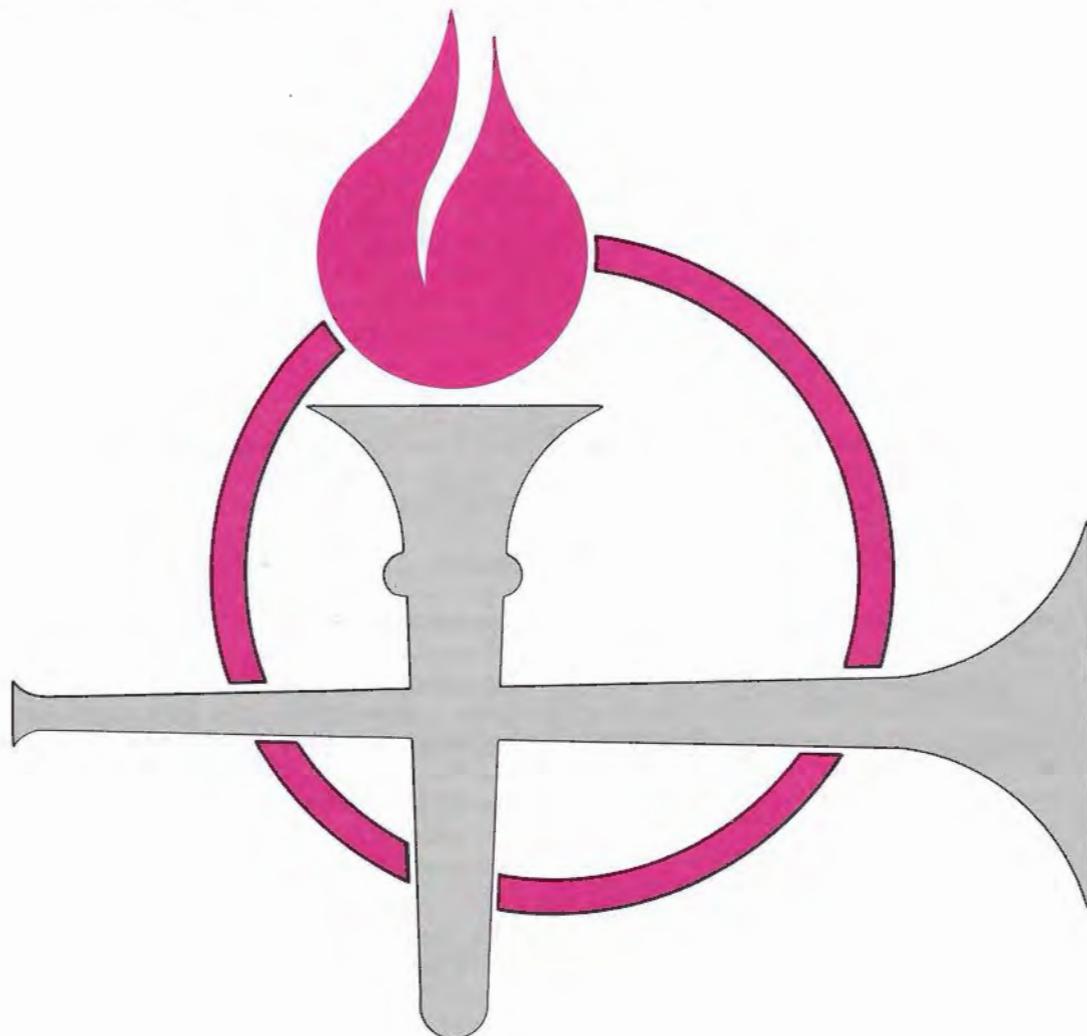


THE OUTLOOK

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

MARCH 1985



**IGNORED AUTHORITY OF CHRIST
A TRANSLATION OR REVISION?
FACTS ABOUT DEFENSE**

MEDITATION

The Unclothed Jesus

John Blankespoor

When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took His clothes dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece, from top to bottom. "Let's not tear it," they said one to another, "Let's decide by lot who will get it" (John 19:23, 24).

The verdict had been given. The time for execution had come. Jesus was led by the soldiers to Golgotha, which was outside of the city of Jerusalem. Before they nailed Him to the cross they completely disrobed Him. This was their custom of treatment of those to be crucified. They wanted the crucified one to be exposed to the greatest shame possible, hanging on the cross completely naked. His clothing was a legacy for the soldiers. Jesus likely had five pieces of clothing, a head piece, undergarment, girdle (belt), sandals and the outer garment also called a robe. Imagine, that is all that Jesus, the son of God, owned of this whole world. The four parts were easily divided among the soldiers (likely four of them). For the undergarment they cast lots, because it should not be torn. Even Jesus' clothing was taken away from Him. We often make much of his "swaddling clothes" in the manger, but we should not forget what is more important, that when He died, they took all away from Him.

Little did the soldiers realize what they were doing. It would have meaning for the church of all ages that in physical shame He was exposed before *the people*, but before God He was exposed spiritually as THE naked sinner.

To understand what really took place here we have to go back to Genesis, to Adam and Eve in Paradise. In their state of perfection they wore no clothing. They didn't need any, neither had they any sense of shame. When sin came and

they became conscious of it, they evidently felt their guilt. This in some way was also reflected in their embarrassment by their nude bodies. They felt exposed in their guilt, and therefore ashamed. They covered themselves with aprons made of leaves. They apparently also felt that this was not a good covering, because when God came to them in the evening of the day they hid themselves. Their kind of clothing did not cover their shame before God. We know the rest of the history. God in His mercy gave them better clothing to cover their shame! He gave them animal skins. Adam and Eve now had clothing because some other creature's blood had been shed. We wear clothing for different reasons also, but the first reason is that our shame has to be covered.

On Golgotha we see the second Adam, the head of all God's people. He is the sinless One, but reckoned to be a sinner on our account. He will take all the sins of all the elect of all ages upon Himself. And when God asked Him, in effect, "Adam where are you?" He could not hide, but was nailed to the cross. He didn't want to hide behind anything. "As a lamb led to the slaughter," He was led to death. Willingly, out of love, He hung naked, with all of the sins of all His people exposed in and through Him before the righteous God. Therefore Jesus had to be unclothed. This spiritual exposure must have been infinitely more painful than the physical shame, for in it He made atonement for all our sins. They are now all covered by His blood. Through faith in Him, as we confess our sins, we can be assured that we will never be exposed before God as naked sinners.

The Bible speaks of man being exposed and judged in the last day, also called the day of judgment. Paul says that then we must all appear before that judgment seat (II Cor. 5:10). One version has it that then we will all stand before Him without any pretense. Another, that then our lives will be laid open. Already in the Old Testament, it is said that God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or evil. We also read 'that there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, neither hid that shall not be made known.' In our Confession of Faith, Article 37, we read that then the books, that is to say, the consciences, shall be opened, and that the dead will be judged according to what they have done in this world. Also that all men shall give account of every idle word spoken, which in this world is counted amusement and jest, and that the secrets and hypocrisy of every man will be disclosed and laid open before all.

Try to imagine what this will mean, first of all for the wicked. All their deeds will be exposed as well as all the motives, lusts and desires. Thoughts that have never come out in the open will then be made known. Sin will be exposed in all of its corruption, from the deepest secret motive to the most atrocious and godless deed. Who of us would want to be so exposed before other people, even our friends? To be exposed before God will be infinitely worse. The Lord will judge men according to all that they will have done and according to what they are in their sins. No wonder that this is called the great and terrible day of judgment.

What will happen to the righteous? They will also be exposed. We will be judged according to the good we will have done, even though every good work (done by the Spirit of Christ) will still be imperfect, tainted with sin. Doesn't this scare every one of us? Even the best Christian must admit that when he takes inventory of himself, considering his motives and lusts, he still is a big sinner? The godly apostle Paul says that he is (present tense) the "chief" of sinners. Doesn't every one of us feel at times that compared with others we are worse than anybody else? And that is all going to be laid open in the great day? It will also be revealed that these same sinners, as children of God, daily confessed their sins, pled for forgiveness for the sake of Christ's sacrifice. The result will be that all those sinful Christians will then stand righteous before God, completely covered by His atoning blood. How great will Christ's sacrifice then appear to be, the payment of Him who hung naked on the cross that we might be covered forever.

If we cover our sins now (not confessing them) the Lord will uncover us completely in that day. But if we now uncover ourselves (confessing all of our sins) the Lord will completely cover us in that final day.

How fitting to sing:

Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling,
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly,
Wash me Savior, or I die.

In heaven after all of our "dirty sinful clothes" will have been washed in the blood of Jesus Christ, they will come out perfectly clean. And we will be dressed in white robes, in a radiance we have never seen before. So perfect and clean we will be through our wonderful Savior, Jesus Christ.

Hallelujah, what a Savior! ☺

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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The Daily Paper

Steve M. Schlissel

I stopped reading the daily newspaper years ago. The *New York Times* was too big; my urbanity would vanish as I clumsily crumpled on to the next page. The *Daily News* and *New York Post* were easier on the hands, but harder to handle in others ways. The *Post* became a local *Enquirer*, with bigger headline type, and the *News* was simply schizoid: they'd run an editorial against pornography and scatter pictures of nearly naked nubility throughout their pages.

Consequently, shortly after Pogo stopped appearing in the *Post*, I bid adieu to the tabloids and turned to the tube to find out whatever; I'm still not sure what for. National TV news is largely network editorial barely masquerading behind "information." Nevertheless, it is easy to turn on or off, and I kind of liked Frank Reynolds.

But TV doesn't have coupons. And lately there have been oodles of coupons in the newspaper; if I only use a few I save more than the paper cost. So I started to pick one up weekly on the way to visit my in-laws. On arrival my father-in-law would check the main section for the lottery numbers, I'd look through the local section to see what the merchants were offering, and Lang, one of our foster children, would cut coupons with operosity, careful not to stray from the dotted lines.

Now recently (I don't know what got into me), I actually started to read the articles. Big mistake. Something is terribly wrong. The newspapers are speaking to someone, we must assume. But the thought of Joe Average out there being able to thumb through the degradation found in a daily paper without having the urge to commit harakiri is frightening. What's happened to us? Here's a sampling of some of the articles that demonstrate the radical value shift we never voted on:

1. Headline: "Have no fear of trying lovers: Jong's advice."

The article is an attempt to calm the fears of some women that Erica "Fear of Flying" Jong might have become "a born-again virgin." Jong authored a book that came to be known as "a bible of sexual liberation." The fears got off the ground because of a modest statement she recently made. Well, the article certainly put those fears to bed. Jong, divorced from husband no. 3 and presently living with someone, says, "Ideally... a woman (should) go to college, have a period of sexual experimentation, have a

number of boyfriends, be promiscuous if she needs to, get a head start on a career and then marry between the ages of 29 to 33 and have her children . . . I think they (women) need the experience of gadding about . . . having different boyfriends, maybe even living with a couple of different people before making a long-term commitment." God counts this as criminal advice. In fact, biblically speaking, many of Jong's ideas are capital crimes.

Now, we are not so naive that we are surprised to find a poor, meretricious woman like Ms. Jong promoting profligacy. But this advice was not found in *Penthouse* magazine, this was in the daily paper!

2. A feature article with two photos tells of Police Officer Jennifer McCormick, being arrested for pulling a gun in a dispute with a bartender. The paper played up the incident because last year this officer was named Joseph McCormick, but "it" had undergone a sex-change operation. The story tells us that "most cops supported her decision to have the surgery." Who would want to disagree with "most cops?" The article failed to mention that God calls far less than what ms'ter McCormick did an abomination (Dt. 22:5) and worthy of death.

This is the kind of article that used to appear only in the sleaziest papers and Gore Vidal's imagination. Today it's just part of the "daily's" fare. (Interestingly, in a recent case, a New York City policewoman was fired because she appeared in a pornographic magazine. The photos had been taken before she became a police officer. I guess she was unfortunate enough to be only moderately degenerate. If she had followed McCormick's example, perhaps the brass would have "supported her decision.")

3. Switching from the state of morality to the state of justice, (They do seem to rise and fall together, don't they?) there was a story on page 4 about a savage who beheaded a four-year-old boy and confesses to having killed 164 other people, including his mother. A police chief said this guy makes "Charles Manson look like Tom Sawyer or Huck Finn." Why do we continue to think that God does not mean what He says?: The murderer shall surely be put to death (Num. 35:17). Otis Elwood O'Toole signed a confession to murder

in October of 1983. Do you think we will see justice in this case by 1993? Or ever? Thank God there is a Tribunal where perfect justice *shall* be meted out.

4. But enough of this. Let's look through the paper for some sort of *religious* news. Can't they write about somebody who carries a Bible instead of a knife? What's this over here? "Three cops rescued a 14-year-old girl who had been kidnapped and raped at knife-point in Queeues by a *Bible-toting* 300-pound state employee, police reported yesterday." Oy vey.

