDITATION

The Censer and Aaron's Blossoming Rod

John Blankespoor

"Aaron offered incense and made a tonement for them" (Num. 16:47). "The next day Moses entered the Tent of Testimony, and saw that Aaron's staff, which represented the house of Levi, had not only sprouted but had budded, blossomed and produced almonds" (Num. 17:8).

The Old Testament is full of revelations of God's mercy for His sinful people. In the history here recorded, we find gems of this beautiful Gospel.

The Israelites were in the wilderness, on the way to Canaan. They had already been on the road for several years. The Lord had cared for them in every way according to the promises given them. But they were not a happy and contented people. They complained and murmured again and again, against the Lord and against Moses and Aaron. Daily the Lord had given them fresh manna from heaven. At another time He had given them quails for meat. At still another time He had performed the miracle of bringing forth abundance of fresh water out of a rock. Although all of these miracles were done before their eyes, they still complained saying at times that they wished that the Lord would have left them in Egypt.

The history of these people is characterized by complaints and more complaints!

We ought to ask ourselves a few questions in the light of this history and the subsequent great displeasure of the Lord with Israel. How would we react to having the same food three times per day, for breakfast, noon lunch and evening dinner (though prepared in different ways) for weeks, months and even years? In spite of having *much more* variety than those people had, we often indulge in complaints and gripes. I have never worked in a factory, but I am told by people who do that in such places there is constant murmuring and dissatisfaction. While nothing may get more criticism than the weather, income taxes, and economic conditions also get their share. Many farmers are notorious complainers, especially in the spring time. It's either too dry or too wet, the

prices are too low and they also surely expect a poor crop. God's people are not free from these sins of habitual complaining.

In Numbers 16 we read about Korah, Dathan and Abiram, three leaders of a rebellion in Israel against the leadership of Moses and Aaron. They maintained that the whole community was holy and didn't need Moses and Aaron. (Remember that the Lord had appointed these two to offices, and that Aaron, from the tribe of Levi, was a type of Christ who was to come.) We know what happened to the leaders of revolt because of their great sin. The Lord caused the ground under them to split open, and they went down alive into this dark grave, with their families, children and all their belongings. One can imagine the anguished cries of these people as they went down. Then the earth closed again as it was before.

The next day the Lord sent fire down from heaven to destroy the 250 other leading men, who had sided with Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Making matters still worse, the next day the *whole congregation* of Israel gathered against Moses and Aaron, accusing them of having killed these people *of the Lord*. This incurred God's fierce anger. He told Moses and Aaron to separate themselves from the people, and He would completely destroy them. Immediately the people began to die from a plague. Moses apparently felt that this was not a time for him to ask God to stop the plague lest the nations have reason to reflect upon the work of God as having been a failure. Neither could Moses and Aaron plead that only a few had been guilty, for all rebelled. It was a crisis. What could Moses do? There was only one thing left. Immediately he instructed Aaron to take the censer (a cup-like vessel), fill it with incense and some coals of fire (from the altar, to make the incense burn) and present it for atonement in the Holy Place before the face of God. Immediately the plague stopped. Thus Moses and Aaron must

act in the *office* of the priesthood to save the people by making this atonement. In this action they point to the Christ to come.

The only hope for grumbling Israelites, as for grumbling Christians, is the blood of Jesus Christ. How beautiful is God's forgiving grace! Never before was the Gospel so preached in the Old Testament. All those who trust in that atonement are promised salvation.

The truth which God taught His people was not exhibited only in judgment. The leaders of each tribe had to take rods and write their names on them. Aaron, of the tribe of Levi, was also instructed to do this. These rods, dead sticks of wood, had to be placed before the Lord, before the ark in the Holy Place of the tabernacle. The next day Moses was told to take them out again. To the people's great surprise, the rod of Aaron had budded, blossomed and produced ripe almonds, the first fruits in the spring of the year in the land of Israel. What did this tell these people? First of all, God told them that salvation would be given only in and through Aaron, who was a type of the coming Christ. Korah, Dathan and Abiram had said that all the people were holy: They didn't need a savior, they could save themselves. God here said very plainly that deliverance would be only through Aaron, with the censer of incense, and the blossoming rod. Christ symbolized by Aaron, the priest, is the only way, the truth and the life. There is no other way under heaven by which men can be saved. Notice also that Aaron's rod in itself was no different than the rest of them. They were all equally dead. Who expects almonds to grow on a dead stick? The Lord, by miraculous power and grace, made Aaron's rod alive and productive. Aaron could take no credit for himself. Only God's grace, Jesus Christ, in His love, grace and power, should receive all the credit. The fact that only Aaron's rod blossomed also indicates God's sovereign choice.

Typically in the Old Testament, but really in the New Testament, the rod bursts into branches, blossoms and much fruit upon the resurrection of Christ and the Holy Spirit's Pentecostal coming.

Symbolized in the censer of incense and atonement is the payment of Jesus Christ for the sins of His people. This is called our justification. And we see in the blossoming rod, the power of the living Christ shown on Pentecost, the power of a new life in the fear of God. This is called sanctification. Thus the story demonstrates the grace of God toward these rebellious people.

How can rebellious and grumbling church people (in the Old and New Testament) be saved? Only by believing in this Christ and His forgiving grace and by living the new life by the Holy Spirit.

How proper it is for us, often grumbling and murmuring Christians, to ask for that forgiving grace. As forgiven sinners, we must then listen to Paul when he tells us to do all things without grumbling and complaining (Phil 2). And we must learn from him when he says, "I have learned to be content, whatever the circumstances" (Phil. 4). In ourselves we are as dead as the rod of Aaron was. Only by faith in this living Christ, and by receiving His Spirit can we begin to bring forth fruits of life that are pleasing to our God.

With the grumbling, impenitent Israelites God was greatly displeased. With sinners who seek forgiveness in Christ and try to live new lives out of His grace, God is greatly pleased.

Being Separated Unto GOD

Paul E. Hooley

The Lord is calling us to "Go up to Bethel and to build an altar there to God." We will answer in the affirmative. Bethel is a high and holy place and a spiritual battle ground. Trusting Him, His Spirit, and His infallible Word, the Bible, we intend to move with Him when the Spirit says move.

The Lord through His Spirit and God's written Word is helping us to keep our eyes upon Jesus and to walk straight before Him and in His order of submission. Thus we did not and do not take the leftward turn with liberal leadership of any denomination, conference district, or congregation to support or to give admiration to coercive socialistic systems conjured up by humanistic philosophies. We cannot give support to that kind of a so-called "peace witness." Because of loyalty to the Lord Jesus we would choose to be in His service and support the outreach of His Kingdom, hoping also that our lives are and will be a blessing to the nations of which we are a part.

As Jesus accepted the Creation account, Moses and the Pentateuch, as true and historical, so do we. The Genesis record describes the creation of kinds of animals reproducing after their kind and the creation of mankind from the earth but without subhuman ancestry and in the image of God. So we accept this record as divinely inspired and do find that the facts of science fit into a creation model that is in complete harmony with the Genesis record better than they fit into any evolutionary model conjured up by the humanists of any period of time including our own. We do highly prize our Godly heritage of being created in His image and reject the deception and indignity of the idea propagated by the humanists that mankind had a subhuman animal ancestry. We are aware of the fact that most state and church-sponsored colleges and universities teach evolution as a fact, and we deplore this deception. We object to having our financial support in our local congregation going to that kind of institution of higher learning. Since human life was created in the image of God, we believe human life to have a sanctity, honor and respect above subhuman animals. Thus in reference to human life, from conception to the end of life on earth, we reject the permissiveness about sex, abortion, and euthanasia that is found in both the secular society and in the liberal elements of many denominations. Our Lord calls us to high standards.

