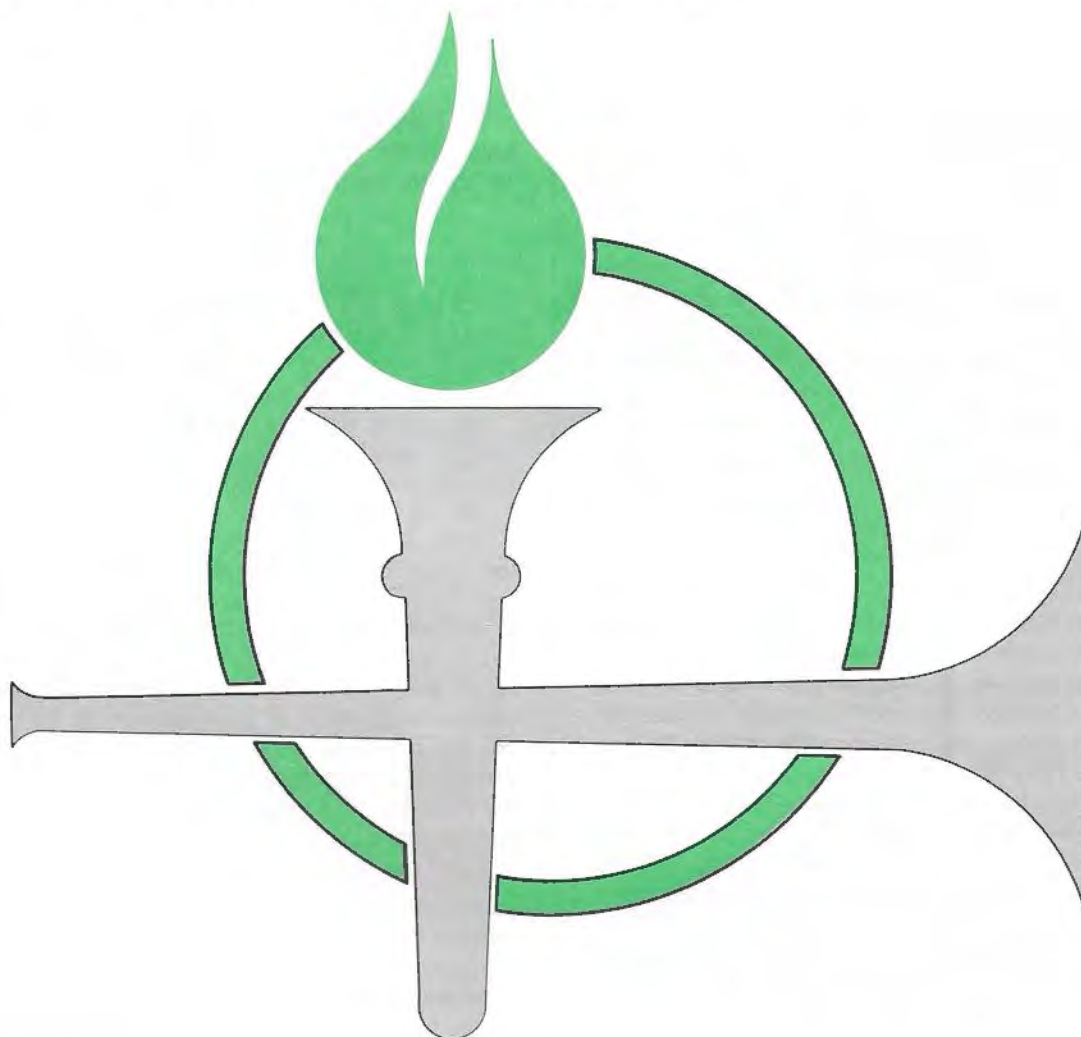


# THE OUTLOOK

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DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

MAY 1985



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VAN TIL AT NINETY  
PREACHING THE WORD  
WHY BE NEGATIVE?

## PENTECOST MEDITATION

# The Holy Spirit Given

John Blankespoor

"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (Acts 2:1-4).

Out of the darkness, through the morning and into the day—in that order the great events of salvation seemed to have taken place here. Jesus was born in the night, He arose early in the morning, and the Holy Spirit was poured out when it had become day. Does this perhaps symbolize that out of the darkness of sin the victory of Christ turns the darkness of night into the light of the morning, and the Spirit's being poured out brings the light of a new day that will never end?

Pentecost means fifty. It was a Jewish feast day celebrating the fact that the Lord had given His people a full harvest. On this day they were to bring to the Lord the first fruits of the complete harvest. This was also the fiftieth day after Jesus had been crucified. Now the "first fruits" of the completed spiritual harvest are being brought in with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Consider what a harvest this was and is for the church of Jesus Christ! What the pay check is to the laboring man, what the financial profits are to the business man, and what the harvest is to the farmer, that Pentecost is for the church of Christ. The Holy Spirit was poured out into the church. When Jesus was on earth He preached *to* the people with word and deed. On the cross He died *for* His people. On Pentecost He begins to work *in* them, giving them the harvest of His wonderful salvation.