Did you ever notice how the press *never* misses an opportunity to link the Bible and Christianity with any sort of reprehensible act? Well, in this article about a horrible rape, the Bible is mentioned at the beginning *and* the end. The second mention revealed that the Bible was merely found in the van in which the criminal was apprehended. But was it his van? Was it his Bible? Did he read it? "What does it matter," they must have thought. "*It was there.* Let's play it up." So, with the public spirited help of these journalists, we now begin to discover the *really* dangerous element in society! Bible-toters!, not Ms. Jong, 'Ms.' McCormick, or Monster O'Toole.

5. "Ah, finally. The 'Religion' column. I can get away from these tortuous articles and see what's up in New York's religious community. What's this? 'Council has hard decision.' My. Wonder what this is about? Oh NO! There's no escape! ARGHH!"

The article turns out to be about the National Council of Churches wrangling over the application of Metropolitan Community Churches to become the 33rd member of the NCC. "The problem is that the... Metropolitan Community is mostly homosexual." I suppose I should thank God that there is at least some opposition. Yet, "to many in the Council of Churches, justice, not sexual orientation, is the key issue." HA! If *justice* were the issue they'd have no problem. God has told us what the justice is which He requires. See Leviticus 20:13. But, not surprisingly, the NCC does not take God or His word as the standard of justice (or anything else). For, the article tells us, "Churches, from Catholic to Calvinist, decided that homosexuality itself was not sinful." Indeed?! Don't you love the way they phrased it? "Churches... decided."

Well, who can argue with so many religious leaders? And who dares to dissent from the opinion of most cops? And who could disagree with high-flying Erica? Where is another voice to be found? In the Bible? Don't you remember? That's the book that rapists read! Surely, all these "authorities" are right. After all, even Catholics and Calvinists believe God's moral standards should be made "new and improved." These apprehensions I feel must be bugaboos left over from my unenlightened superego. Why, anyone who wants the death penalty for Otis O'Toole is just as bad as he is. All we really need is love, sex and tolerance. What am I worried about? Don't fight it. That's the way the world is in 1985. Get with it. Right?

Of course not. But that's the way millions are *led* to think each day as they pick up and read their "friendly" newspaper with "all the news the misfits print." It's probably better to be *un*informed than to be so radically *mis*informed.

Yet, it's incumbent upon us to offer more than criticism. What's a person to do? Let me make some proposals:

1. That all who call themselves by the Name of Messiah follow the good advice of Dr. Lloyd-Jones: "Let us decide to spend less time in reading the newspapers and more time in *reading the Bible*" (*God's Ultimate Purpose*, p. 207). And we ought to *heed* every jot and tittle that proceeds from the Mouth of God.

2. That we *become aware of journalistic techniques* that distort and pervert truth in order to further the socialistic, anti-moral, anti-family vision of the media moguls. One example of such reality re-shaping is the blackout of women's voices that do not share the agenda of the National Organization for Women. Why does NOW (membership 120,000) get vast coverage while Concerned Women of America (approximate membership 300,000), the Women's Christian Temperance Union (membership 250,000), the General Federation of Women's Clubs (membership 600,000), B'nai B'rith (membership 500,000), Hadassah (membership 370,000), or Church Women United in the USA (membership 2,000,000) get *none*? Even the Daughters of the American Revolution can boast nearly twice the membership of NOW. When was the last time you saw an article about them in the paper?

Newspaper editors necessarily censor some news in favor of other news. Do the articles in the paper you read serve to advance an unarticulated but discernible agenda? Be aware.

3. *Read suspiciously.* Unfortunately, journalistic mendacity is increasing and will continue to do as competition for market share increases. Sensationalistic reporting will also increase as newspaper after newspaper compromises by aiming low to get circulation high. Fortunately, recent surveys indicate that Americans have diminishing faith in news reports.

4. *Read selectively.* Just because it's in the paper doesn't mean it's proper to read (Rom. 16:19; Phil. 4:8).

5. *Let us teach our children well.* The Psalmist could have been speaking about the newspapers when he said, "They will perish, but (the Lord) remains.... They will be discarded. But He remains the same, and His years will never end" (Ps. 102:26, 27). Our children must be explicitly taught to have complete confidence in God and His Word and little in man and his.

6. Vigorously *seek to win men to the Lord* and disciple them in the *whole* counsel of God. "The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul... The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Ps. 19:7, 8). We cannot expect a godly society without regenerated men and women. But, how can they believe unless they hear; how can they learn unless they are taught?

7. *Be prepared to reconstruct*, for we know that the Lord sees what is in our papers, *and* in our hearts. Surely we should tremble even as we serve (Romans 16:20).

The daily papers. They used to be different. Or am I a romantic? Is nostalgia appropriate when you're only 32? I think my old decision not to buy the paper was probably a sound one. What I have to figure out now is, are the coupons worth it? ☺

THE WORLD ALLIANCE

Final Phase of the “Courtship?”

Marten H. Woudstra

The full name of the World Alliance of which we speak is World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC for short). This organization, which throughout its history has existed under a variety of names, dates back to the year 1857. It is a world-wide organization of churches which, historically at least, trace their origin to the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition and faith. Its present membership totals 157 churches. Far the greater number of these are found in the Third World, about 100 of them. At the Alliance's General Council meeting held in Ottawa, Canada, in 1982, there were also 36 European and 10 North American churches present.

The organization is financially in very dire straits. The media reported that last year there was a prospect of drastic curtailment of staff because of this. It appears that the Ottawa meeting has proved to be such a drain upon the Alliance's coffers that the bottom is showing.

A Committee Hobby

It is this non-descript, confessionally ill-determined Alliance which has long been looking in the direction of the Christian Reformed Church to swell its ranks and hopefully, we may assume, to replenish its treasury. Not only was the WARC looking in the direction of the Christian Reformed Church; this denomination, through the agency of its Interchurch Relations Committee, has also cultivated its relationship with WARC. Stated more accurately: *The Interchurch Relations Committee* has been prodding the Christian Reformed Church to give serious attention to membership in WARC. To the best of the present writer's knowledge, at no point during the last 13 years — the time of our “courtship” with WARC — has there been even the slightest groundswell in the churches in favor of our joining the WARC. All that the *Acts* of past Synods reveal is that the initiative has come from the Interchurch Relations Committee.

It all started in 1972 when upon the initiative of the Committee the Synod authorized a study of the “desirability and feasibility” of joining the Alliance. Between the years 1972 and 1981 one could read in the *Acts of Synod* that the Committee was mindful of this task, a task which it actually imposed upon itself, but that the time to accomplish it had not arrived.

Then, suddenly, in 1981 the Committee seemed to have forgotten completely what already had happened in 1972. It approached the Synod of that year with the request to “encourage” the Committee “to engage in concentrated study of this organization,” i.e., the WARC. The Synod of 1981 dutifully obliged. What the Committee wants, the Committee gets.

A Proposal to Join?

It may well be that in the forthcoming report to the Synod of 1985 the Committee will have a definite recommendation regarding this matter. Knowing the composition of the Committee and having seen the reports of those who attended the 1982 meetings in Ottawa, this writer fears that the Committee report will recommend joining the WARC, though he hopes that his fears are ill-founded.

The unfortunate thing about this whole affair is that for 13 long years the Interchurch Relations Committee has passed up the opportunity to inform the membership of the church, its ministers, elders and informed participants in church affairs, as to the true state of affairs with the WARC. True enough, the Committee has many tasks, and of some of them it has acquitted itself well. Yet, one is at a loss to explain the Committee's failure to provide the Church with at least some basic facts and figures.

As matters now stand the procedure will be the usual one. The Synod Agenda will be in our hands some time in April, probably May. One month will be allowed, to digest its many and weighty reports, including, possibly, a report favoring membership in WARC. This report, will likely contain a “charter and principles of ecumenicity” in the light of which the Committee will have made its decision. In other words, matters of far-reaching consequence pertaining to inter-church cooperation may well come before us. Yet, the time to digest all this is negligible compared to the bigness of the issues involved.

Look at the History

In an effort to get at least some discussion started we wrote an article for the May, 1983 *Outlook*, to which readers may wish to refer. The editor himself also has written on this subject.

Let us briefly review the main points. As far back as 1924 the Christian Reformed Church has considered possible affiliation with the Alliance. This issue was again weighed by the Synod of 1959. The Synod of 1959, acting upon advice of its interchurch committee, decided not to join. The reasons were:

1. The Constitution of the Alliance is indistinct.
2. The Alliance has a relation to the World Council.
3. Its membership is theologically mixed.

Here are a few other matters which those coming to the Synod might be interested in knowing. The Alliance's activities are divided over five (5) areas:

1. The administration of scholarships.
2. Being of service to the member churches.
3. Engaging in theological discussions.
4. Conducting interchurch dialogues.
5. Keeping an eye on theological colleges and seminaries.

No Creed

The Alliance has no doctrinal statement. It only has some sort of "preamble." This preamble was judged to be too indistinct by the Synod of 1959 to be of much use. Yet it is this doctrinally ill-defined organization which engages in inter-church dialogue with no less than eight different church groups. We shall mention some of them: The Anglicans, Baptists, Roman Catholics, World Methodists, Lutheran World Federation, the Eastern Orthodox and the Christian Church — Disciples of Christ.

One of the participating churches, the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom, has recently effected some sort of union with a Baptistic church. This may well be a triumph for theological accommodation. It augurs ill for the distinctly Reformed nature of an organization of which this church is a part.

All these facts — which we hope to have reasonably correct — will possibly be presented in the Committee's forthcoming report to Synod. Along with the facts there will, we assume, be a rationale for joining the WARC. At the time of writing, the Church is still in the dark as to what this rationale may be. Will it run along the lines of the advice of those who in 1967 argued that the Christian Reformed Church could well join the World Council of Churches? Two of the present members of the Interchurch Committee were also signatories of the 1967 minority report. In matters "ecumenical" our Church has witnessed a surprising degree of continuity of committee personnel in spite of the rule of mandatory retirement from committees after six years of service.

The Church Must Know

What we need, in the light of the above tale of 13 years of missed opportunities to inform the Church, is a much more open and ongoing forum for the discussion of ecumenical concerns on the part of the whole Church. The Interchurch Committee could have stimulated such but failed to do so. Those best in position to inform the church membership do not write. Moreover, where in the present structures could one best carry on such a continuing dialogue? The monthly periodicals are too infrequent to bring about much clarity by means of a give-and-take of authors with differing viewpoints. The weekly organ of the Christian Reformed Church, the *Banner*, has not been suitable for this purpose either.

We have said and written these things before. We know that note has been taken of our lament. But things have remained the way they were. In the meantime, if the scenario we have sketched above proves to be correct, members of the 1985 Synod will be asked to face a major question of ecumenical cooperation with a minimum of discussion within the wider forum of the Church. More than a dozen years of "ecumenical" baiting have gone by without the Church getting even the most elementary information in the light of which it could make up its own mind.

Is not the ecumenical question of far too great an importance to let it be the domain of a few committee members? Proceedings at Synods which the undersigned has witnessed indicate that the membership of the Church is not well informed about even some of the most elementary matters of interchurch cooperation on which Synods are asked to pass judgment. This is regrettable and an affront to the very cause of ecumenicity, which is a worthy cause. May the story of thirteen years of inexcusable silence with respect to the World Alliance arouse enough of us to solemnly vow that from this time forward things will change for the better.

Note: Dr. Marten H. Woudstra is Professor of Old Testament at Calvin Theological Seminary at Grand Rapids, Michigan.

NEWS ITEM

The Committee of Concerned Members of the CRC in North America is continuing its efforts to be of assistance to Consistories and individuals. Requests for overture materials continue to come in and now number over 250. Our Mailing List now numbers well over 700; consistories, ministers, and concerned members. We are also receiving a number of overtures which classes have adopted to send to Synod of 1985. Some classes have not adopted overtures which consistories have submitted; we would appreciate receiving a copy of such overtures which consistories will submit directly to Synod.

The Committee is making plans for an *Inspirational Rally* to be held May 15, 1985 in the Fine Arts Center Auditorium of Calvin College. At this Rally the featured speaker will be Dr. W. Robert Godfrey. Dr. Godfrey is Professor of Church History at Westminster Theological Seminary in California, an Associate Minister of the Escondido CRC, and was a delegate from Classis California South at the Synod of 1984. Please take note of this rally and pass the word along!

THE BELGIC CONFESSION:

A New Translation or an Illegitimate Version?

Norman DeJong

The Christian Reformed Church is a creedal denomination and hopefully will remain so. As summaries of, and guides to, Biblical teaching, creeds are immensely important to the preservation of the true church. Without them, we are apt to ride the current theological hobby-horses. We are tempted to focus attention only on those teachings of scripture that tickle our contemporary fantasies. With creedal direction we are more apt to respond to the comprehensive and divinely authored Word of God.