The Lord through His Spirit and His written Word is calling us to a higher respect for the marriage relationship. Our

Lord ordained it to be one man with one woman for life. Our Lord referred to the creation of mankind and said that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and said, "For this cause (or reason) a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one. Therefore, what God hath joined together let not man separate." The apostle Paul's writings support this (Rom. 7:1-6 and I Cor. 7:8-11). True relationship with the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit provides the inner springs of living water and enables the unmarried to live chaste lives as singles (Rom. 6:14, John 4:1-42 and 8:1-11).

The Lord restored the standing of women as spiritual beings to that of men as spiritual beings before the triune God. However, by His choice of the twelve apostles and the choice of those sent out to represent and extend His kingdom He recognized the divine order of authority later described by the apostle Paul in I Cor. 11:2-16; Eph. 5:21-33; Col. 3:18, 19; I Tim. 2:11-15; and by Peter in I Peter 3:1.

Jesus shared the precious teachings of His mission, His kingdom, and His peace and caring love with women as well as men and both were used effectively in the church from its very beginning. The faithful church during any period of the church age has observed the principles of the kingdom, one of which is to place the leadership offices upon the shoulders of faithful men in the church. Faithful officers of the church truly are servants, however, even as servants they have grave responsibilities to hold to the true doctrine once delivered unto the saints and to give the leadership in the preaching of the Gospel to all the world.

When the feminist movement hit America, it was promoted by wicked women who were dedicated to convert America from Christianity to humanism and to a goal of making sexual promiscuity and abortion an accepted way of life in America. They were also dedicated to the task of destroying all of Christ's kingdom principles including the stability of the family. They have promoted divorce and remarriage and condoned homosexuality and lesbianism and fought to help these alternatives to Christian marriage become accepted patterns of life in America.

Some women of many denominations have allowed themselves to be swept along with the wicked tide and have brought elements of sympathy for the wickedness and destruction described above. Church leaders who were poorly grounded in the faith have moved in sympathy with them to compromise the kingdom principle of God's order of authority both in the home and in the church.

This is bringing deplorable devastation [sic] and painful frustration to many who are trying to be faithful to the Lord, His Word and the church which is unfaithful to them by imposing feminist leadership upon them.

Since the Lord is calling us to "go up to Bethel" we want to march to His orders and keep our eyes upon Him and let our sisters in our fellowship enjoy equality in worship and service while responsible brothers carry leadership responsibilities.

Paul E. Hooley, M.D., is the founder of Oakhill Medical Associates, West Liberty, OH.

Reprinted, with permission, from the Nov.-Dec., 1984, Guidelines for Today. This is a conservative Mennonite journal published at Johnstown, PA. Its editor, Rev. Sanford G. Shelter, has commented on the fact that although our traditions differ substantially, we as Bible-believing Christians in today's world, observe some remarkable similarities in our major church problems. Our readers may observe some of these similarities in this article.

"USEFUL IDIOTS"

Juan S. Boonstra

The Vatican's long-awaited report on "Liberation Theology" will make many clap for joy. Others will hide in shame and, very likely, attempt to modify their views. It's not easy for members of the church hierarchy openly to oppose the clear statements of the Pope. An editorial page of *The Wall Street Journal* reflects most of the printed media. It says, "The publication of this document means that communist politicians and guerrillas will now have to come up with a new gimmick to sell themselves to civilized world society."

Politicians and guerrillas, yes. But what of priests and religious organizations, and even unsuspecting believers?

In the Country

For many decades, Marxists in Latin America have successfully employed a very refined political theory. It is called the "useful idiot" policy. It means that everything and anything can be used to climb the ladders of power. If patriotism fires the imagination of the masses, then patriotism must be emphasized. If some politician is useful for reaching the objectives of the party, he will be allured into serving the cause.

This theory of the "useful idiot" is still very much in force. It has been part of the development designated as "liberation theology." The Gospel speaks quite forcefully of love for the poor. It is not strange, therefore, when guerrillas are represented as native movements to correct oppression and eliminate injustice. Christians who have those same objectives easily fall into the trap of "useful idiots."

But "useful idiots" take other forms. Just before scheduled elections in Nicaragua, many visitors came to the country. Most of these came from places where the Christian message has been a traditional leaven of social consciousness.

Visitors go to Nicaragua because they are fascinated by the news from that land. They go to Nicaragua because they have some sort of unexplained sympathy for the government there.

In some cases, these visitors, observers, tourists, and interested travelers become "useful idiots."

The Marxist government, apparently, is granting instant citizenship to all these sympathetic visitors. As citizens, they will be able to vote in the elections which the rest of the world has demanded Nicaragua have. Opposition newspapers in Managua are very critical of what they call "instant citizenry."

Out of the Country

An organization named International Cooperation for Development and Solidarity is based in Brussels, Belgium. Thirteen Roman Catholic entities contribute to this or participate in one way or another. They come mostly from the developed nations of Europe. This organization boasts an investment of more than 250 million dollars in about 6,000 projects. It recently distributed a very profuse report about conditions in several countries in Central America. The report made the rounds of many countries and many churches long before the people themselves had an opportunity to examine it and pass judgment on its accuracy.

The ICDS is raising large amounts of money in religious services. That is, they are "utilizing young people and children who innocently run through the streets and visit homes with their ringing kettles." The reports speak glowingly of liberation movements, people's churches, and leftist governments.

The tragedy is that more than six months passed before officials in Central America even saw the document for themselves. The archbishop of San Salvador unconditionally stated, "It was totally false." We see how a highly respected organization in Europe had fallen into the trap of the "useful idiot."

Documentation has been released in recent months which demonstrates that there are "useful idiots" in places other than Nicaragua. They come from practically all walks of life, denominations, and political allegiances. An effort apparently is being made to promote Nicaragua, to exalt the government there, and to raise levels of sympathy everywhere. Funds are being raised for all types of projects by people working with the government of the country. It is astonishing to see an almost page-by-page repetition of what happened in Cuba after 1958, when Fidel Castro came to power. Traditional denominations in the United States — such as the Church of Christ, some Methodist and Presbyterian bodies — have entered the field of "useful idiots." The scheme basically works in two ways. One is to have individuals from the United States make "official" visits to Nicaragua. They become the guests of the government and officials. Rather efficiently, they proceed to pick up statistics, visit showplaces, hear about tragedies of the past and promises of the future.

Convinced that "things are far better today than under the previous regime," these visitors return to their home churches as crusaders for the great cause of revolutionary Marxism. Members of churches who have not been to Nicaragua are easily convinced of their responsibility and their privilege to participate in what is painted as an attempt to Christianize an entire country.

The other route being followed is the formation of organizations in Nicaragua. These organizations have appealing names and purposes. A group may have the lofty goal of bringing down illiteracy — in itself a praiseworthy objective in a place where the majority of people cannot read or write. Funds are requested and raised in U.S. or Canadian churches for such a project.

Privileged Christians in North America feel good that they are helping helpless brothers. The organizations indeed teach literacy. However, they use textbooks or materials which have been designed primarily as Marxist propaganda tools. They condemn such things as churches, a simple faith, and the institutions of a capitalistic society.

Do the thousands of people who contribute to this activity in Nicaragua realize the purpose behind it all? Do they realize that they are being manipulated as "useful idiots"?

To be an idiot for the sake of Christ may be a biblical concept. But in the political area, we at least should have the benefit of knowing exactly what we are doing.

Rev. Juan S. Boonstra is minister of Spanish broadcasting of the Back to God Hour, Palos Heights, IL.