The Holy Spirit makes new creatures (or creations) out of old, lost sinners. He is the marvelous Power of God that enables sinners to walk and live in the way of godliness. He is the Spirit that, in this world devastated by sin, produces the fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22).

What blessings are given to the people who receive the Spirit, and are enabled to produce such marvelous fruits. John says that their works are even greater than what Jesus Himself did on earth. The Spirit will continue the work of God until all the elect are raised from the grave in the final day, in a new heaven and earth, to enjoy an eternity in full life and fellowship with the Lord.

The Holy Spirit, "poured out" on Pentecost, is "the third person of the Trinity, one with the Father and the Son" as we learned from our earliest catechism books.

The Holy Spirit was given with "signs." Although He in Himself is invisible, the church must know who He is and what He does when He is given. The signs are given only once, although He came to stay with His people.

One special sign was a sound of a violent storm, perhaps like the sound of a tornado. Someone who experienced it once told me that when the tornado passed his home it sounded like ten long freight trains passing at once. This noise came suddenly and unexpectedly. The "sign" was not a wind, but the *sound* like that of a violent wind. The meaning of the sign is clear. Jesus compared the Spirit with the wind. He is invisible, but has tremendous power. The Holy Spirit works invisibly and internally with infinite power in the hearts and lives of God's elect people. He can change the hardest heart—think of the conversion of the Apostle Paul. He has power to make sinners new creations, to make spiritually dead people alive, to resurrect God's people in the final day with glorious new bodies. He can give faith that can move "figurative" mountains and can grant a comfort and peace that surpasses all understanding.

A second sign was separated tongues of fire, appearing on the heads of all who were in that room. There was no fire, but what looked like fire. What did this sign mean? First, fire purifies. The Spirit purifies our filthy hearts from the sin that is in us. Fire also gives light. The Spirit will enlighten the minds of the Lord's followers so that they can understand His work. Think of what great changes they experienced in this short period of time. Up to this time the entire work of Christ seems to have been a "mystery" to them. They did not understand Him or the meaning of His cross and resurrection. Now Peter was ready to preach the memorable Pentecost sermon with such power and enlightenment that 3000 people repented and were added to the church.

What was the meaning of their speaking in foreign languages? With our speech we communicate with others. The Spirit with His power and enlightenment changes the hearts of saved sinners, so that they begin to pray to and praise God. He also enables them to speak for their Lord to other people. This speech in many languages points ahead to the work of the Lord in saving, along with these believing Jews, believing Gentiles from all kinds of other nations.

Jews already in that day lived in many parts of the world and were often business men. Many of them had come from these diverse countries to celebrate the feast of Pentecost. Now they heard these followers of Christ talking in the native languages of the countries from which they had come. This amazed them, for these speakers had no formal training in these languages which they were speaking. This speech in foreign languages meant that the Holy Spirit and salvation would be given to believers from all nations with no country excluded. We who are mostly from Gentile ancestry need to appreciate and thank the Lord for extending this grace also to us.

We notice, finally, to whom the Holy Spirit was given. He was not given to all people or to a group of them indiscriminately. Unbelievers do not receive the Spirit. He is poured out upon believers. Note too, as a basic principle found through the Scripture and the history of the church, that the Holy Spirit is not given where there is continuing in sin. These two are opposites. We remember how Samson, when he was obedient had incredible power, but when he broke his Nazarite vow lost his strength. When David fell into sin with Bathsheba, he prayed that God would not take His Spirit from him (Ps. 51:5). Pentecost follows Calvary. Atonement must be made—our sins must be removed before the Spirit is poured out. In practice, we must confess our sins and seek forgiveness in Christ before we enjoy the blessings and peace of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit was poured out upon the church which was in Christ and for whom He died. On the New Testament church, living in obedience to God's word and in the unity of the faith, the Lord poured out His Spirit. The Spirit works through the Word which He inspired and where that Word is received.

Was there another time in the history of the New Testament church when the people of God were so characterized by zeal, love and dedication as was the church at this time? This condition did not last long. We soon read about Ananias and Sapphira. The blessings of Spirit-filled people are given only where people repent from sin, trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and live by His Word.

Today's church is generally not filled with the Spirit. He is often "quenched" or "grieved" in our lethargic and complacent "Christianity." May the Lord lead us by His Word to pray,

Come, Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove, with all thy quickening powers;  
Kindle a flame of sacred love in these cold hearts of ours.  
Look how we grovel here below, fond of these trifling toys;  
Our souls can neither fly nor go to reach eternal joys.  
Come, Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove, with all Thy quickening powers;  
Come, shed abroad a Savior's love, and that shall kindle ours.

# 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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# Christians and Their Pastor

Herman Otten

We ask you, fellow Christians, to appreciate the men who work with you and lead you in the Lord and warn you. Love them and think very highly of them on account of the work they're doing. Live at peace with one another (1 Thess. 5:12, 13).