Minimizing the Creeds

In spite of our rich creedal tradition, there are a number of indications that the importance of the creeds is being steadily minimized among us. Let me cite just two significant examples. In 1979 Synod passed two rules of procedure for all subsequent synods to follow. The first specified "that whenever a recommendation is presented to synod which would require a change *in the Creeds* (italics added) and/or in the Church Order, the proposal ought to specify the changes." The second stipulated "that Church Order Article 47 implies that whenever changes *in the Creed* and/or substantial changes in the Church Order are made by synod, the churches shall be given adequate opportunity to consider the advisability of the changes before they are ratified by a following Synod" (*Acts*, 1979, Art. 77 C, p. 90). These rules were passed in response to what was judged to be the hasty and unwarranted decisions of the 1978 Synod concerning women in ecclesiastical office.

Those who follow the discussions going on within the church will immediately recognize that, since 1979, a good deal of debate has arisen about the change in Article 3 of the Church Order. That article has historically stated that "confessing *male* members . . . are eligible for office." After five years of almost incessant wrangling, the Synod of 1984 finally succeeded in eliminating the word "male" from that article, but then only in relationship to the office of deacon. Five years of hotly contested debate over one word relative to one office!

But what about the creeds? In the rules of 1979, *the first concern is the creeds*. Who has been discussing the more

numerous and more substantial changes that would be required in the Belgic Confession in order to permit the change in church practice? The sad answer is, "almost no one!" Judging as a historian, one would have to conclude that somehow, some way, the Church Order has become much more important to the church than have the creeds. Some may rejoice at this diminution of creedal influence, but those who do are guilty of radically departing from the historic faith delivered to us by our ancestors ever since the Protestant Reformation.

The second illustration of diminished creedal influence is even more alarming. I refer specifically to a matter which is coming for final vote to the Synod in June, 1985. At those sessions the delegates will be asked to approve a new "translation" of the Belgic Confession and to discard the one that has been in existence and continuous use by the Reformed churches since 1618.

How the New Version Began

Although very few people have been taking note of it, this proposal for a new "translation" did not just happen, but has been bumping and grinding its way through ecclesiastical channels ever since 1973, when such an effort was first requested by the New Confession Committee. In response to some vague complaints about supposedly "archaic language" and "cumbersome style," Synod in 1977 appointed a Belgic Confession Translation Committee and mandated it to present a new "translation," for consideration by a later synod.

Although I was a delegate to both the Synods of 1979 and 1983, at which the preliminary reports were discussed, I must confess that very little serious attention was paid to these reports. The reports were, after all, rather lengthy (1979 — 70 pp.; 1983 — 140 pp.) and increasingly technical. To digest them fully would require a reading knowledge of French and Dutch, as well as an historian's knack for tracing voluminous dates. Besides, there were other more pressing, more important issues on which to focus attention! I was guilty of making such an erroneous judgment, even though Rev. Leonard

Verduin made an impassioned and well-argued plea against the committee report in 1983 and submitted a ten-page minority report (see *Acts*, 1983, pp. 396-405) which everyone ought to read.

Verduin's Deserved Criticisms

It is high time that we take seriously the concerns of Rev. Verduin, who refused to sign the Translation Committee's report, and carefully consider his insightful criticisms in his minority report. As I read through those pages, it becomes apparent that the "translation" which the CRC is being asked to adopt is a *wholly illegitimate and un-Reformed version* of the Creed, which should not even be up for consideration. As Verduin points out, the version which the majority is recommending has never had the blessing of the church councils and teaches subtle variations of doctrine which Verduin found "impossible, in conscience, to live with." Up to this point, he has been a lone wolf crying in the wilderness, but I pray that it will not long be so. Every office holder and concerned member owes it to the church to join Rev. Verduin in his concern for the possible adoption of a significantly altered and illegitimate text of the Confession of Faith.

Surreptitious Feminist Perversion of a Creed!

There is another concern, however, in addition to those cited by Rev. Verduin. Although it did not come to the attention of the synodical delegates in 1979 or 1983, and has not been cited by the committee when calling attention to the "revisions," the male language used in reference to the ecclesiastical officers has all been removed and replaced with non-sexist language. "Men" becomes "persons" and the male pronouns become "everyone" or "all." If this is allowed to pass next June, those who treat the creeds lightly will have effectively altered the Confession in such a way that there will no longer be any legal barriers to *women elders and ministers*, which appears to be the desire of those who are preaching the gospel of democracy, as well as that of the Committee for Women in the CRC.

Synod Ordered Copies — None Produced!

In conjunction with this rather unknown debate about a new version of the Belgic Confession, Synod in 1983 wisely instructed the Board of Publications to make the new "translation" available to the churches in booklet form "as soon as feasible" and encouraged the churches "to submit reactions and suggested improvements — no later than May 15, 1984" (*Acts*, 1983, p. 648). The Board of Publications has not yet complied with Synodical instructions by providing consistories with the booklets for study!

Conclusion

The delegates to Synod should reject any proposal to revise the Belgic Confession. Those of us who use the present translation for study and teaching purposes are not at all convinced that any new translation is necessary. My high school catechumens and college students have never complained about the supposedly "archaic language" and "cumbersome style." In the absence of some overwhelming evidence that the Belgic Confession is truly antiquated, we ought to thank the Translation Committee for all of its work and discontinue the effort. It would be far more profitable for all of us if we seriously studied what we have and give it the prominence that it deserves.

A Crisis of Conscience

If Synod next summer should insist on adopting the new version recommended by the Translation Committee, a very interesting and not insignificant dilemma will confront all those delegates who oppose its adoption. Delegation to Synod, as well as membership in the Christian Reformed Church, requires expressed agreement with the creeds on which the denomination is founded. When delegates to Synod cannot express agreement with one of the three creeds, will they be forced, as a matter of conscience, to withdraw from Synod? Will consistory members be asked to resign from office? Will congregation members be asked to transfer elsewhere? Or will all of the above be asked to blunt their consciences and to "go along for the sake of peace?" Whichever way the offended parties choose to get out of their dilemma, the forms of unity which have held us together for so long will have become the instrument of disunity.

Why didn't we, way back in 1973, require the New Confession Committee to document and substantiate their charges of "archaic language" and "cumbersome style?" The solution to our problem would have been so much simpler. Now, because we had itching ears and a desire for something fresh, we have created for ourselves a theological mess. The Belgic Confession wasn't broken-down, but we decided to fix it anyway. We are all to blame, but it isn't too late to repair the damage.

Dr. Norman DeJong is a professor at Trinity Christian College at Palos Heights, Illinois.

Editor's note: We are informed that this new, illegitimate version of the creed, which was not made available to consistories for critical study as the synod had ordered, is already included in service booklet #6, is listed in the Publication Committee's catalog and can be purchased for use in church services.

Who Am I?

Glenn P. Palmer

I am a believer. Being so excited about my faith, I stirred up the Ephesians by proclaiming Christ as Lord, and not Dianna. Because of the effectiveness of my preaching, my companion and I were seized and were carried into the theater. Later I sailed on a ship for Italy, and you know the story of the ensuing shipwreck. Still later I was imprisoned for my faith, and was called a fellow-worker of Paul. Translated, my name means "best ruling." Who am I?

There was a man of God who challenged me to a contest. My prophets called on me to bring fire down from heaven, but I did not respond. Perhaps I was "deep in thought, or busy, or traveling," or perhaps I was sleeping. I really do not know, because I never did hear them, and the man of God won the contest. Despite that, I was later worshipped by King Manasseh in the temple of the one true God. Which god am I?

The Waning Authority of Christ in the Churches

A.W. Tozer¹

Here is the burden of my heart; and while I claim for myself no special inspiration I yet feel that this is also the burden of the Spirit.

If I know my own heart it is love alone that moves me to write this. What I write here is not the sour ferment of a mind agitated by contentions with my fellow Christians. There have been no such contentions. I have not been abused, mistreated or attacked by anyone. Nor have these observations grown out of any unpleasant experiences that I have had in my association with others. My relations with my own church as well as with Christians of other denominations have been friendly, courteous and pleasant. My grief is simply the result of a condition which I believe to be almost universally prevalent among the churches.

I think also that I should acknowledge that I am myself very much involved in the situation I here deplore. As Ezra in his mighty prayer of intercession included himself among the wrongdoers, so do I. 'O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.' Any hard word spoken here against others must in simple honesty return upon my own head. I too have been guilty. This is written with the hope that we all may turn unto the Lord our God and sin no more against Him.

Let me state the cause of my burden. It is this: *Jesus Christ has today almost no authority at all among the groups that call themselves by His name.* By these I mean not the Roman Catholics nor the liberals, nor the various quasi-Christian cults. I do mean Protestant churches generally, and I include those that protest the loudest that they are in spiritual descent from our Lord and His apostles, namely, the evangelicals.

It is a basic doctrine of the New Testament that after His resurrection the Man Jesus was declared by God to be both Lord and Christ, and that He was invested by the Father with absolute Lordship over the church which is His Body. All authority is His in heaven and in earth. In His own proper time He will exert it to the full, but during this period in history He allows this authority to be challenged or ignored. And just now it is being challenged by the world and ignored by the church.

The present position of Christ in the gospel churches may be likened to that of a king in a limited, constitutional monarchy. The king (sometimes depersonalized by the term 'the Crown') is in such a country no more than a traditional rallying point, a pleasant symbol of unity and loyalty much like a flag or a national anthem. He is lauded, feted and supported, but his real authority is small... the Lordship of Jesus is not quite forgotten among Christians, but it has been relegated to the hymnal where all responsibility toward it may be comfortably discharged in a glow of pleasant religious emotion. Or if it is taught as a theory in the classroom it is rarely applied to practical living. The idea that the Man Christ Jesus has absolute and final authority over the whole church and over all of its members in every detail of their lives is simply not now accepted as true by the rank and file of evangelical Christians.

What church board consults our Lord's words to decide matters under discussion? Let anyone reading this who has had experience on a church board try to recall the times or time when any board member read from the Scriptures to make a point, or when any chairman suggested that the brethren should see what instructions the Lord had for them on a particular question. Board meetings are habitually opened with a formal prayer or 'a season of prayer'; after that the Head of the Church is respectfully silent while the real rulers take over. Let anyone who denies this bring forth evidence to refute it. I for one will be glad to hear it.

What Sunday-school committee goes to the Word for directions? Do not the members invariably assume that they already know what they are supposed to do and that their only problem is to find effective means to get it done? Plans, rules, 'operations' and new methodological techniques absorb all their time and attention. The prayer before the meeting is for divine help to carry out their plans. Apparently the idea that the Lord might have some instructions for them never so much as enters their heads.

Who remembers when a conference chairman brought his Bible to the table with him for the purpose of using it? Minutes, regulations, rules of order, yes. The sacred commandments of the Lord, no. An absolute dichotomy exists between the devotional period and the business session. The first has no relation to the second.

What foreign mission board actually seeks to follow the guidance of the Lord as provided by His Word and His Spirit? They all think they do, but what they do in fact is to assume the scripturalness of their ends and then ask for help to find ways to achieve them. They may pray all night for God to give success to their enterprises, but Christ is desired as their helper, not as their Lord. Human means are devised to achieve ends assumed to be divine. These harden into policy, and thereafter the Lord doesn't even have a vote.

In the conduct of our public worship where is the authority of Christ to be found? The truth is that today the Lord rarely controls a service, and the influence He exerts is very small. We sing of Him and preach about Him, but He must not interfere; we worship our way, and it must be right because we have always done it that way, as have the other churches in our group.

What Christian when faced with a moral problem goes straight to the Sermon on the Mount or other New Testament Scripture for the authoritative answer? Who lets the words of Christ be final on giving, birth control, the bringing up of a family, personal habits, tithing, entertainment, buying, selling and other such important matters?

What theological school, from the lowly Bible institute up, could continue to operate if it were to make Christ Lord of its every policy? There may be some, and I hope there are, but I believe I am right when I say that most such schools to stay in business are forced to adopt procedures which have no justification in the Bible they profess to teach. So we have this strange anomaly: the authority of Christ is ignored in order to maintain a school to teach among other things the authority of Christ.

The causes back of the decline in our Lord's authority are many. I name only two.

One is the power of custom, precedent and tradition within the older religious groups. These like gravitation affect every particle of religious practice within the group, exerting a steady and constant pressure in one direction. Of course that direction is toward conformity to the status quo. Not Christ but custom is lord in this situation. And the same thing has passed over (possibly to a slightly lesser degree) into the other groups such as the full gospel tabernacles, the holiness churches, the pentecostal and fundamental churches and the many independent and undenominational churches found everywhere throughout the North American continent.

The second cause is the revival of intellectualism among the evangelicals. This, if I sense the situation correctly, is not so much a thirst for learning as a desire for a reputation of being learned. Because of it good men who ought to know better are being put in the position of collaborating with the enemy. I'll explain.