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CORRECTION

The title of View Points on page 19 of the January 1985 OUTLOOK by J. Tuininga was omitted in error. It is "When the Church Ignores the Bible."

PRAYER OF THANKS

I want to thank You, Lord,
For friends both far and near;
For fellowship with loved ones
So precious and so dear.

I want to thank You, Lord,
For saving me from sin;
So many live in darkness
You chose to let me in.

I want to thank You, Lord,
For guiding me each day;
For giving me Your Spirit
To lead me on life's way.

I want to thank You, Lord,
For talents given me;
For open doors of service
To serve You faithfully.

I want to thank You, Lord,
For all that You have given;
For Your great words of promise
And future hope of heaven.

I want to thank You, Lord,
For trials sent my way;
For blessings in the darkness —
I thank You, Lord, today.

Annetta Jansen
Dorr, Michigan

Prayer

Henry Vander Vam

Lesson 11 Gen. 28:18-22, Judges 6:36-40

TESTING GOD IN PRAYER

Who is able to say how often we test our God in our prayers? We do so again and again. We often pray when there is real need, promising that, if the Lord will help us out of this need, we will do this and that. When a person is very sick he can easily pray that he will devote the rest of his life to the service of God if God will only spare his life. This is a dangerous practice. If God will do so... then we will do thus! What if God doesn't do that which was desired of Him? Even then we are still called to be faithful.

God's Progressive Self-Revelation

When we look at the way in which some of the saints of the Old Testament times prayed to their God we must also avoid the danger of attributing to them the same light which the New Testament believers share. This is not fair and it is also a misuse of the Scriptures. We have to be careful in denouncing an Old Testament saint with a word from the New Testament. Yet, we must not look at the various experiences of the Old Testament saints as "normal happenings" either when their God had made Himself clearly known to them. We must compare Scripture with Scripture, but this must also be done in the right way. The Scriptures teach us too by the historical happenings in Old Testament times.

Jacob's Ladder Dream

Genesis 28 follows upon the deceit which Jacob practiced on his brother Esau and on his father Isaac. Because of his misdeeds, which had such enormous effects on the future, he had to flee for his life. He can plausibly do so under the guise of seeking a wife from the people of his mother rather than from the neighboring people of his immediate family. The man is to be pitied as he leaves his home and sets out on the long journey to Paddan-aram. Seemingly he does not even trust going into the city of Luz for the night, but sleeps in the open field and has a stone for a pillow. The amenities of home are gone.

During the night he spends in the field, a remarkable thing happens. He dreams of a ladder reaching to heaven with the

angels of God ascending and descending on it. This dream is still so vivid in his memory the next morning that he desires to memorialize this experience in some way. The stone which has served as his pillow during the past night is now set up as a pillar. This is not for the purpose of making it a fetish which is to be worshipped! Some have read all manner of things into this account. He pours oil upon this stone, thereby consecrating this place, and calls it "Bethel," meaning "the house of God." This name seems to be intended only for the place where Jacob had slept, but later it was also the name of the neighboring city whose former name was "Luz." When Jacob realizes the significance of the things which have happened here the previous night, he says, "How dreadful is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." This language shows that he has no evil intent in the erection of this stone nor with the pouring of the oil upon it. He is deeply under the influence of the presence of his God.

His Promise

Now he makes a promise to his God. What is wrong with that? Should we not always make our vows unto our God? But notice the content of his promise. God had spoken to him before (vs. 13-14) and had made it very clear that He was the God of his fathers and would also be his God. He would give him the whole land where he now slept as an alien! Is there now doubt in Jacob's mind? "If God will be with me!" God is to be taken at His word! There should not be a shred of doubt that this God will be with him and will prosper him above all that he has ever dreamed! God had told him that He would do great things for him. His seed would be so numerous that it would fill that whole country. He and his descendants would be a blessing to all the people of the earth. God would surely bring him back safely.

What does Jacob do now? He says that if God will give him the *small* things such as food, clothing, safety and a return, *then* "the Lord will be my God!" He was his God since he was born! May he now question whether God will actually do those things which He had promised Jacob just that night? Then this stone shall be the house of God. Then he will give God a tenth of all that He had given to Jacob! Jacob knew of the necessity of the tithe. This was already

mentioned in the days of his grandfather, Abraham (Gen. 14:20). Regardless of what God does, Jacob owes Him the tenth of all that he has!

When we properly compare Scripture with Scripture, we see that Jacob is "walking on thin ice." He may not test God! He is to take God at His word. When Jacob returns from Paddan-aram as a fabulously rich man, he is frightened by hearing that Esau comes to meet him with 400 armed men. Will he lose everything he has and even his life and the lives of his family? No, the Lord again led him out of all his troubles.

A Neglected Vow

Ten years after his return to his homeland God must remind him to go back to Bethel and keep the vow he had made there 30 years ago (Gen. 35:1-7)! How ashamed Jacob must feel now. Thirty years ago he wondered whether he could really depend on the word which God had spoken to him — however, that was not the problem — the problem was, could the Lord depend on Jacob's vow? God is not to be doubted, for He has proved Himself over and over in the life of every believer. But, where does the believer stand in relation to his God? "If God will do this" — He will! "Then I will do that" — will you? Many who have vowed that they would give their lives in service to their God if He would only heal them of the present disease, have fallen into the old manner of life as soon as He had healed them — as soon as He had kept His word. Hannah also made a vow to her God. If He would give her her heart's desire that she might have a son, she would dedicate him to the divine service. She kept her vow! Jacob must be shamed into keeping his vow and must then first purge his family of all the heathen baggage which his wives and children had accumulated. Thus humbled he goes to Bethel!

Jacob was in many respects a great man. The author of the book of Hebrews counts him among the heroes of faith when he gave his blessing to his children and grandchildren. He was sure that God would keep His word which He had spoken to him that his seed would inherit this entire land. Even though the man had to die in a foreign land, Egypt, he was still certain that God would keep His word. Then he stood on the heights. At Bethel he did not reveal that same confidence. This was human, but not to be imitated by God's people.

Gideon's Calling

Like Jacob, Gideon is also mentioned in the catalog on the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. He too was a man who would do great things for the people of God. He would win a great victory with very few people. What faith it took to proceed against the overwhelming host of the Midianites with only 300 men! But, this man too had times of wavering in his spiritual life. One of those times is recorded in the passage at the head of this lesson. He does very much the same thing which Jacob had done some years earlier. This should not surprise us. Even the heroes of faith plainly show that they and we are saved by grace alone and that it is not our works which save us.

Because of the faithlessness of Israel, the people were again in sorry straits in the days of Gideon. The Midianites did not allow them to eat the fruit of their own land but took it for themselves. Stealthily the people, including Gideon, would thresh and hide some of the grain so that they might have food. But, when the people of Israel cry unto the Lord, He always hears them. He sent an angel to talk to Gideon.

This man has such humility that he cannot understand that the Lord will save Israel by his hand. When Gideon returns to the place where he has met the angel he comes with food — an entire meal, which was scarce — as a present to the angel. Then the angel already shows him a sign. The entire meal is consumed when the angel touches it with his staff. Now Gideon must break down the altars to Baal and Ashera. The trouble with Israel did not all come from the outside — they themselves were guilty of idolatry. Gideon does as he is commanded and his father shows great wisdom and courage when the men of the city seek Gideon's life.