Our evangelical faith (which I believe to be the true faith of Christ and His apostles) is being attacked these days from many different directions. In the Western world the enemy has forsaken violence. He comes against us no more with sword and fagot; he now comes smiling, bearing gifts. He raises his eyes to heaven and swears that he too believes in the faith of our fathers, but his real purpose is to destroy that faith, or at least to modify it to such an extent that it is no longer the supernatural thing it once was. He comes in the name of philosophy or psychology or anthropology, and with sweet reasonableness urges us to rethink our historic position, to be less rigid, more tolerant, more broadly understanding.

He speaks in the sacred jargon of the schools, and many of our half-educated evangelicals run to fawn on him. He tosses academic degrees to the scrambling sons of the prophets as Rockefeller used to toss dimes to the children of the peasants. The evangelicals who, with some justification, have been accused of lacking true scholarship, now grab for these status symbols with shining eyes, and when they get them they are scarcely able to believe their eyes. They walk about in a kind of ecstatic unbelief, much as the soloist of the neighborhood church choir might were she to be invited to sing at La Scala.

For the true Christian the one supreme test for the present soundness and ultimate worth of everything religious must be the place our Lord occupies in it. Is He Lord or symbol? Is He in charge of the project or merely one of the crew? Does He decide things or only help carry out the plans of others? All religious activities, from the simplest act of an individual Christian to the ponderous and expensive operations of a whole denomination, may be proved by the answer to the question, is Jesus Christ Lord in this act? Whether our works prove to be wood, hay and stubble or gold and silver and precious stones in that great day will depend upon the right answer to that question.

What, then, are we to do? Each one of us must decide, and there are at least three possible choices. One is to rise up in shocked indignation and accuse me of irresponsible reporting. Another is to nod general agreement with what is written here but take comfort in the fact that there are exceptions and we are among the exceptions. The other is to go down in meek humility and confess that we have grieved the Spirit and dishonored our Lord in failing to give Him the place His Father has given Him as Head and Lord of the Church.

Either the first or the second will but confirm the wrong. The third if carried out to its conclusion can remove the curse. The decisions lie with us. ●

An extract from an article in The Best of A. W. Tozer, compiled by Warren W. Wiersbe, Christian Publications, Inc., Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Dr. Wiersbe writes: 'This article first appeared in The Alliance Witness on May 15, 1963, just two days after the death of Dr. Tozer. In a sense it was his valedictory, for it expressed the concern of his heart.'

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The 7th Ministers and Elders Conference sponsored by *Banner of Truth* will be held at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan on May 28-31, 1985. The Conference theme is "The Office and Work of the Holy Spirit." Speakers include Pastor Walter J. Chantry, Dr. J. Richard deWitt, Dr. Sinclair B. Ferguson, Pastor Albert N. Martin, Rev. Iain H. Murray, Pastor Ernest C. Reisinger, and Dr. O. Palmer Robertson. For registration information contact the conference secretary, *Banner of Truth*, P.O. Box 621, Carlisle, PA 17013.

In Search of Facts About Defense

Peter De Jong

Rev. Norman Jones' Biblically based article on "The Ethics of Nuclear War" in our December *OUTLOOK* suggested a number of questions about our nuclear defense concerning which there is a great deal of confusion. The subject is currently getting even more attention than usual because it is beginning to be discussed in new talks between representatives of the U.S. and Russia. The question about the placement of such weapons in space — "Star Wars" defense, as it has been called — is expected to be especially troublesome in these talks.

An Extraordinary Writer

In answer to an inquiry about dependable information on this subject the writings of Freeman Dyson were recommended as exceptionally knowledgeable and informative. Following this suggestion, I first read his earlier, 1979 book, *Disturbing the Universe*. Displaying a classically trained Englishman's exceptional mastery of the language as well as a ready wit, it detailed the author's experiences in the British army in World War II. In it he was assigned the duty of assessing the effectiveness of Britain's strategic bombing of Germany. (His conclusion was that although the strategic bombing was extremely destructive, it was a failure as far as contributing to the outcome of the war was concerned just as were the German V2 rockets whose materials might better have been put into needed airplanes.) It was a curious fact that at that time the German girl who would later become his wife was hiding in bomb shelters from the British bombs! Later he came to the United States and became involved with the leading scientists in the field in atomic weapons research. In general he came to support defensive weapon development, but to oppose offensive weapons. Although the earlier book is an illuminating and often highly entertaining introduction to the life and career of the author, his new 1984 volume, *Weapons and Hope*, addresses more directly the subject with which we are concerned.

The Aim: Communicating Between Two Worlds

"I write," Dyson says, "because I live in two worlds, the world of the warriors and the world of the victims," and he hopes to "improve mankind's chances of escaping . . . nuclear holocaust if I can help these two worlds to understand and listen to each other" (p. 4). He sees the warriors' world in the scientists, technicians and military people with which he consults on technical problems. He sees the victims' world especially in the wives, children and families and in

the churches which are often agitating for peace. While he hears the dire predictions of some scientists of what would happen if war broke out, he also recalls how the actual casualties resulting from German bombing of London turned out to be only about one twentieth of the number which experts had predicted (p. 18). "We learned . . . that a war could still be fought and won without destroying civilization" and "that yielding to threats is the greater evil . . ."

Trend Toward Smaller Weapons

An important fact which Dyson highlights (and which may not be generally known) is that the development of nuclear weaponry, instead of producing ever larger bombs, has been producing smaller ones. He sees this trend toward smaller weapons (in both the U.S. and Russia) as resulting from the lack of targets for the earlier huge weapons, the improvement in accuracy, and the development of new delivery systems (cruise and MIRV missiles) which required keeping weapons as small (and relatively inexpensive) as possible. "The arms race has thus led to the paradoxical result that, at least as far as the United States forces are concerned, the hydrogen bomb has become almost irrelevant" (p. 38). "The same Strategic Air Command which clamored so loudly for the big bombs thirty years ago is now quietly withdrawing them from service." In bombs as in nuclear power plants, the earlier "big units turned out to be inconvenient and uneconomical" (p. 39). Although "the two primary agents for abolishing nuclear weapons must be international negotiation and the aroused conscience of mankind," "we will have a far better chance of achieving nuclear disarmament if the weapons to be discarded are generally perceived to be not only immoral and dangerous but also obsolescent" (p. 41). "For those who are not yet convinced that nuclear weapons are more trouble than they are worth, the arms race itself may be a good teacher" (p. 43).

"David and Goliath"

In an especially intriguing chapter entitled "David and Goliath" the writer alludes to the Biblical story not for the religious lesson that it teaches, but as a "folk" story exemplifying a variety of ways in which monstrous offensive weapons may be destroyed by relatively small and simple defensive devices. "A successful David and Goliath experiment, with a two pound rocket killing an intercontinental missile . . . could mark the beginning of a change in the way

people think about nuclear weapons," showing them up "as clumsy brutish things outwitted by a cheaper and more agile adversary" (p. 46).

A Computer Revolution

"The mathematician John von Neumann played a leading part in the development of nuclear weapons and an ever larger part in the development of computers. He said in 1946 when both these developments were just beginning, that the computers would be more important than the bombs. The impact which computers have made upon civilian society has already proved him right" (p. 51). Dyson sees new developments promising "to prove him right in the military sphere also," as "small cheap devices with brains... overwhelm big expensive vehicles" — "David against Goliath." Although some scientists might oppose scientific involvement in weaponry, "John von Neumann was the most brilliant and the most articulate of the scientists who consciously devoted their talents to the improvement of weaponry in the cause of freedom" (p. 53). "Freedom survived in England in 1940 because the technological Davids, the coastal radars and the fighter airplanes, were there when they were needed." "For every scientist who believes with Einstein that modern weapons in the hands of modern governments are an absolute evil, there is another who believes with von Neumann that modern weapons rightly used can help David to survive in freedom in a world of Goliaths."

Dyson cites the examples of some highly sophisticated and inviting weapons that turned out to be impractical and sometimes expensive failures and wonders whether the MX program might turn out to be the same. In a chapter entitled "Star Wars" he suggests that though space developments may have a modest role to play, "Space forces, like air forces, should be firmly harnessed to the strategic needs of earthbound humanity" (p. 72).

Sensible Shelters

Dyson was once invited to consult with Swiss officials on their very extensive shelter program. His conclusion was that their properly constructed shelters were, from a technical standpoint, remarkably effective and that such a system "has a good chance of making the difference between the life and the death of a society" (p. 91) and offers "a better chance of saving your life than any other weapon system which you could buy for the same money." He sees such shelters, however as, in spite of their merits, practically unacceptable to the American public because of their expense and politically inexpedient because our building them would be interpreted as preparing for a nuclear attack on others.

Facing U.S.—Soviet Differences of Strategy

A central part of the book deals with the experiences and points of view of a wide variety of individuals and groups of people such as soldiers, scientists and diplomats in the complex subject of war strategy. Dyson sees both U.S. and Russian current dependence on nuclear weaponry as a mistake. He cites U.S. Lieutenant General Arthur Collins' opinion that "If we try to defend Europe with nuclear weapons... we are playing a game which the Soviet Union knows how to win" (p. 161). He thinks that "a non-nuclear defense of NATO territory is feasible and affordable. Only the addiction of our military and political leaders to nuclear weapons deprived us of all incentive to build a defense system that would really work" (p. 162). While "World War I was

the classic example of a war of stupor and mass destruction," "the early blitzkrieg campaigns of Hitler were amazingly nondestructive compared with the campaigns of World War I." "The technological arms race... is moving away from mass destruction toward weapons which give scope to brains and initiative."

Our dealing with the Russians has been complicated by differences of history and viewpoint. While we think of deterrence from war by weapons development ("assured destruction"), they envision survival and ultimate victory if war should come. While the Soviet strategy, reflecting Russia's past history as dramatized in Tolstoy's monumental *War and Peace*, has been based on development of a "counterforce" adequate to meet and overcome any attack, that of the U.S. for thirty years has stressed building weapons for "assured destruction" and (somewhat contradictorily) for a "limited nuclear war" (p. 291). These U.S. concepts, Dyson rejects, "assured destruction because it is immoral and suicidal, limited nuclear war because it is illusory, and both of them because they are incompatible with Soviet concepts and, therefore, incompatible with comprehensive arms control agreements." The author's own conclusion is bluntly stated. "If I were running the United States as an absolute monarch, I would choose non-nuclear resistance as my policy. It is risky, it is hopeful, and in my heart I know that it is right. I would accept the risks of leaving the Soviet Union as the only major nuclear power in the world. Fortunately, I am not an absolute monarch and do not have to take this responsibility" (p. 292). Short of that, he would advocate a policy of "live and let live."

Conclusion: What Ground for Hope?

In a final chapter, "Tragedy is Not Our Business," Mr. Dyson, somewhat as in his earlier book, leaves the technical and political fields behind and takes refuge in past history and literature. He quotes extensively from Governor William Bradford's history of the early Plymouth colony and, after a number of other such literary digressions, returns to Bradford with the remark, "Many of us do not share Bradford's religious belief, but we can all share his pride and his hope. Pride for what the old people have done, hope for what the young people will do. The most important lesson which comedy has to teach us is never to give up hope."

This extraordinarily well-written book sheds far more light than this review can detail on the technical problems and complexities of national defense in today's world. Whether or not one agrees with the author's conclusions, it is a good book to read to become better informed on the subject. He tries to give a balanced treatment of the controversial questions involved. He also makes it plain that his basic perspective does not depend ultimately on technology but on his faith. Unfortunately that is avowedly not the Christian faith, but a secular faith which appears remarkably akin to the humanistic wishful speculation of the (liberal) Protestant and Catholic clerics with whom he evidently associates himself in their peace movement. This faith is not ours, and neither should its perspective be ours.

As a study of weaponry, Mr. Dyson's book is very informative, but as an assurance of hope (the other half of his title) it is really without substance or ground. The real bankruptcy of the hope becomes pathetically apparent when he in his conclusion recommends adopting William Bradford's confidence while explicitly rejecting the faith in God which was its only ground! Something similar happens in

his treatment of Old Testament history. His clever adaptation of the David and Goliath story, using it as a bit of folklore to illustrate the historical development of weaponry, apt as it is, quite ignores the point David wanted to make absolutely clear. "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty . . . whom you have defied . . . This day the LORD will hand you over to me . . ." "All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves, for the battle is the LORD'S, and He will give all of you into our hands" (I Sam. 17:45-47). With such a faith in God, we, like Bradford, must have fewer illusions than Mr. Dyson does about the good will of men, the Soviets, in particular. (One is inclined to agree with his comment that he "fortunately" does not have to make the final decision whether to trust them.) Our Christian hope is not a bit of

folklore useful on occasion to embellish a secularist's hopeful dreams. It is a hope "both sure and steadfast" (Heb. 6:19), anchored in Christ who claimed, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth," and "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away" (Matt. 28:18; 24:35). While His word instructs us, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men" (Rom. 12:18), it goes on immediately to add that we must obey and support governments in their responsible use of weapons to suppress evil (13:1-7; cf. Matt. 22:21). Yet our hope is not to be in those governments or their weapons, but in Him who has complete authority over them. ●

Note: Freeman Dyson's Weapons and Hope is published by Harper and Row, New York, priced at \$17.95. His earlier book, Disturbing the Universe, is now also available in a relatively inexpensive (\$5.95) paperback.