Craving Extra Assurance

It has now been made clear to Gideon that God will save Israel by his hand. But, he still feels a need of more proof! "This generation," too, "asks for signs." God has spoken clearly and has already done mighty works, but more are asked. He will put a fleece, the wool of one animal while it is all intact, on the threshing floor. If everything is dry in the morning but the fleece is wet with dew, he will know that God is sending him. Strange as it may sound, the Lord agrees to this kind of test. In the morning everything else is dry and the fleece is soaked so that he has a whole container full of water. Does this satisfy him? No, when one once begins to journey on this pathway he will not be persuaded easily. The Lord has answered him exactly the way he has wished, but he wants one more proof. This one will be the reverse of the previous test and it will also be more "difficult" (?). Let the fleece be dry and everything else soaked with dew in the morning. This is more "difficult" because a fleece of wool would naturally attract moisture. Again the Lord does not turn from him nor rebuke him, but he finds everything the way he has asked for it the next morning. Only the fleece is dry. Everything else is wet.

The kind of requests which Gideon makes of God do not spring from a clear and active faith. At best, they spring from *fear*. Our faith is tested as to whether we will take God at His word at all times. His word often goes contrary to that which seems right in our eyes. Faith, however, does not ask for further signs. It believes and obeys!

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees of His day when they asked for signs. Was His word not clear enough? These would get only the sign of the prophet Jonah! If they cannot believe His word, they will have to believe those events which go beyond all human understanding. They will have to believe in His death and resurrection! They will have to believe that which is a stumbling block to the Jew and foolishness to the Greek *for their salvation!*

Questions for Discussion

1. Was it proper for Jacob to raise a stone as a memorial and to pour oil on it for consecration? Give reasons for your answer.
2. May we ever "demand" that God do certain things before we will do what is asked of us? Did Jacob do that?
3. Why is it that God must almost "drag" Jacob back to Bethel? Cf. Gen. 35:1-7.
4. Is there more reason for Gideon to seek a sign than for Jacob? Why or why not? Had things been made as clear to Gideon as they were to Jacob?
5. Why, do you think, the Lord agrees to go along with the signs which these two saints of God ask of Him? Does this contradict Jesus' answer to the Pharisees concerning this matter? Why or why not?

Comment and Opinion

John H. Piersma

THE PROBLEM OF POLARIZATION IN THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

This is the title of one of the most important articles to appear in a Reformed periodical in the last while. Especially for the kind of people who read *OUTLOOK*.

The author is Prof. John Bolt of Redeemer College, Burlington, Ontario. The article appeared in the Oct. 22, 1984 issue of *Christian Renewal*. I understand that it was published as well in another Canada-based journal, *Calvinist Contact*.

Prof. Bolt is convinced that "polarization is a fact" in the CRC, and that "it is high time that our Reformed community comes to terms with the significant differences in its midst and learn to deal with these differences in a mature manner." Issues which divide are listed as women in ecclesiastical office, nuclear weapons, capitalism, socialism and poverty, abortion and the Council of Christian Reformed Churches in Canada. To these, others might be added (membership in the World Council of Churches, reunion of the CRC and the Reformed Church of America, the doctrines of Scriptural authority and divine predestination, the proper observance of the Lord's Day, the authority of the creeds and the church order, etc.).

For one who wishes to be "confessional" (honest in commitment to the creeds of the CRC in terms of the Form of Subscription, and that literally) much of Bolt's article is encouraging. I am tempted to offer a run-down on the several points skillfully and effectively made in this piece, but this would be difficult to accomplish fairly (and conservatives have to be doubly careful on that score!)

Maybe the best thing to do is to record a few reactions, hoping that this will provoke more good discussion of this problem, and even stimulate some to read the entire article for themselves (maybe *OUTLOOK* ought to reprint it?).

1. Isn't it rather naive to suggest that current tensions in the CRC are perhaps no more than "petty dissensions," which will happily disappear in an atmosphere of Christian forbearance, tolerance and kindness? For example: Are the 1984 women in ecclesiastical office decisions really reducible to a possibly biblical recognition of the diaconal office as something completely subordinate to the office of elder (as defended, say, by Prof. J. VanBruggen of Kampen in his recent book, *Ambten in de Apostolische Kerk*)? If so people like Dr. Nicholas Wolterstorff of Calvin College (a rather significant voice in the CRC, I think) aren't impressed. ("The effect of Synod's action, then, is to acknowledge the exclusion of women from office as being without biblical and theological basis.

And this means, I believe, that in the not-distant future women will be admitted to all offices." *Reformed Journal*, August 1984, p. 3). In my experience the Wolterstorffs usually get their way at synod, sooner or later.

2. The fact is that to many "conservatives" things are way past the "talk stage." They often feel that personally and politically they are not really of any significance in the CRC. They see all kinds of things which disturb them: liturgical innovationism far removed from the old Reformed principle that worship is principally "ministry of the Word," all kinds of abuse of the sacraments, wide-spread and flagrant violations of the church order, ridicule of all who hold to the verbal inspiration of Scripture, the non-expository, topical sermon whose superficiality is only surpassed by its brevity; etc.

More could be added. In fact, several more important things have been omitted. My point is, I think that Dr. Bolt in his excellent contribution is more sanguine about the possibility of a truly spiritual oneness (Psalm 133) between those at opposite ends of the poles (even the non-extremists) than I am.

But I hope and pray that he is proved right!

Interpreting The Bible in Theology and the Church

Recommendation and appreciation for a book by a Calvin College professor in this magazine might not be the biggest favor to its writer, but I'm going to offer it anyway. I think Henry Vander Goot, teacher of Bible and theology at the CRC's largest college, has written something which deserves careful attention by all interested in and devoted to that wonderful book which is the Bible.

All Bible readers know that it isn't always easy to grasp the meaning of the sacred Scriptures. Reading as such is often hard work. Bible reading involves an added dimension: spiritual discernment (I Cor. 2:13, 14).

The church has often yielded at this point to what seems to be a good and easy way out of this difficulty. Why not turn over "the job?" of interpreting Scripture to "the experts"? Surely scribes and Pharisees, theologians, priests, popes or ministers know much more about biblical matters than "we ordinary people" do! This may sound plausible (and even modest), but the consequences are disastrous, as anyone tracing his spiritual heritage back to the Great Reformation of the 16th century knows.

of the people. God is able to send rain and He is able to withhold it. However, if they pray "toward," not at this place or in this place, but in their homes with their faces toward Jerusalem, may the Lord forgive the sins of the king and of the people and send rain so that they may again be able to live in the land the Lord has given them.

Other Calamities

Besides war and drought, there are various other calamities which may come upon a land. King Solomon mentions several of them. If there be famine, often the result of drought, or if there be pestilence, blasting or mildew, locust or caterpillar, siege by an enemy or any other plague or sickness — if they repent and ask for forgiveness, may the Lord hear them. Famine came upon the land of Canaan several times during the course of sacred history despite the fact that this land was to be the land "flowing with milk and honey." When the king mentions pestilence he is referring to a very contagious disease of that day (such as the black plague of the middle ages?) which revealed itself in boils. Blasting refers to the singeing of the grain by the dry hot wind blowing from the desert. Mildew was another disease of the grains. Solomon mentions locust and caterpillar, grasshoppers and other creatures which denude the fields of all vegetation. One land would often invade the other, besiege its cities and take the inhabitants captive. Finally the king does not distinguish between the various evils which may come but sums them up by speaking of whatsoever plague or sickness there be. But, if anyone or if the whole people turn to God in repentance, may He forgive. The speaker speaks of each experiencing the plague of his own heart — his sin. Then he prays, "Lord, render to every man according to all his ways. Let the penitent be spared." God knows what is in their hearts. The hearts determine their actions. And now follows something different: "that they may fear Thee all the days that they live in the land which Thou gavest unto our fathers." This "fear of God" is a concept which we find frequently in the Old Testament. It is our "faith" with its own connotation.