Servant of the Most High

LOUIS PRAAMSMA — 1910-1984

John Hultink

This moving tribute by the publisher of Dr. Praamsma's later words is reprinted by permission from Christian Renewal, of which Mr. Hultink is managing editor.

On the morning of December 3, I received my last letter from Dr. Louis Praamsma. It was dated November 30. Receiving this letter was a strange sensation for I had already been informed that he was no longer with us. This letter was a response to a request in an earlier letter I had sent him. The letter opened with the words, "Beste Jan, Hartelijk dank voor je brief. Mijn reactie is: 'bijna bewogen' (je kent dat oude versje wel), en ik was in de geest al bezig een artikel te schrijven, maar ik voelde deze morgen dat ik het niet kon. Mijn hoofd zit me in de weg, daar heb ik veel last van." (Dear John, Hearty thanks for your letter. My reaction is: 'almost persuaded' (you probably know that popular song), and in spirit I was already busy composing an article, but I couldn't this morning because I didn't feel well. My head is bothering me, it is giving me much difficulty lately.)

He went on in his letter to express joy at the prospect of visiting a special clinic in London, Ontario and hoped that a thorough examination would alleviate the angina attacks and the dizzying effects of the pills he was taking. He closed the letter by asking me to pray for him as he would pray for me (he knew I had been sick).

It was not to be. God in His wisdom had decided that on earth the work of His faithful servant, Louis Praamsma, was

finished. On the evening of December 2 in the year of our Lord 1984, he who never ceased to fight the good fight of faith was laid to rest. But Louis Praamsma died with the unshakable assurance that his God would not only provide for those he loved but also for the church he loved and served so faithfully.

By the grace of God, Dr. Praamsma remained active and alert up to the very end. Although his angina attacks must have been a constant reminder of the brevity of life and an affirmation of the nearness of that last great enemy, he nevertheless was enabled to continue his labors until the very week God called him home.

This morning I finished reading the proofs of what will now be Dr. Louis Praamsma's final book revealingly titled: *Let Christ Be King*. It is interesting to note, as pointed out by Riemer Praamsma in his article elsewhere in this issue, that his father began and ended his career by writing about Abraham Kuyper. Almost forty years ago, in 1945, Dr. Praamsma published his thesis entitled, *Abraham Kuyper as Church Historian*. Forty years later he completed his life's work by writing: *Let Christ Be King: The Life and Times of Abraham Kuyper*. The span of an entire generation lay between those two publications. Why this preoccupation with Abraham Kuyper?

Let Christ Be King is unquestionably the crowning achievement of an active literary career carried on while all the time serving as full-time pastor. In this book Dr. Praamsma brings

to bear an entire lifetime of reflection and insight upon the life and writings of a man he loved dearly. After discussing the life and times of Abraham Kuyper with great feeling and insight in a way that at times reads like an intriguing novel, Dr. Praamsma writes in the concluding chapter that "Kuyper was a giant who straddled the 19th and 20th centuries. His life bridged the closing of one era and the opening of another. By his influence conservatism was conquered, liberalism thwarted and socialism checked. Reformed theology was renewed, honesty in the church was proclaimed, the confession was honored and the Kingship of Christ was professed."

In this quotation lies the key to the question why Dr. Praamsma was so preoccupied with the life and work of Abraham Kuyper. The reader must not forget, as he reads these words about the great Calvinist, Abraham Kuyper, that they are words quoted by a man who had an intimate knowledge of the church of the Reformation he loved so much. Louis Praamsma was not blind to the personal failings of this great man nor was he ignorant of the shortcomings of the reformed community during Kuyper's lifetime. But these shortcomings paled in comparison to the modernism and the naked unbelief which everywhere manifested themselves in the reformed churches in The Netherlands during the early years of Kuyper's career when Kuyper himself was still a modernist.

Louis Praamsma was so attracted to the writings of Kuyper because Kuyper, more than anyone who came before him, identified and fought the collective evils of conservatism, liberalism and socialism which were eating away at the heart of the confession of the people of God. Kuyper succeeded, more than anyone else, in opening the meaning of the Scriptures for the life of the ordinary man so that they sought, with heart and soul, to proclaim the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all of life. Those who think and say that Louis Praamsma was a stuffy conservative never knew the man and his writings and have failed miserably to understand the warmth and genius of a man of God who was deeply under the influence of the great Dutch Calvinist who dedicated his life to one great goal: Let the people of God everywhere acknowledge the Kingship of Christ. This also was the lifelong quest of Louis Praamsma as he wrote and worked among the sons and daughters of the Reformation.

In the opening chapter of his moving book on Abraham Kuyper, Dr. Praamsma points out to his readers that "the 19th century was in the first place a reaction against the frightening aspect of the French Revolution. Yet at the same time it carried the ideas of the French Revolution further. It opened the door both to reaction and to liberalism, to conservatism and to socialism, to all manner of new theologies and to a revival of the old one, to secularism and to evangelism and to agnostic idealism. When Kuyper was young he assimilated all the new ideas of his time. However, when it pleased God to convert him, He used all the remarkable powers of Kuyper's mind to renew the Dutch Reformed Church and to liberate the people of God in The Netherlands, together with their children, from a house of bondage. In his activities in both church and state the cry of Kuyper's heart was: 'Let Christ be King!'"

When Kuyper appeared on the Dutch scene the belief in the sovereignty of man was proclaimed from many reformed pulpits and the gold of the great Reformation had grown dim. But for the converted Abraham Kuyper the pivotal turning-point in history became the ascension of Christ and the

revelation of how God's grace wrestled throughout history against the consequences of sin. Kuyper once again emphasized the "Calvinistic character of the nation and appealed without apology to the energy, fearlessness and faith of the Reformation era." As Dr. Praamsma points out in his book, "When Kuyper died, free Christian schools were to be found from north to south. Believers were applying Christian principles in their homes, churches and associations. Christian men of science were demonstrating that belief in the Bible was not antiquated but up-to-date. The face of the country had been renewed."

Once again we ask the question what it was about Abraham Kuyper that intrigued Louis Praamsma to the point that he began his professional life by writing about this great Christian statesman and forty years later concluded his life by again writing on Kuyper for an English-speaking audience. For a complete answer to this question the readers will have to turn to Praamsma's new book. For it is in this book, more than any other book, that the author pours out his own heart and his own soul and reveals, time and again, that the cry of his own life was also: "Let Christ be King in home, church and school. Let the people of God above everything else remain faithful to the Word of God and to the confessions as these have been articulated by the faithful throughout the ages."

As one reads the many books as well as the numerous articles that Dr. Praamsma wrote on a very wide range of subjects, one is struck by one recurring theme: "People of God, for Christ's sake, be true to your confession!" This theme surfaces time and time again in every book and every article that Dr. Praamsma wrote.

In his *magnum opus* (great work), which has already appeared in four double volumes in Dnch under the title, *De kerk van alle tijden*, and which will appear in English in eight* volumes, the organizational principle is once again the author's overriding concern to point out to the people of God the history of obedience and disobedience of the church throughout the ages. The underlying warning is always there: *Be true to your confession*. In this great work, Dr. Praamsma conclusively demonstrates that in our age there are no new heresies, only variations on heresies that are often as old as the church of Jesus Christ herself. His extensive knowledge of the history of the church reinforced the biblical emphasis for him that only Jesus Christ can preserve His church. In the face of countless attacks made by satan upon the church, there is only one hope, one future for the church: Jesus Christ her Lord!

Dr. Praamsma has no patience in his books and articles with those who live out of the pretense that they possess within themselves the power to establish God's Kingdom on earth, here and now. They have no humility and deny the power of satan. The number of those who believe that they can bring salvation to mankind is legion. But the road on which they take the Church of Jesus Christ is a road that leads to death. There is no hope in this modern century for those who seek their salvation outside of Jesus Christ. For this reason, and in the face of great personal opposition, Dr. Praamsma persisted throughout his life in pointing his listeners to the indispensable need of remaining true to the reformed confessions.

Before he left The Netherlands, Dr. Praamsma was already criticized severely by liberal colleagues and professors at various theological schools whom he dared to criticize. The work of these people undermined the confession of the people

of God and this hurt him deeply. In Canada also, his work was not always appreciated. Upon his return from the Free University in The Netherlands and after having assumed a teaching position at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, Henk Hart in the book, *Out of Concern for the Church* wrote: "At best it (such a faith) halts at the sterile doctrinal infighting and heritage-preserving leadership of a Dr. Louis Praamsma, whose range of problematics, characteristically, is largely confined to the Christian Reformed Church. This kind of Christianity can only be practiced behind church walls. On weekdays its people serve either the free enterprise conservative capitalist establishment or the liberal-socialist hypocrisy in the democratic West." Why this bitter, public attack upon a man whose reformed life and actions were unassailable by a young upstart who had just returned from The Netherlands and the ink on whose dissertation was still wet? The terrible irony of these words is that today, fifteen years later, we know the extent to which Henk Hart has himself refined the art of sterile infighting within the ICS, the downtown Toronto Christian schools, and St. Matthew's in the Basement, thereby frustrating the work of Jesus Christ in this world.

What Dr. Praamsma writes of Kuyper in the concluding chapter of *Let Christ Be King*, can also be said of Louis Praamsma himself: "He (Kuyper) did not bow his knee to the baals of his time, whether in the form of scientism, mamonism, evolutionism or culturalism. He fought for a free church, a free Christian school, a free university, a free Christian labor movement and a free Christian political party... He respected the laws of history, recognized different Christian communities and acknowledged the pluraformity of churches. *Yet he always drew the line when he sensed that people were not being true to their sacred commitments* (emphasis added). In 1914 Kuyper wrote to the board of the Free University: 'If your association should decide to accept a... teacher, an instructor, who would definitely deviate from the confession, rest assured that in such a case I would cut off every connection and contact with the Free University, and I would do so publicly.' When the Henk Harts of this world understand this sentiment, they will begin to understand the Louis Praamsmas of this world. The Kuypers and Praamsmas will tolerate much but they will not stand idly by while the reformed confessions are being trampled upon.

What was said of Abraham Kuyper may now be said of Louis Praamsma, "He spoke the truth even when this meant estrangement from people he would have preferred as his friends. He could be very tolerant but drew the line when he sensed that people were not being true to their sacred commitments." For this reason he spent much of his life speaking out against men such as Jan Lever, H.M. Kuitert, H. Wiersinga, Augustine, Koole and many other Dutch leaders who played fast and loose with the Scriptures and the reformed confessions, leading young people under their stewardship to the abyss of unbelief.

During his lifetime Dr. Praamsma was an outspoken advocate of Christian schools and Christian organizations. Already in 1959 when he addressed the All Ontario School Rally held in Hamilton, he cautioned his listeners not to fall into the trap of conformity to the world but to establish distinctive Christian schools so that covenant children might be given an education which would teach them to acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ. And Louis Praamsma was intimately acquainted with the writings and labors of men such

as Vollenhoven, Dooyeweerd, Van Riessen, Popma, Zuidema, Runner, and a host of others involved in the reformation of the sciences. And without exception he had a deep admiration and respect for all these men insofar as they were faithful to their reformed "beginnings." As a historian he was better acquainted than most with the history of the Society for Calvinistic Philosophy, with its strengths and its weaknesses. And the influences and the insights of these men are everywhere present in his own work.

It is not true, as the mythmakers are already beginning to suggest, that Dr. Praamsma disassociated himself from the ARSS/AACS because he was not free from "the incipient, Kuyperian dualism as it came to expression in the doctrine of common grace." (See Bernard Zylstra's article in the January 4, 1985 issue of *Calvinist Contact*.) Before the myth is elevated to the status of historical fact, the mythmakers would do well to read that chapter of the book, *Let Christ Be King*, which is entitled "The Two Graces." Even a superficial reading of this chapter will quickly dispel the unfounded notion that the reason that Dr. Praamsma did not associate himself with the AACS in its early years was because of some dualism he had inherited from Abraham Kuyper. He had better reasons than that to exercise caution. And a good number of those reasons can still be found in the book authored by AACS staff members entitled: *Out of Concern for the Church*, as well as its sequel: *Will All the King's Men*.

No, if it already becomes necessary to talk publicly about why Dr. Praamsma did not associate himself closely with the ARSS/AACS during the years that John Olthuis and James Olthuis and Hendrik Hart and Arnold de Graaf joined the staff, the reader would do well to consult those articles which Dr. Praamsma himself wrote on the subject at that time. And those articles are readily available. In an article written in 1967 in which he congratulated the Institute for Christian Studies on its opening he wrote: "Let me say from the start that I sympathize essentially with the ideals of the ARSS; that it is my sincere wish that God will bless this Association for the advancement of Christian scholarship; that I am convinced of the deplorable, almost chaotic situation on the campuses of most of our universities where a lack of sound Christian leadership is more than evident; and that I share the hope of the ARSS that it will turn the tide. There should be no misunderstanding among us concerning our commitment to the Reformed (Calvinistic) view of world and life, and I would like to stress the R of the ARSS."