The Foreigner

When the Old Testament speaks of the "foreigner" it does not always refer to the same kind of people. The king is here not referring to the stranger who makes his home in Israel, but to the foreigner who comes and goes. He becomes acquainted with the ways of the Israelites and with their history and he also finds out about the greatness of Israel's God. When such a person prays toward this place, may God hear him too. How ecumenical! That all the peoples of the earth may know Thy name!

At War

If His people go to battle against their enemies, whether at home or in other countries, when they pray toward this place, may God hear them and maintain their cause. Give them victory!

In Captivity

In the last petition Solomon deals with the worst situation which can befall a people. Previously there was not an indication of a complete captivity of His people, but that is considered in this petition. If they are taken out of their land because of their sin! He adds, "for there is no man that sinneth not." This sentence has been explained in various

ways. Surely, he does not mean it as an excuse. It is necessary to add these words because Israel may well be over-confident at the time when it is the strongest nation in that part of the world. If they in captivity come to a different insight and repent, if they acknowledge their sins before God and turn to Him with all their hearts and soul, if they then pray toward this land, toward this city and toward this house, may the Lord hear them and forgive, maintain their cause, and bring them back from captivity.

This is Solomon's prayer. Let God now hear Solomon. The temple is dedicated and let God now arise to His dwelling place! This king does priestly work without violating the office of the priest as Uzziah later did. Solomon intercedes. That is his privilege and his duty. If this king will continue in this way, he may be sure that the Lord his God will remember His covenant and all the loving kindness which He had promised David. He will then not lack a son to sit upon his throne. Alas, Solomon didn't stay on this height of commitment to God. This beautiful prayer must be applied to his heart as well as to the hearts of all who read this prayer.

Questions for Discussion:

1. How does Solomon overcome the difficulty of doing priestly work and not sinning by doing so? How were the kingly and priestly offices kept separate?
2. Does the temple in Jerusalem have more significance than our church buildings? Why, or, why not?
3. Does the enormity of the sin have anything to do with the possibility of forgiveness? Can a murderer, if he repents, be saved? Can one who is condemned by the state to the death penalty still be a "worthy partaker of the table of His Son"? How would this be possible?
4. Are there more ecumenical passages in the Old Testament? If there are, why are they so few?
5. Seeing God always forgives upon His people's repentance, can this forgiveness become rather common place to us?

RATING SEMINARIES

A recent survey by *Christianity Today* asked 1000 pastor/subscribers to list and evaluate the seminaries of which they were aware using 10 different categories. On the basis of the replies, the schools were rated on a scale considering 1 the highest and 25 the lowest. Although the results reflect the opinions of the magazine's readers, our readers may be interested in the ratings given to the 2 of the 25 seminaries best known among us.

	Calvin	Westminster
Academic Reputation	5	3
Faculty Reputation	19	3
Doctrinal Soundness	15	1
Spiritual Atmosphere	17	4
Practical Emphasis	21	18
Scholarly Emphasis	12	2
Location	3	8
Degrees Available	19	9
Job Placement	17	22
Campus Facilities	4	21

THE DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

Eternity

Jerome M. Julien

We have always confessed, as Reformed Christians, that when Jesus comes as Judge from heaven, He "shall cast all His and my enemies into everlasting condemnation, but shall take me with all His chosen ones to Himself into heavenly joy and glory (*Heidelberg Catechism*, q. 52)." All that we have left in our overview of "last things" is the matter of eternity. Although this subject is really outside of the scope of "last things," we now consider it because there is no other place to consider this important subject.

First, taking our cue from the catechism, we consider the final state of the wicked. After the Judgment the wicked are consigned eternally to hell.

The first thing we must insist upon, because the Bible insists upon it, is that hell is a *place*.

Some, you see, insist that when the Bible speaks about hell, it is to be understood as being "destruction" or "annihilation." However, in II Thessalonians 1:9 we read that this destruction is "eternal destruction." The wicked will experience the agony of punishment without end throughout eternity. It will not be a punishment at *one* point in time. It will be without end. Time will be no more!

Liberals will speak of hell as a way of speaking of one's condition. For them, it is a figurative way of speaking but certainly it is not a place.

The Bible, however, places the emphasis on hell as a *locality*. We are told that men can be "cast into the hell of fire (Matt. 18:9)" and "into the furnace of fire (Matt. 13:42)." Even II Peter 2:4 which speaks about the intermediate state for the wicked speaks of hell as a place.

The word for "hell" in the Bible is the word "Gehenna." Gehenna was a locality — a place. The Bible reveals much about hell as we see what happened at Gehenna.

Gehenna was literally "Ge-Hinnom" or the land or valley originally belonging to Hinnom. It is a valley just south of

Jerusalem and curving west.

There, a high place was built. It was called *Tophet* which means "place of spitting out" or "abhorrence." It was a place of burning.

It was there that Ahaz and Manasseh made their children pass through terrible fire as offerings to Moloch (II Chron. 28:3; 33:6).

Jeremiah predicted God's judgment on Gehenna. He said that it would become known as "the valley of slaughter (Jer. 7:31-34; 19:2; 32:35)."

Finally, God-fearing Josiah stopped the wickedness taking place there (II Kings 23:10). After that, Gehenna became an ever-burning garbage dump.

This is the place, the name of which became the word we translate "hell"!

There is one other word which is translated "hell." It is "hades." These are not two different places as some suggest. Rather, hades refers to hell as it is experienced in the intermediate state. Gehenna refers to hell as it is experienced after the Judgment.

Second, hell is a place of *torment*. Medieval writers loved to make graphic pictures in words of hell as a place of torment. Especially notable is Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

Hell is a place of torment because it is the total absence of God's favor. It is not the absence of *God*. Rather, God is there in all His wrath (Ps. 139:7-12; Rev. 14:10).

This burning wrath of God brings about pains of body and soul. For those there Christ did not bear the punishment for sin on the cross. They must pay — and eternally — for their sin. What anguish will be theirs! We are told that it will be "outer darkness" and the "furnace of fire" where will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 8:12; 13:50). It will be "unquenchable fire" (Mark 9:43, 48). The torment will be in the presence of the Lamb (Rev. 14:10).

Will there be degrees of punishment in hell? Indeed. Jesus said, "But I say unto you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee (Matt. 11:24, cf. v.22)."

One question about hell remains. How do we understand the "fire of hell"?

Of course, the liberal dismisses it as being merely an ancient way of thinking — a way of thinking outmoded today.

On the other hand, true Bible scholars take it seriously. Louis Berkhof reminded us that the purpose of these words is descriptive. They tell us about the nature of hell's anguish. William Hendriksen told us that the literal and physical do not exhaust the idea of fire. While, indeed, it is an actual fire, it is one that brings an intense agony to men's spirits, as well as physical misery.

Another theologian who also would take the fire of hell seriously — Herman Hoeksema — wrote in his *Reformed Dogmatics* (p. 866):

We must . . . beware that we not understand terms like *fire, sulphur, worm, and smoke* in the literal sense of the word, no more than we may interpret these terms in that earthly sense when the Scripture speaks of the golden streets and the pearly gates of the New Jerusalem.

While these words are not merely an ancient way of speaking, they are vivid descriptions of an existence in unspeakable suffering, Hoeksema adds.

For the believer, eternity will be experienced in The New Creation.

With the Judgment, the universe will be renewed (II Pet. 3:7, 11, 12; Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:21; Ps. 102:26, 27; Isa. 65:17; 66:22; Heb. 12:27-29; Rev. 21:1-5). In this new universe we will dwell. The joy of heaven will only be part of the believer's eternal joy. The new earth will *also* be our dwelling place.

What a blessed place this will be! It will be a place of perfect harmony. God will be there and there will be no

unrighteousness (Rev. 21:3, 4; Isa. 11:6-9). It will be the place of the covenant fulfilled (Rev. 21:3). It will be the place of fulfilled life (Rev. 22:1-5). In fact, the whole of Revelation 22 speaks of the blessedness of the New Creation. The curse because of sin will be gone (v. 3). God's wrath against sin which is manifest in the thorn and the thistle, in suffering, sorrow and death, will be forever gone. Instead, "... his servants . . . shall see his face (vv. 3,4,)." Though it will ever be impossible to see God in His infinite essence, we shall see His face — the highest revelation — in the face of Christ. True knowledge of God and His will will fill our minds and hearts (v. 4). This will be direct knowledge (v. 5). The Kingdom, for which we pray, will have been perfected. All things shall serve Him — and everlastingly!

The church, the New Jerusalem (21:2), will be complete, *and* complete in her Savior! All of God's elect shall have been gathered. All of God's elect will know the fullness of glorification. Then, the church will know that eternal sabbath rest which is laid up for her (Heb. 4:9).

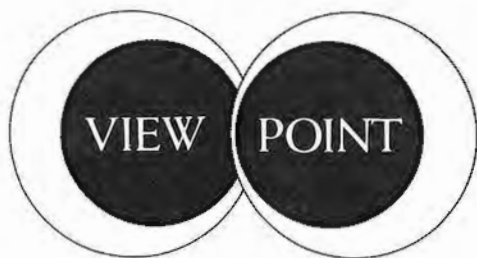
In a very beautiful and devotional way, the Dr. William Hendriksen pictured what this dwelling will be like on the basis of Jesus' words, "In my Father's house are many mansions (John 14:2) (*The Bible on the Life Hereafter*, pp. 209, 10)."

This will be *home* — and as home it will be a place of *fellowship*. It will be a place of *safety* and *rest*. It will be a place of perfect *understanding* and *love*. It will be a place of *permanence*. No wonder our *Marriage Form* reminds us that the godly home "affords a foretaste of the eternal home."

Is it any wonder, then, that the church Reformed has confessed (*Belgic Confession* Article XXXVII):

Therefore we expect that great day with a most ardent desire, to the end that we may fully enjoy the promises of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. AMEN.

Amen, come, Lord Jesus, — Rev. 22:20.



Conscientious Objectors

Is the synod of the Chr. Ref. Church going to make room for "conscientious objectors"? That is the question that must be asked in connection with the decision of the synod of '84 regarding women office-bearers. It is easy to say (as synod did) that each church is free to implement or not to implement that decision, and that ministers need not participate in ordaining such women. But are those who object to this

decision *really* free? Consider the quota system: Are we not "locked into" a system which forces us to give financial support to agencies which promote that which we deem to be in conflict with the Word of God? Several members of the church cannot in good conscience support such agencies. What do we tell them? What is synod going to tell them? Unless room is made for such "conscientious objectors," several of them may leave the CRC (some have already).

Our creeds and *Church Order* protect the conscience of the believer, which is bound only by the Word of God. Art. 32 of the Belgic Confession states that "we reject all human inventions, and all laws which man would introduce into the worship of God, thereby to bind and compel the conscience in any manner whatever," and Art. 7 says that we may not consider any "councils, decrees or statutes as of equal value with the truth of God, since the truth is above all." And we all know Art. 29 of the Church Order: decisions of synods are considered settled and binding *unless* they conflict with the Word of God and the *Church Order*. Many consider the decision of the synod of '84 as doing precisely that. And there's no use kidding ourselves: some of our members are not going to give their money to causes which promote that which they are convinced is contrary to the Word of God. And consistories, classes and synods had better consider what they are going to do with such members. Will there be room for them in the church, or will there be room only for those who cause the problem in the first place? We cannot avoid answering this question. ●

J. Tuininga, Lethbridge, Alta.

PASTOR Paula

Pastor Paula Irik is a minister of the combined congregation of the Nassau and Prinsesse churches (Reformed, GKN and "state," HK) in Amsterdam. *Nederlands Dagblad*, a Dutch periodical, relayed from the *Waarheidsvriend* the report of an interview with the minister which appeared in her church's monthly bulletin, which we translate.

The occasion for the interview is the happy news that Paula is expecting a baby in September and because she wants to arrange her life somewhat differently than is perhaps expected, we asked her several questions.

Question: What do you plan for the future?

Paula: My friend Hans and I are going to live together in July; we have found an apartment on Watteastreet.

Question: You are not getting married. Why not?

Paula: In my circle of friends are many who are not officially

married and who would feel alienated if I were. It is a matter of feeling. The church can be very hard on people who choose another life-style than marriage. I hope for a church with more room for people who want to live differently, such as lesbian living together, or living singly.

Question: How can you solemnize a marriage if you yourself do not choose to be married?

Paula: That belongs to my job. I keenly enjoy it, and I am not against church marriage. It is good if people want to express their happiness over their covenant in the church, with their weal and woe. It grieves me that church marriage is played off against other life-styles. The joy of homosexual relations, for example, I would also like to see celebrated in church. Now that can often not be done.

Question: Don't you think that the minister, as leader, must be an example to the congregation? What about the teen-agers?

Paula: Are we on the way of the Messiah? Has our way anything to do with the way that Jesus took? To that I want to be held. The minister does not stand above the congregation, but with it. How do we live together as Christians? The Shepherd must go the way of the good Shepherd; the Teacher is concerned with opening the Scriptures together. The congregation may not call me to account for the form, but only for the content of my relation. And that is going very well; I have full confidence in it. Parents of teen-agers may be shocked — I can readily imagine that — thinking, "I hope that my child doesn't. . . ." Children may freely choose the life-style that best suits them. Are they happy? Are they good to each other? Children are not an extension of ourselves; they are entrusted to us. In our congregation, there is, fortunately, room for various opinions and a readiness to talk about them.

Question: What kind of person is Hans? Many of us do not know him. And he is outside of the church. What about that?

Paula: We met each other shortly after I came to work in the Prinsesse church. All of the good things then occurred together. Hans is a political scientist and he has an office at the Bureau of Economics in The Hague. He commutes each day by train and in September will be working three days a week. Just like Hans Mos and Rev. Hibma, we are choosing to take care of this child together, and both to continue working. When Hans was 17 he left the Dutch Reformed Church after much thought. I see much Calvinism in him. We have good talks about my work and my faith; he supports me completely in what I do. He listens critically to my sermons, especially the development of the theme. We can freely discuss the discoveries I make in a Bible text. He doesn't go to church because he doesn't want to appear to belong to a fellowship of which he is not a part. If Hans had been a church member I would gladly have celebrated my commitment and joy in the church. But Hans thinks that it is hypocrisy to bring something into a church in which he doesn't believe. No one must get the impression from me that I am opposed to marriage. I only oppose using fixed norms and values against people. Do people get their rights? That is what it is about. I ask the freedom to live in that way. We are very happy with that.

The interview demonstrates again what can and may be expected to happen when a church discards the norms of God's Word to replace it with mere personal opinions — as also our denomination is doing. ●

P.D.J.

What Message?

Not so long ago my wife and I and our three teenage children attended the evening worship service of a church in a neighboring community. We were disappointed as we walked into the church building to notice that there were scarcely fifty worshipers seated in an auditorium built to accommodate several hundred. I became uneasy when the minister stepped down from the pulpit to station himself amid the pews so that, as he said, he, and hopefully the congregation also, might be "more comfortable."