It is true that Dr. Praamsma did not enthusiastically endorse the work of the ARSS/AACS during the years that the young graduates from the Free University rose to positions of leadership and soon published such writings as *Out of Concern for the Church*. For some of us it was extremely difficult at that time to understand his caution. What we could not see then, Dr. Praamsma, with the keen eye of an historian had already begun to detect: faithlessness to our beginnings. Many who lacked his depth of insight and perception then, can certainly tell today.

Dr. Praamsma was critical of the Institute for Christian Studies for the same reason that he was critical of the Free University of Amsterdam: those placed in positions of leadership were being unfaithful to their "beginnings," to the task and mandate to which they had been appointed. And like Abraham Kuyper, Louis Praamsma raised his voice in protest against this faithlessness. "If your association (i.e. the Free University) should decide to accept an instructor who would

definitely deviate from the confession," Kuyper wrote a few years before his death, "rest assured that in such a case I would cut off every connection and contact with the Free University, and I would do so publicly." On this crucial issue of faithfulness to the confessions both Kuyper and Praamsma were men who could not be moved. It was not for naught that it was said at his funeral that Louis Praamsma during his life was a man of *beslistheid*, *belijndheid*, and *belijdenisvastheid*. He feared and honored God more than his fellow man.

How it hurt Louis Praamsma as he watched his worst fears become reality, especially during the last years of his life. A dark shadow descended upon the bright hopes he held for the reformed community in North America and its Kuyperian inheritance, as the Institute for Christian Studies gradually became a house divided against itself. Its energies became absorbed fighting about issues that should have constituted common ground. Reformed professors at the Institute began to advocate the ideas of their liberal colleagues at the Free University of Amsterdam. A lengthy, divisive, acrimonious debate preceeded Arnold de Graaf's dismissal in 1980. The unthinkable, from a confessional point of view, became the substance of prolonged debate. Man began to decide over life and death. Abortion became permissible, the liberation theology of Jürgen Moltmann and others made its inroads into the classroom, the "distinction" of referring to God as a female on national television for the first time in the history of Canada went to an institute professor, homosexual marriages were seriously discussed as a pastoral solution to homosexual problems and the Institute's professor of Theology and Ethics became a confessing member of the most liberal church community in the land, the United Church of Canada. What was already present in seed form in the late sixties now began to manifest itself with a vengeance. The Institute for Christian Studies was no longer true to its confession.

But a lifetime of functioning as a prophet had taken its toll. Louis Praamsma's heart began to weaken. He no longer possessed the psychic and nervous energy needed to wage the battle. He resigned himself to the comforting knowledge that not he, but Jesus Christ, would preserve His church — against the gates of hell if necessary.

He turned once again to his books. He reached into the very depth of his heart and once again wrote with great feeling the story (history) of Christ and His bride. Once more he demonstrated from the pages of history that only a church which is faithful to its "beginnings" can withstand the terrible onslaught of satan in this world. Only they who endure to the end shall be saved. Christ! not man, is our salvation. Ask and it shall be given. If only the people of God would be obedient to His Word.

But confession, of and in itself, is not enough. Faith without works is dead. So Louis Praamsma marshalled all his great insight and energies one last time. No one, except perhaps his wife, will ever know the toll this work took upon his health. He could have spent the last years of retirement reading mystery novels while others did the work. But circumstances did not permit it.

For what was to be the last time, he took up his pen. In the most dramatic way he knew how, he combined confession and Christian living. He wrote a book on the life and times of Abraham Kuyper and let the jubilant cry go forth with power from his lips for one last time: *Let Christ be King. Confess it! Live it!*

Louis Praamsma is dead, yet he shall live. May God comfort those who mourn. The legacy he has left us in his books is invaluable.

It has been said that as leaders of the older generation are departing to be with their Lord, there are no new leaders to take their place. That is a great tragedy, but a tragedy that has been brought about by an inability among potential leaders to generate among God's people a sense of trust and confidence. The greatest tragedy of our time is that the younger leaders have been unwilling to learn from the old. Indecision, uncertainty and equivocation as well as an unwillingness or inability to stand on principle and suffer the consequences, has characterized the words and actions of potential leaders. There is a debilitating unwillingness to place principle above friendship. This is the hard but crucial lesson our young potential leaders have failed to learn from their elders.

The hour is late, the time is short. Yet we may work while it is still day. More than ever the church of Jesus Christ needs leaders like Louis Praamsma whose first love for Him bloomed during their childhood years, and blossoms still.

There is hope! Yes, thank God, there is still hope. We find that hope firmly confessed in the concluding chapter of *The Church in the Twentieth Century*, where Louis Praamsma writes: "Time has not yet run out, and the Church of Christ may continue to build on the unchangeable promises of God. We have the promise that 'this gospel of the kingdom' will be preached in the whole world. We have the promise that the gates of Hades will not prevail against the Church. And finally we have the promise that the believers, even when others faint with fear and foreboding because of what is coming over the world, may look up and raise their heads because their redemption is drawing near. Yes, the Kingdom will certainly come!"

For Louis Praamsma, servant of the Most High, it already has. ●

*Volume 7 is already in print under the title: *The Church in the Twentieth Century*. *Paideia Press*, 1981.

Louis Praamsma was born in Amsterdam, *The Netherlands*, in 1910 and emigrated to Canada in 1958. He studied at *de Christelijke Kweekschool, Sneek*, *het Gymnasium, Sneek*, and *de Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam* (B.D., 1934; Th.D., 1945). In 1935 he was ordained as a minister in *GKN* and served as pastor of *Nieuwlanda GKN* (1935-1944); *Stadskanaal GKN* (1944-1949); *Groningen GKN* (1949-1958); *First CRC of Toronto, Ontario* (1958-1962); *Fruitland CRC, Ontario* (1963-1972) and *Collingwood CRC, Ontario* (1972-1974). He was emeritated in 1974. He was a teacher in *Church History* at *de Gereformeerde Kweekschool voor Onderwijzers, Groningen* (1952-1958). He was Professor of *Historical Theology* at *Calvin Theological Seminary* (1962-1963). In *The Netherlands* he served on several synodical committees of *de GKN*. The synodical committees of the *CRC* on which he has served include "Infallibility and Inspiration in the Light of Scripture and the Creeds," "Ecumenicity and the World Council," and "Synodical Interim Committee." He was editor of *Groninger Kerkbode* (1957-1958).

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Prayer

Henry Vander Kam

THE PRAYERS OF HEZEKIAH

Lesson 13

II Kings 19:14-19, 20:1-6

The recorded prayers of Hezekiah are short, they were uttered under differing circumstances and they are of great importance for us to understand our own prayer life. He prays when real danger threatens him and the country of Judah. Again he prays when he is very sick. At such times we also turn to our God in prayer and we often wonder how we should pray under such circumstances.

An Imminent Danger

In the first Scripture passage noted above, Hezekiah is dealing with the danger posed by the armies of Assyria under Sennacherib as they are about to attack Judah. This is a tremendous host. No one has been able to stop these armies. Sennacherib boasts about this fact. What can Judah do? Isaiah the prophet has already given Hezekiah assurance concerning the threatening danger. Isaiah has a very important place in the kingdom of Hezekiah. He has access to the royal house at any time and is a trusted counselor of the God-fearing Hezekiah. Isaiah tells of the history which is here unfolding in chapters 37 and 38 of his prophecy. It must, therefore, not escape our attention that Isaiah has already spoken about the outcome of this "danger" before Hezekiah prays. Hezekiah sends ambassadors to Isaiah to ask for guidance and for the prayers of the prophet. Now Hezekiah may pray calmly and confidently.

The king of Judah has received a letter of the king of Assyria uttering his threats against Hezekiah and against Judah. The king of Judah reads the letter and then takes it to the house of God. Dramatically he spreads this letter before God for Him to read what this man is threatening as though God were a fellow human being. See what this letter contains that so deeply disturbs Hezekiah! He lays the whole problem before God.

The Address

In Hezekiah's touching prayer he adores the God to Whom he comes. That ought always to be first. He comes to Jehovah, the God of Israel, Who has given His promises to His people — He is the covenant God. This is the God who sits above the cherubim. Hezekiah is not in the Holy of Holies, he may not come there. He spreads out this letter before God but God dwells in the Holy of Holies where the ark of the covenant stands with its cherubim folding their wings toward each other above the mercy seat. Now God is enthroned above these cherubim. He is *the* God, the God "of all the nations of the earth." Many of these nations have made their own gods, but He is the God Who has made heaven and earth. In other words, these gods of the other nations have no standing. These other nations and kingdoms should also acknowledge that the God of Israel is the only God Who is

to be feared. Sennacherib has spoken of the impotence of the gods of the nations. He has defeated them all and he puts the God of Israel on the same plane with these other gods. Hezekiah must not think, says Sennacherib, that his God can save out of my hand.

A Confession of Faith

This adoration of God is also Hezekiah's confession. He confesses his faith in this God and confesses Who He is. He is the Maker of Heaven and earth and He is also his covenant God. This is the God in whom Hezekiah trusts. He knows that this God may not be placed on the same plane with those who are not gods.

The king continues to speak to God as to a fellow human being. He asks God to "incline His ear" and to "open His eyes" to all the evil that the king of Assyria is planning against the people of God. However, he is not only plotting against the people of Judah; he is defying the living God! The honor of God is very closely related to the well-being of His people. If Sennacherib conquers Judah, what will happen to the promises given by God to His people throughout the centuries? What will the heathen say? With this kind of argumentation Hezekiah shows that the king of Assyria would then indeed place the God of Judah on one level with all other gods. So must His people pray. They must base their petition on God's promises!

Hezekiah continues by asserting that the kings of Assyria have indeed laid all the other nations waste. They have conquered all that they faced. Assyria is a power to be reckoned with! Not only have these kings destroyed the lands around them; they have also burned the gods of these nations. They could do this, says Hezekiah, because they were wood and stone. The kings of Assyria could destroy the nations together with the gods in whom they trusted. This emboldens Sennacherib to think that he will also be able to destroy Judah and her God!

Hezekiah now prays that God will save him together with his people out of the hand of the king of Assyria. This is not an idle request. His trust in his God knows no bounds. If God is willing to do it, He surely is able. No earthly king shall be able to stand before Him. Therewith Hezekiah and his people will be rescued out of the hand of this hostile king; thereby also all the nations of the earth shall know that the God of Judah is the only God Who exists. No other gods have been able to save out of his hand. Jehovah can! All men shall realize through this salvation that the God of Judah alone is to be feared. He only is worthy of homage. This salvation will honor Judah's God.

Anticipating Total Salvation

Throughout this episode we are reminded of the full salvation of the people of God which is to come at a later date.

It is the same God who will give complete salvation from sin. The One Who prays for his people is greater than Hezekiah!

A Prayer in Illness

In the second passage listed at the top of this lesson, Hezekiah prays in the midst of very serious sickness. This is a very moving passage, but also a difficult one. The occasion is clear. Isaiah the prophet is commissioned to go to the king to tell him that he will not recover — that he is going to die. What a painful message he is called to convey to this man of God who is deathly sick. Will this message now so upset him that he loses the will to live. Or would the will to live now be sin? Besides all this, consider that this word of the "unchangeable" God does not go into effect, but that He "changes" His mind! These are some of the great difficult matters which face us in this passage.

Because Hezekiah will not recover from this illness, he must set his house in order. He must regulate and make his final arrangements for all the things which pertain to his house and property. How do you do that? There is evidently still time to do this. He also had a mind able to do this. But, what distressing news to hear in the prime of life! It is thought that Hezekiah was about 35 or 36 years old at this time — cut off in the midst of his days!

What is the proper reaction to this news? Should he just say: The Lord who does not change has spoken and, therefore, His will be done? I think this would be a proper answer, but, it is not the answer or the reaction of Hezekiah. He turns himself to the wall and prays. Why pray when the judgment has already been made? A question which often rises in the hearts of God's people is, "Does prayer really change things?" Surely, no one will come to the conclusion that Hezekiah is not submissive to the will of God! The question is: How are we to deal with the God Who hears and answers prayer? Does Hezekiah now have sufficient excuse to cease from praying? Has the time come to stop praying when the prophet has brought this word?

The content of his prayer sounds strange to us. Hezekiah asks God to remember how he has lived before Him, "in truth and with an undivided heart." He has done that which was good in the sight of the Lord. Is he here basing his prayer for restoration on his own goodness? It may sound that way. However, Nehemiah also prays virtually these same words again and again and they find favor in the sight of God. Has God not promised long life to those who walk before Him according to His law? (Proverbs 10:27) Here, too, he bases his petition on God's word, on His promise. It is always a mystery to the people of God when the wicked live a long life (See Psalm 73). But why must a man such as Hezekiah, a God-fearing king, be cut off right in the midst of his life? That is the content of his prayer. And, we read, Hezekiah "wept sore." Is he afraid to die? That conclusion does not follow from his weeping. We must realize that life is sweet for the believer. Neither was the outlook on eternal life as clear then as it was made later in the New Testament.

Recovery!

The sequel is amazing. While Hezekiah prays and Isaiah has not left the royal property, the prophet is told to go back to Hezekiah with not only a different message, but one that was the very opposite of what he had been given before. What a glorious message it was. This "sick visitor" must tell

Hezekiah that his prayer has been heard and that his tears have been noted. Isaiah must go to "the prince of my people" with the words of "Jehovah, the God of David thy father." Not only is his prayer heard, it is answered in a way beyond anything he would have dreamt. "I will heal thee," says God! In the days when medical science knew little concerning the human body, God would heal him. He is the only One who can heal. To show that the cure is miraculous, he is also assured that he will go up to the temple on the third day. The man who was deathly sick will in 72 hours be well enough to go up to the house of God. The promise assumes that Hezekiah will want to go there to bring his thanks for restoration.

The answer to his prayer now becomes very specific. Isaiah must tell him that the Lord will add fifteen years to his life! Has anyone else ever lived who could walk in the assurance that he would live another fifteen years? He will not be an old man when these fifteen years are completed, but he will certainly live to an age which is above average for his time.

Besides his bodily restoration the Lord also informs him that he will be delivered out of the hand of the king of Assyria. His fifteen years will not be spent as a captive in Assyria! The God to Whom he prays is able to prolong his life and is also able to defeat world-powers. He is the God to Whom His people pray.

Hezekiah has seen correctly. God will defend Jerusalem "for mine own sake" and for my servant David's sake. The promise which He has once made shall stand throughout the generations. This God is our God forever!

Questions for discussion:

1. What do you think of the "dramatic" way in which Hezekiah spreads the letter of the king of Assyria before God? Is this example to teach us to entrust all our needs to Him and hide nothing?
2. Is there a difference between the adoration of God and thanks to God in prayer?
3. Is it wise for us to allude to various attributes of God in our prayers? Why does Jesus tell us to use the simple address: Father?
4. How well must we know the word of God in order to be able to base our petitions on His word?
5. God does not change (Mal. 3:6; I Sam. 15:29; cf. 11). How then must we understand the one word of God to Hezekiah that he will die and the other that he will live? Can we understand this difference?
6. May we ever think of the unchangeableness of God as though He were unfeeling?
7. Is there a conflict between Hezekiah's prayer after he has been told he will die and Paul's decision-not to pray anymore concerning his thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:8 ff.)?

THE PRAYER OF DANIEL

Lesson 14

Daniel 9:2-19

Daniel ranks among the greatest heroes of Old Testament times. While he was still very young he stood head and shoulders above the other Jews found in Babylon. He was heroic in the stand which he took against the commandment of the Babylonian king regarding the food which he and his friends were to eat. He would not "defile himself with the

king's dainties" and thereby sin against the law of his God concerning clean and unclean food. Again, although he knew the edict which had gone out that no one was allowed to pray to any god for a certain time, he prayed to the Lord his God as he had done before. Neither did he do this in secret; with his windows open to Jerusalem, so that anyone could see him, he prayed. He would not permit his religious practices and convictions to be compromised by those who were out to entrap him. Regardless of threatened consequences, he felt safe only in obedience to his God.

Prompted by a Scripture

Daniel's lengthy prayer in the ninth chapter of his book is an example of confession and intercession which has seldom been equaled. This prayer is occasioned by the fact that Jeremiah had spoken of 70 years of captivity for the people of God. The end of their captivity would be closely connected with the fall of Babylon, the country which had taken Judah captive. Daniel studied the prophecy of Jeremiah, and many of the expressions used in this book remind one of the style of Jeremiah. He refers especially to chapters 25 and 29 of Jeremiah's prophecy. Babylon *has fallen*. Darius the Mede is on the throne. Persia has conquered Babylon. It had seemed for a long time that this kingdom of Babylon would continue for ages because of its strength. However, the strength of the nations is a fleeting thing. Since Babylon is fallen, is the redemption of Israel from this captivity now coming near? Perhaps the rest of the people have not taken note of Jeremiah's words or understood the time when Judah would go back to its own land. This prophet, Daniel, sees the implications of the words which God spoke through Jeremiah, and he now begins to plead for his people. The prophet is fully aware of his duties. He will speak the word of God when he is called to do so and he will also intercede for his people as a true priest of God. Such leaders God's people need!

Addressing God

The prayer which Daniel utters in this chapter is not a liturgical prayer, as some have thought, but it is an intensely personal prayer which he prays for the whole people. This is not a contradiction in terms. He feels himself one with the people of Judah and with her kings. He pours out his heart in this prayer. It gives us a glimpse of the true spiritual life of a devout child of God. He begins in all humility. Even though he is a great man in the kingdom of Darius, as he also was in the kingdom of Babylon, before the face of God everyone is simply a sinner. He calls on his God in prayer "with sackcloth and ashes." These often in Scripture denote an attitude of deep humility. Thus Daniel addresses God.

God is now spoken of in the highest and most endearing terms. He is the covenant God. It is important that God's people realize that they come to God Who has given His promises to His people and that these promises shall always stand. No other people know of a god such as Jehovah. But, He is also the great and dreadful God. He is awesome in His power. However, He is the One Who keeps covenant and loving-kindness with all those who love Him and keep His commandments.

Penitence

This, however, is the difficulty. Why should this God listen to the prayer of Daniel or any of these people? They have not kept His commandments? They have done the opposite.

Although it is the purpose of Daniel to pray for the release of the people of Judah from the bondage of their captors, he must first make confession. The sin of the people was the reason they had been led into captivity. They had not repented of their sins. They had often bemoaned the state in which they found themselves now, but they didn't come to the conclusion that it was their own fault. Daniel says, "we have sinned." He completely identifies himself with the people of God. They have dealt perversely and have done wickedly. They have rebelled and have turned away from the commandments which their God had given them to keep. God had sent His prophets again and again to inform the people of their sin and the danger of their ways but we didn't listen to them. They had not listened to the Lord Himself when He warned them.

The prophet now draws a clear contrast between the God against whom they have sinned and His people. To God belongs righteousness. All that He does is righteous. Men must confess that! They must confess that even when they do not understand! On the other hand, to the people belongs confusion of face, utter shame! This is true of all the people. They ought to be ashamed of the fact that their God had to send them into this captivity! Shame belongs to them as long as that captivity continues! He has scattered them out of their own land. They have been sent to Babylon and to various other nations. All Israel, the northern kingdom as well as Judah, is guilty of the sins which Daniel confesses. Had there only been this spirit of confession years ago — how different would have been the history of His people! They have trespassed against their God. They are guilty of treason! Unless God shows lovingkindness, there will be no hope for Judah.

Daniel reiterates his confession in verse 8. It is now evident that this shame belongs not only to the common people, but also to their leaders. They must also come ashamedly before their God. Kings and princes and the fathers must all humble themselves under His mighty hand. A man's station in this life or in this world is of no use to him when he appears before God!

The situation of his people and the reason for their captivity do not fill the heart of Daniel with hopelessness. To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness, even though we have rebelled against Him. The nature and character of God give hope. The situation of the people is bleak. Looking at them now or in the past would smother all hope, but with the Lord are mercies and forgiveness! And this people desperately need these! They have to live on the mercies and the forgiving spirit of God. The people have rebelled and do not deserve His favor. They have not obeyed the voice of their God which came to them through the prophets. They have gone their own way. This has cost them their freedom and their prosperity. When will this people learn that the law of their God is for their profit? When will they learn that their life is only to be found in their obedience to the commandments which He has given? Daniel prays for them

We apologize to our readers for two especially annoying errors in our February issue. The printer transposed pages 8 and 16 and misprinted our cover announcements.

and confesses the sins of the people. Who else prays so in Judah? They continue in their waywardness.

It may seem to some that Daniel is repetitious in this prayer. The truth is rather that there is no end to the sins which have to be confessed. He includes all Israel, not distinguished in northern and southern kingdoms, in the confession he now makes. Because all the people have transgressed, God has dealt with them as He had already warned in the law of Moses. He is righteous. He does all that which He said He would do. They have now experienced it. They could have known long before it actually happened that evil would come upon them because they had turned from the law which He had given through Moses. One may not deal lightly with the law of God. He holds man to it. Its demands stand.

He has simply confirmed the words which He spoke in the earliest times, says Daniel. He had warned them time and again. He had warned their judges and rulers throughout their history. No other people had laws like Israel's. No other people was blest as Israel was. Therefore, when they fell, they fell lower than any other people. No city has now suffered the way Jerusalem has suffered. When the best falls, it falls lower than all others. This was the people that should have known what to expect. God did not "wink" at any of the sins of Israel!

The law of Moses had plainly warned of the great evil that would befall those who would not obey its admonitions. This had been made so clear to Israel that everyone of the people should have realized it. Then, when the evil came, they should have realized that it came because of their sins. But, they didn't. "We have not entreated the favor of Jehovah!" Unbelievable! "We have not turned from our iniquities. We have not confessed our sins." Of what good is the truth to such a people as this? They have not used it wisely. Seemingly they have not learned anything from the truth which God had revealed to them.

God was always aware of the sin which Israel committed. Therefore He brought all this present evil on the people. He maintains His righteousness!

Daniel will mention the sins of the people again before he concludes this prayer, but he now comes to the purpose of this prayer. He reminds the Lord of the way in which He had redeemed Israel out of Egypt. He has obtained a great name among all people for that deed, and, even though it is so long ago, that fame continues till now. However, let the righteousness of God stand and let His anger and wrath be turned from Jerusalem. Is this possible? Can there be forgiveness while the righteousness of God is maintained? Of course! That is the gospel! Let the Lord now hear and answer the prayer of this humble child of God. Do it not for us, but for Thy great name's sake. Jerusalem is closely connected with the Name of the God of Israel. That city is called by His name and it is lying desolate. Daniel prays "Not for our righteousnesses, for we have none, but for Thy great mercies' sake, Oh Lord." Let the mercies of God be extolled. Daniel pleads for forgiveness. If the sins are taken away, Jerusalem can be restored! Now, in very brief sentences he pleads for God's mercy. "Lord, hear. Lord, forgive. Lord, don't postpone. This city and this people are called by Thy name!" Not only is the glory of Israel departed, but the name of God will not be properly honored as long as Jerusalem is desolate.

This beautiful prayer teaches us to pray. It teaches us to pray Biblically.

Questions for discussion:

1. Daniel knew what time it was on God's clock by studying the prophets. Is it true today that we could better know our times through such study?
2. Are the attributes which he ascribes to God logical? Is there any conflict between His covenant faithfulness and His righteousness?
3. Must confession always have as prominent a place in prayer as Daniel gives it?
4. How is the former redemption from Egypt a real source of comfort to Daniel when he prays for the deliverance out of the present captivity?
5. Is there a conflict between God's forgiveness and the fact that He remembers all the sins which are committed against His law?
6. In the concluding verse of this prayer Daniel unites the honor of the name of God to the answer to his prayer. Do we dare to do that? Do we dare to "hold Him to His word?"

Bach and Handel TRICENTENNIAL

Peter De Jong

Both *Eternity* and *Christian News* call our attention to the fact that in 1985 it is three centuries ago that two of our most famous Christian musicians, Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) and George Frideric Handel (1685-1759) were born. Bach has been acclaimed the greatest musician of all time, "the most profound and original musical thinker the world has ever seen." His work had been virtually forgotten until in the mid-19th century it was rediscovered by Mendelssohn. Today he has come to be acknowledged as the musician, as *Newsweek* put it, "to whom almost everything in music past and present is somehow indebted." That periodical observed that, "No composer in history, in short, has been so widely jazzed up, watered down, electrified and otherwise transmogrified, debated and admired as this German provincial. So it is hardly surprising that this 300th birthday next March will rank as a world-class anniversary."

Of Bach, the provincial choirmaster's over 1,000 works almost 300 are cantatas. The *Christian News* article called attention to the fact that the flood of recent reports and stories "fail to emphasize that Bach was first and foremost an orthodox Christian whose life's motto required that he do all his work 'in Jesus' name' and 'to the glory of God.' Even when not in direct service to the Church, he nevertheless took for granted that he was serving God." It cites an observation that "Bach did not distinguish between a sacred and secular calling in life. His life gave evidence he agreed with Luther when he insisted that all honorable service glorified God. Bach thus showed that he was in truth a member of God's royal priesthood."