After the service we left the church and made our way across the parking lot to our car. As we did so one of my children asked, "Dad, what did you think of the message tonight?" Before I had an opportunity to answer the question another of my children responded by asking, "What message?" Those questions following a Sunday evening worship service have troubled me. The questions were legitimate because there had been no authoritative preaching of the Word that evening. The Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ had not been proclaimed. The call to repentance and faith was missing. Indeed what message had we heard in church that evening?

As we drove home we talked about the evening's experience. We discussed what should be found in every sermon. I haven't been able to dismiss the conversation of that evening. As I reflect upon it I recall an experience related to me by a friend whom I respect highly. A member of a neighboring church had come to see my colleague in the ministry. The visitor was greatly disturbed. He was concerned because his pastor was not preaching the full counsel of God. He was burdened because his children were not hearing the Word of God proclaimed. He was wondering what he should do. My friend said to his caller, "You can't leave the church just because of the minister. After all the minister won't always be there." The troubled father replied, "But neither will I always have my teenagers with me." That statement has weighed heavily upon me in recent weeks, especially as I have experienced regret at having taken my family to a service where they did not hear the Word proclaimed, although, let me hasten to say, the church which we attended was of Reformed persuasion, so that we had the right to expect that we would hear a biblical message.

The experience has reminded me forcefully of two things. First, the great responsibility which is mine as a minister of the Word to be faithful in the proclamation of that Word. Secondly, I was reminded afresh of the duty which is mine as a father and the spiritual head of my home to make sure that wherever we worship the Word is proclaimed so that when we leave the service the question won't be "What message?" but rather "How shall we respond to what God has spoken to us?"

Arthur Besteman, Zeeland, MI

Unrepresentative Representatives

In a recent issue of this magazine, the editor pointed out that our major assemblies (classes & synod) are often not representative of the local churches. And yet the representational character of these assemblies lies at the heart of Reformed church policy.

Well, there is yet another body where we have a similar problem. The delegates of the CRC to the recent meeting of the RES (Ref. Ecu. Synod) were *not* representative of the churches as a whole. One could say in fact that the entire delegation was very *unrepresentative* of the CRC.

This becomes evident when one reads the report of the RES meeting in *The Banner* of Sept. 10, 84. Several member churches in the RES are very disturbed about happenings in the Gereformeerde Kerken of the Netherlands. A rather strongly worded motion was passed, stating that "on certain points (discipline, scriptural authority, homophilia), the GKN are departing from the testimony of Scripture and the substance of the Reformed confessions." However, Calvin College professor John Primus tried to "rescue" the Dutch churches by proposing an amendment which stated that the Dutch churches are "in danger of departing" from Scripture and confession. CRC delegate Boomsma "contended that the GKN aren't indifferent to deviation from the confessions;

instead they affirm them. He saw no valid reason to part company with them." Another CRC delegate, former Calvin Seminary president John Kromminga "tried to persuade the synod that the GKN is trying to articulate the gospel meaningfully to our age," and their departure from the RES "would be a serious loss" to this body. Kromminga also favored changing the Constitution of the RES to make more room for the GKN.

Well, there you have it. One wonders what would really have to happen in the GKN before they actually depart from

Scripture and confession in the mind of these delegates! If they are only "in danger of" doing that today, one would hate to see what actual departure would mean!

These delegates did not represent me nor a host of other CRC members. In the future we had better either send other delegates more representative of the CRC or have them stay home altogether. That way they would do less damage than is now the case. ●

J. Tuininga, Lethbridge, Alberta

Out of Concern For the Christian Reformed Church

Towards the end of December, I received a note with an accompanying article from Rev. Tony De Jager who writes for *De Wachter*. The note informed me that the article which accompanied the note is to appear in a future issue of *De Wachter* (that article meanwhile appeared in the December 18, 1984 issue).

You can imagine my curiosity at the content of the enclosed article. Why would Rev. De Jager send me an article he had written for *De Wachter* as a matter of editorial ethics? My curiosity was immediately satisfied when I read the article entitled, "Wereldse Methoden" (Worldly Methods).

In his article, Rev. De Jager engages in the uncharitable activity of leveling serious accusations against fellow members in the Christian Reformed Church who placed a full page ad in *Christian Renewal* and *Calvinist Contact* expressing concern about synod's decision to ordain women to the office of deacon.*

For reasons which are never made clear, Rev. De Jager concludes that the people responsible for placing these ads have adopted worldly methods and are guilty of playing the numbers game. According to him they are people grasping for power and influence through intimidation.

Why would a minister in the CRC make such serious accusations publicly without offering reasons for arriving at his highly speculative conclusions? Did Rev. De Jager take up contact with the people responsible for placing these ads to inquire into their motives for doing so?

Rev. De Jager sent a copy of his article in *De Wachter* to *Christian Renewal* because his article not only accuses the sponsors of the ad of playing the numbers game and seeking power, he also questions the wisdom of *Christian Renewal*

and *Calvinist Contact* for publishing the ad. He feels *Christian Renewal* and *Calvinist Contact* should have exercised more wisdom and, like the editor of *The Banner*, refused to place the ad.

It is interesting to note that the editor of *The Banner* does not have similar compunctions when placing full-page ads extolling the virtues of Robert Schuller's books or when he publishes a generally positive review of Tom Harpur's *Heaven and Hell* which excels in denying every tenet of the Christian faith. Wisdom you say?

I can assure Rev. De Jager that before the ad was placed in *Christian Renewal*, the reasons and motives for placing the ad were carefully considered. And it may interest Rev. De Jager to know that, contrary to his speculations, the main reason for placing the ad was because it is an expression of deep concern about the present direction within the CRC.

For all intents and purposes the pages of our denominational paper, *The Banner*, are closed to all those who wish to express a point of view on the issue of women in office which does not agree with the point of view held by the present editor. As a matter of fact, the editor of *The Banner* has become such an ideologue on the issue of women in office that on those rare occasions when he does place an article which goes contrary to his own point of view, he is incapable of exercising normal editorial restraint. He can't resist arguing his own point of view in the very issue of *The Banner* in which such an article appears. (See the article by Peter W. Brouwer in the Nov. 24, 1984 issue of *The Banner* and note how the editor prejudices Brouwer's point of view before one gets a chance to read it.)

There is more than wisdom at work here.

Rev. De Jager suggests elsewhere in his article that one well-written overture to synod can be as effective as 200. People shouldn't engage in "massive protest actions," that is, place an ad in *Christian Renewal* and *Calvinist Contact* urging the silent majority to speak up. But Rev. De Jager doesn't suggest what concerned people *may* do. Apparently they should continue to allow a small, vocal minority to drastically change the direction of the CRC.

Rev. De Jager expresses surprise at an ad which is placed by people who wish to express their genuine concern in *Christian Renewal* and in *Calvinist Contact*. But is Rev. De Jager then totally unaware of what developments are taking place within the CRC? Is he unaware that the pages of *The Banner* have been closed for years now to anyone who wishes to express a point of view on women in office that does not agree with the view of the editor? Is Rev. De Jager unaware of the fact that for more than a decade we have had an outspoken feminist movement in our midst called the Committee for Women in the Christian Reformed Church which has wide influence, especially in the Grand Rapids area, and which advertises its programs and actions in the pages of *The Banner*? (Where now is all that discerning wisdom?) Is Rev. De Jager unaware that some of these concerned women in CW CRC are interested in nothing short of revolutionizing the structure of the Christian Reformed Church and that they engage repeatedly in the use of inflammatory language to attain their ends? One such instance is found in the July/August newsletter in which they refer to consistories as that "clubby, male preserve of the CRC."