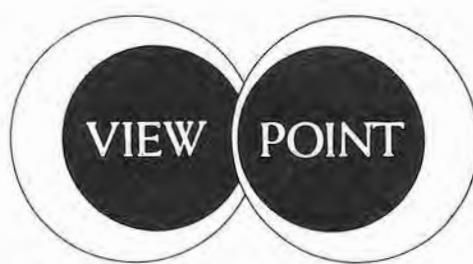
After expressing disappointment with a recent TV special on Bach, the article observes, "Liberal churchmen, who now are praising Bach, pay little attention to Bach's theology. They should read 'Bach's Musical Response to Biblical Criticism'... (our May, 1981 *OUTLOOK* article which *Christian News* reprinted in its magazine and later in its *Encyclopedia*). That article cited an observation of Jan Zwart in the Dutch *De Reformatie* that Bach in 1724 had composed a cantata vigorously attacking the criticism of the Bible and sectarian strife in the church. "During that time Bach came to compose a splendid cantata that can be designated as a song in praise of sound doctrine. In it he made use of a poem of Luther based on Psalm 12. This is not surprising because in Psalm 12 David was speaking against those who no longer took the Word of the Lord seriously. A situation which was also becoming painfully obvious in Bach's time." "The Cantata was not exaggerating when it exposed to ridicule those who take 'foolish reason as their compass.' " "Whether they realize it or not, those leading in this critical movement are engaged in a wicked business. Luther and Bach knew it and, following the inspired psalms, taught the

church to sing its prayer and praise to God for deliverance from and victory over the enemies."

Christian News concludes its quotation by observing, "Bach opposed the Bible critics of his day. True Christians today should follow Bach's example."

Although Bach and Handel were born only 80 miles and a month apart, they never met and their worlds were widely different. Handel was a celebrity in his day. *Christian News* cited *Newsweek*'s comment that "When, by 1800, his 'Messiah' reigned as the most popular music the world had ever known, almost nothing of Bach had been heard for half a century." In the recent Christmas season we were reminded again of the way in which Handel's marvelous arrangements of the Biblical texts concerning the predictions, the coming, and the return of the Messiah make singing and hearing it a uniquely moving experience, an anticipation of the triumph to come, to all who believe in Christ our Lord.

We should be better acquainted with and make much more extensive use of the enormous Christian musical legacy the Lord has granted us in the works of these composers whose 300th birthday the world is observing. ●



In the Trenches

It has been said by those who know the game of football that the game is won or lost "in the trenches," that is, on the line where the guards, tackles, and centers fight it out seeking to gain the advantage over the opponent. If the offensive line succeeds, they open up areas for the running backs to get through, or they protect the quarterback to get off a completed pass. If the defensive line prevails, they shut down the running back or sack the quarterback. Most people watching the game of football think in terms of the quarterback passing to the ends, or the running backs. They think in terms of the most visible and outstanding plays.

Much of what happens in football and the way people watch the game is also true of the church. People watch the actions of a synod like they watch the star running back. Synod is the focus of attention. There the big decisions are

made. Issues win or lose at Synod. When a synod convenes, everyone is wondering how this or that issue will turn out, and each eagerly waits for the debate and the outcome.

Having been a delegate to synod at various times, including last year, I have come to see that the synod is not really the place where the issues are decided. The issues are won or lost "in the trenches." I do not mean by that, in committees or in political maneuvering behind the scenes at the synod. I mean by that that issues are won or lost already on the classical level. The classes choose the delegates to the synod and these delegates vote their own views at the synod. If a person could tally those views before the synod meets, one would know the outcome of the issue before the synod meets.

What I am saying here is overly simplified, of course. There are convincing speeches at the synod and people are convinced to vote differently through debate. But most delegates, especially on an issue like putting women in office, know their position before they get to the synod and they vote that position.

If the decisions at the synod are really already determined at the classes, their election of delegates to attend the synod becomes extremely important. The point has been made by others that some of the traditionally conservative classes in our denomination contributed several votes in favor of women as deacons. How does that happen? Is this the position of these classes and the membership of the churches in these classes? Did these classes knowingly send these votes to the synod? The answer is probably, "No." How then did this come about?

This happens especially because delegates to a Classical meeting do not know how ministers stand on these issues. Ministers sometimes know the position of other ministers, and some elders may know the position of some ministers, but, by and large, there is no knowledge of this. Some ministers are good leaders on the floor of classis and therefore get votes, and the minister who is chairing the meeting, if he is doing a good job, will probably be elected. There is confusion on major issues in the classes, and one does not win by confusion.

What obviously needs to happen is that the delegates at a classical meeting must be given an opportunity to ask certain questions to which all ministers, as well as elder nominees, must reply. This is the only sensible approach to the problems. We do not elect representatives to government positions without hearing their position on various issues. Consistories seek to learn the position of ministers on issues before they place them on a duo or trio. We do not appoint people to Calvin Seminary without an interview at the synod to reveal their connections. It is ironic that we want to hear the positions of people who teach at our seminary, but we do not want to interview and know the positions of the people that we send to the synod to elect them. Someone at Classis, before voting begins, ought to move that delegates be given the opportunity to learn the positions of prospective delegates to Synod on issues. This should also be done when a classis votes for representatives to denominational boards.

Most people reading this article are probably thinking about women in the office of deacon which is the hot issue right now. That is one issue into which delegates at a classis would inquire, but there are also other important issues. I would inquire about a person's position on the proposed plan to put World Missions and World Relief under one board, how they would vote on a *Banner* editor, their view of denominational quotas, apartheid and race relations, the contemporary testimony, etc.

Perhaps "the trenches" go back even one more step to our consistories. In considering the issue of women as deacons, suppose the minister and the elder whose turn it is to attend the classical meeting favor it, but the consistory as a whole does not. This consistory will then send two votes to classis against any overture to overturn the decision of 1984, and two votes for delegates to synod for men who favor women as deacons. There is something terribly wrong about that. Perhaps consistories need to alter their procedure in sending delegates to classis to ensure that they are properly represented on some of these issues.

However we approach this, let us remember that the game is basically won or lost "in the trenches."

Norman Haan, Worthington, Minn.

Capital Punishment

The other day an article appeared in the local press about the stand of the United Church of Canada on the issue of capital punishment. While all of the local clergy interviewed were against a return to capital punishment, the "churchmen say their congregations may support a return to the death penalty." That's not the first time that clergy are not representative of the thinking of the people in their congregations.

What struck me, however, were the *arguments* used by the clergy against reinstating capital punishment. I want to look at a few of them.

1. "Murder doesn't entitle us to murder in return," says one minister. As if capital punishment, carried out by duly appointed executioners, is murder. The magistrate is armed with the sword to prevent murder, says the Catechism. If I kill someone by taking the law into my own hands, then I am guilty of murder. But when someone appointed by God to carry out punishment does it, it is *not* murder. Rulers are God's servants for good, says Romans 13, and do not bear the sword in vain. (And the sword referred to is that of the executioner.) One would think that ministers of the Word would understand that elementary distinction.

What is more, in the same body of legislation in which God forbids murder (the 6th commandment), he prescribes the death penalty for several offenses. Is God contradicting himself? Of course not. The 6th commandment forbids us to kill our neighbor out of hatred or revenge. But God himself decides which crimes call for the death penalty, and He entrusts that duty to the magistrate who acts in the name of God. That is not "murdering in return."

2. "The 'eye-for-an-eye' philosophy in the Old Testament is superceded by the New Testament gospel." Capital punishment is "contrary to the spirit and teaching of Christ." That is an old standby that has been used many a time. But it is dead wrong just the same. Old and New Testaments cannot be played over against each other in this fashion, neither in this case nor in that of the imprecatory psalms. You find the same principle at work in both testaments.

First of all, the "eye-for-an-eye" rule is not a cruel, vindictive law at all, but was introduced by God in order to prevent undue harshness in punishment. God was simply concerned to spell out that the punishment meted out was to fit the crime perpetrated. It was the principle of retributive justice, and that principle still holds in the New Testament too (Cf. Matt. 7:2; Luke 11:29-32; 12:47-8). Furthermore, the spirit and teaching of Jesus is consistent with that of the Old Testament, including His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, and it does not contradict or rule out punishment for sin (cf. e.g. Matt. 5:17-20; 7:13, 14, 21-23; John 2:13-16; Mark 11:15-17; Heb. 10:26-31).

3. "I'm still not convinced capital punishment is a deterrence to murder." In the first place, that is not the point. If God says that he who sheds Man's blood must have his blood shed by man, then we don't counter by asking whether or not it is a deterrent. God's laws are good, whether or not we think they work. What is more, Romans 13:3, 4 clearly teaches that punishment is a deterrent to evil. And if capital punishment were carried out swiftly and effectively, it would be a great deterrent, as has been demonstrated more than once in history. Aside from that, however, God has established a "balance" in this world, so that he who willfully takes a man's life must himself undergo a penalty that restores the balance — restitution must be made. On that principle the whole house of justice stands.

J. Tuininga, Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada

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A LOOK AT BOOKS

WOMEN IN CHURCH OFFICE

Rev. Ron Cammenga

With this 16 page pamphlet the Rev. Ron Cammenga makes his contribution to a growing genre of articles on the subject of the role of women in the church. Like Dr. G. Knight, the Rev. R. Sikkema, and Mrs. Laurie Vanden Heuvel, the Rev. Cammenga, pastor of the Hull (Iowa) Protestant Reformed Church, is opposed to the ordination of women to ecclesiastical office. Although his style is not as scholarly and irenic as others who have addressed this issue (e.g. Knight), nonetheless he makes a strong case in a very forthright manner.

If one wants a concise and cogent presentation of the Biblical position regarding this topic, this pamphlet can be readily recommended. The author addresses the pertinent Biblical passages and views the current debate as the product of the spirit of the age infecting the church. Ultimately this issue is not about who is "for" or "against" women, but how one views the Scriptures. Writes Cammenga, "The underlying issue, . . . is Scripture and the church's confession of the inspiration, infallibility, and authority of Holy Scripture."

The last two sections of this pamphlet under the headings "Our Calling to Stand Against this Movement" and "The Positive Calling of Women" are considerably more polemical. In these, Cammenga expresses his opposition to women voting at congregational meetings,

teaching catechism, birth control, and abortion. He defines the positive role of women in the church almost exclusively in terms of childbearing (I Tim. 2:15) and contends that if a woman has no children she should be known "as was Dorcas for her good works and for her almsdeeds." Having introduced such a wide range of subjects these sections could have been expanded or, better yet, omitted. They are not essential to his basic premise that while women may be involved in many ways in serving God's church, the Scripture excludes them from being "ministers, elders or deacons."

For the price of a postage stamp one may obtain copies of this pamphlet free upon request by writing to: The Reformed Witness, P.O. Box 181, Doon, Iowa 51235.

Reviewed by Rev. Richard Blauw
Zutphen CRC
Hudsonville, Michigan

Am I alone or are there others who are tired of *The Banner*, our church's publication, running page after page of liberal articles, reviews of R-rated movies, and the thoughts and desires of the editor-in-chief instead of the convictions of the majority of the church?

Am I alone or do others feel that it is time for a good hard look at Calvin Seminary, and where it is leading the church. The leaders of the church are taught there but what are they being *taught*?

Am I alone? I pray that I am not, for I see the slipping away of a church that I love. I pray that God will give strength and wisdom to those who have questions like these and are wondering if they are alone.

Yours in Christ,
David Pruin
Box 344
Stout, IA 50673

YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN

I wonder if the Lord ever gave all those of us, who are Church members, a more important warning than that we must be born again to enter heaven (Jn. 3:3). The more because of directing it to as active a Church member as ever there was perhaps, namely Nicodemus. Yes and even repeated the introductory word — "verily" or "truly."

Yet of all the sermons that I personally have listened to over the years I cannot recall even one that was based on that warning. Is that because of so many believing in baptismal regeneration? Is all the controversy in our circles, these late years, due to so many not having been reborn? And is that the reason why so many no longer take God's Word to be authoritative when, for example, it comes to women in ecclesiastical office?

Something to be mindful of, I realize, is the possibility of having been regenerated in infancy or unconsciously. That possibility, not one of us, I presume, would deny, for that would be the same as to declare that all the children of believing parents who have died in infancy have perished.

But let us not dare to take for granted that actually we were born again in infancy, seeing this warning of our Lord makes it clear that our everlasting weal or woe is at stake. Scripture, for good reasons, warns us that we examine ourselves whether we be in the faith, and that we make our calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10).

(Rev.) J.E. Brink
Kalamazoo, MI

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

AM I ALONE

Recently there have been some questions that have laid heavy on my heart and I am wondering if I am alone.

Is every one satisfied with the new or lecturing way some have "preached" the Word of God in our C.R.C.? Do some go home as I, pondering where the blessing and spirit filled hearts are, trying to put the pieces together so I can feed on the Word during the week?

Am I alone or are there others who have found that Sunday school and catechism come last and everything else comes first? Have we so lost the appreciation of Sunday school and catechism that it has spread into the homes where parents have also lost a sense of the importance of them?