Is Rev. De Jager unaware that Carl Tuyl uses the pages of *Link* to give free reign to advocating his novel ideas about women in office and that the president of this year's synod, Dr. Roger Van Harn, openly militates for women deacons and women elders and women ministers in articles he writes as well as in speeches he gives in Grand Rapids? Is Rev. De Jager unaware of the fact that in Calvin Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids female seminary students already participate in the worship service and that Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids has appointed adjunct elders with the express purpose of eventually forcing synod to accept these female elders to our churches everywhere?

It strikes me as terribly incongruous that at a time when all these developments, which go contrary to our church order, are taking place within the CRC, Rev. De Jager has reserved his criticism for the placement of an ad in *Christian Renewal*.

Rev. De Jager is also of the opinion that the discussion about women in ecclesiastical office is becoming a monotonous affair. We agree. Especially in view of the fact that after 14 years of study reports, not a single convincing, biblical argument has been presented why the practice of 1900 years standing should be changed. As long as Christians confess that the teachings in Corinthians and Timothy, and related passages, are not "time-bound" and "culturally conditioned," the question of women in ecclesiastical office is superfluous.

Let those who are needlessly disturbing the peace within our denomination by militating for mindless change accept the plain teachings of Scripture. It will bring to an end much of the present polarization. ●

John Hulink

*The OUTLOOK ran this ad on the back of its December, 1984 issue. This editorial reaction is reprinted by permission from *Christian Renewal*.

ATTRACTING Young People

One point made by the two delegates of the Gereformeerde Kerken (Bakker & Schippers) on their tour through North America is that their church is concerned about keeping the youth. And that is supposed to explain some of the deviations in that church communion: If we don't accommodate a bit, we'll lose the youth.

I have never been able to understand such argumentation, and am totally unimpressed with it. Examples of churches who have done that very thing (accommodated) and *lost* more of their youth are legion. One need only look around at some of the mainline churches, and see what has happened to their young people. They simply aren't there! The church consists mainly of old ladies. A friend and colleague of mine in the Presbyterian Church of Canada used to worship with us once in a while in my first charge. He said to me: "What a joy to see *families* in church, including husbands and young people. All we have is old ladies." Why? Because, as he readily admitted, the church had nothing to offer the young people. The gospel had been watered down so much that what they heard on Sundays was the same thing they could read and hear in the daily news during the week.

Young people are not as stupid as we sometimes think they are. They readily see through phoniness. They don't want a church that bends with the winds of the secular age in which we live. No, they want to hear the gospel straight. As Popma says somewhere in his work on the Catechism: they may have a big mouth and appear a bit indifferent at times, but they still want to hear a good sermon on Sundays.

You don't attract young people by introducing all kinds of nonsense into the worship services. Time and again when we have visitors, we are told: You have a lot of young people in your services. Thank God for that! And it belies what the gentlemen from the Gereformeerde Kerken are telling us. One would think they could see it themselves, for, if I am correctly informed, the youth are not exactly flocking to and sticking with those churches. The gentlemen ought to investigate the reasons for their absence. ●

J. Tuininga, Lethbridge, Alta.



There were some who subtly came unto the Bride of Adam II and said, "Yea, hath God said the Bible is literally the inerrant Word of God? Did God really say women should not have authority over a man? Do you think He truly meant it when He said that homosexuality is an abomination? Nay, these things are open to interpretation. You cannot be sure of what He meant until you are thoroughly familiar with the cultural, anthropological and historical context.

"What's that? You thought you *were* familiar enough with it to understand a plain and simple command? Ach! You're just showing your naivete. God wants you to be mature. What He really wants is for you to decide for yourself what is good and evil. He spoke to you to give you a sort of reference point. His Word was never intended to be as static as you think it is.

"Death? Oh, no. You shall *not* surely die! You shall become *relevant*!"

With deep concern,
Steve M. Schlissel
Elder

IN DEFENSE OF A "HERESY"

Having been declared by the Acts of Synod of 1984 a "Heretic," I believe it is appropriate that before the burning fagots and the enveloping pyre burns away and destroys a dissenting viewpoint forever, the "heretical" view should at least be expressed. (They do still burn them at the stake, don't they?) I freely admit that I harbor instinctive as well as doctrinal support and sympathy for the policies of the Union of South Africa. I can report also that I am experiencing only a very minor trauma that might be associated with the chastening rod of C.R.C. hierarchical vatican decree. There is also only insignificant embarrassment upon discovering that once again I am athwart of Synodical pronouncements and decisions.

As an admitted "heretic," according to Synodical standards, I hereby publicly confess that I see nothing ethically wrong or morally reprehensible with the "equal but separate development" principle as currently practiced in the Union of South Africa. It should be obvious to all, except perhaps those that have been blinded by the propaganda show of our day, that the concerns in South Africa are with two distinct cultures (admittedly not ideal, but in South Africa a fact nonetheless). One of them is qualified to be and is entrusted with the administration of a highly developed and sophisticated society; the other is not far removed from the stone age and is in many instances still living in primitive tribal communion. It is (sad to say) years premature to turn over the reigns and responsibilities of this complex society to those who obviously do not yet have the administrative skill and knowledge to function within it.

Notwithstanding this cultural chasm, amazing progress is being made under the "equal but separate development" principle. The newest and most modern schools are for the blacks, the newly constructed hospitals are for the blacks, and the new housing projects are for the blacks. A prodigious effort is being made in every area to improve the lot of the blacks, both materially and intellectually so that they can be assimilated into South African society and take their place alongside the whites to responsibly govern South Africa to everyone's mutual advantage, under freedom. Until this condition is approximated South Africans have determined and correctly so, I believe, that the "equal but separate development" course is the best means to ameliorate the current disparity that exists between the two races and to achieve an efficient and stable country.

They are determined to do this in contradistinction to that which has occurred in all the other African nations who have utilized different methods for change and in which results have been catastrophic. The most recent and glaring example of course is Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) where Mugabe, the Marxist, rules and chaos has once again become the way of life, as ancient tribal dissensions and Communist terror have become the determining forces.

If the motives of our synodical brethren, those who initiated this decision, were pristine and pure, it seems that they would have been as zealous and determined to issue concomitant condemnation relative to those unfortunate people and nations that have fallen under Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe. What? May I ask, about Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania (where there is a pathetically beleaguered Reformed community) Lithuania, Hungary, etc., etc. Here, in each instance, the worst variety of Apartheid exists. Here *all* basic freedoms are denied. Here there is *no* freedom of worship (a freedom not denied in the Union of South Africa), no freedom of speech, no freedom of the press, no freedom of assembly. Here the people live under the most monstrous tyranny in all of history. If Synod is to address the injustices in the world as it sees them, why is it only silent concerning the lamentable condition and fate of those people just mentioned? Why is only South Africa condemned? Must I believe that South Africa has been singled out because this decision reflects the bias of a coterie of domestic Dutch collectivists within the CRC which is acting in concert, consciously or unconsciously, with philosophical and political cousins across the Volga? They too are straining every effort to effect the fall of the Union of South Africa. There is ample evidence to demonstrate that the difficulties in South Africa are less "black" than they are "Red." The patent policy discrimination of Synod to me is an abomination and their hypocritical slip is showing.

Rudyard Kipling penned it all years ago, and I commend his words to those who have so successfully set the Christian Reformed Church in America against the pro-western, anti-communist nation of South Africa and against our Reformed brethren there:

"Let it down by the foot and the head
Shovel and smooth it all
Thus we bury a nation dead
Who will be next, with your good help,
to fall?"

Albert C. Wiersma (Heretic), Grand Rapids, MI

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by Rev. Jerome Julien

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