Our text tells us about the proper attitude Christians should have toward their pastor. When we observe what is happening to the ministry today and the attitude many have toward pastors, it is well that we consider this theme.

## Pastor Firings and Burnout: a Growing Problem

*Newsweek* (March 23, 1981) reported on the increasing problems between many congregations and their pastors in an article titled "Why Pastors Are Fired." "Many Churches Are Beginning to Recognize Clergy Burnout is an Occupational Hazard" was the headline. Religious News Service gave to a weekly feature last June (June 12, 1981). RNS said in part:

Clergy, although still considered to be called by God, are being fired from the job more than ever before or else abandoning it for other careers.

According to a number of recent surveys of the ministry, the level of job dissatisfaction and low morale are increasing among the clergy.

Ministry observers have come to recognize this trend as a particular psychological condition, popularly called "burnout," which is an emotional deterioration that occurs in most high-pressure professions. Among clergy it often results in a loss of motivation and enthusiasm for ministry. As the condition worsens, it is compounded by doubts about the validity of the call to the ministry and about the very faith that the minister has been called to preach. . . .

These stresses are by no means confined to the individual minister. In recent years, the National Institute of Mental Health has found the highest rates of nervous breakdown among the wives of male clergy and doctors, (clinical psychologist) Dr. Brian Hall, said. . . .

Although difficult to tell whether "burnout" is a result or a cause of marital instability, several researchers have begun to address the problem of the growing number of clergy marriages which are having a harder time lasting "until death do us part" . . . .

## From Divine Calling to Secular Profession

Earlier this year RNS (Feb. 10, CN, Feb. 22, 1982) in a story titled "Southern Baptist Clergy Firings at an All-Time High Across the United States" reported:

A nationwide trend toward clergy firings and forced resignations has alarmed officials of the Southern Baptist Convention, with 13 million members the nation's largest denomination.

Pastor firings are at an all-time high, according to Brooks Faulkner, supervisor of the denomination's career guidance section in Nashville, Tenn. He said 29 of 35 state Baptist newspapers carried editorials concerning the problem in the last year. . . .

Reasons for clergy firings are varied. They include sagging church financial and attendance statistics, for which a pastor is blamed; general unstable conditions in the country; resulting in frustration among congregations and clergy; personality clashes; breakdowns in communication between pastor and congregation; and power struggles between pastor and a faction within the congregation.

RNS quotes one Southern Baptist editor: "In the past churches were reluctant to dismiss a pastor. Historically, we have held that the church and the pastor were led to each other by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we assumed that when the termination came that also would be the influence of the Holy Spirit. But now we find that methods used by the secular business world are more commonly being used by the church.



For example, if the church doesn't show growth, then—like General Motors—the top man has to go" (CN, Feb. 22, 1982)....

## The Biblical Correction

What is the answer to "clergy burnout," "clergy firings," and most of the other difficulties that arise between pastors and their congregations? Our text gives us the answer. Paul writes to the Thessalonians: "We ask you, fellow Christians, to appreciate the men who work with you and lead you in the Lord and warn you. Love them and think very highly of them on account of the work they're doing. Live at peace with one another."

## A True Pastor

The "men who work with you and lead you in the Lord and warn you" are the pastors. Who is a pastor and what makes a man a pastor?

A pastor is not just anyone who pretends to preach. There have always been many vain talkers who pretend to be pastors. "I didn't send the prophets, and yet they ran. I didn't talk to them and yet they prophesied. If they had stood by My council, then they would have told My people what I say and would turn from the evil they live in and the evil they do.... I've heard what the prophets say. Those who tell lies in My name say, 'I had a dream!'.... How long will the hearts of these prophets tell lies and invent dishonest prophecies?... I'm against the prophets, says the LORD, who use their tongues and say, 'God said it.' I'm against those who prophesy false dreams, says the LORD. They tell and make My people go wrong by their lies and wild talk. I didn't send them or order them to go, and they can't help these people at all, says the LORD" (Jer. 23:21-32).

### (1) "Men"

While it was Christianity which highly esteemed women and motherhood and noted that in the eyes of God men and women are equal, the women preachers among the sectarian and liberal churches are against God's will. Paul says under the inspiration of God, the Holy Spirit: "As in all the churches of the holy people, the women should be silent in church because they are not allowed to speak. They should submit, as the Law says. If there is something they want to know, they should ask their husbands at home. It is a disgrace for a woman to speak in church" (1 Cor. 14:33b-35).

### (2) "Called" by God

A pastor is a fellow Christian, called by the Shepherd and Bishop of our soul, through a Christian congregation.... According to God's will the Christian congregation chooses and calls men as ministers, who in the name of Christ and in the name of the congregation publicly perform the functions of the Office of the Keys. (The) call to serve as pastor here is a call from God and not some business contract, as far too many congregations consider their "call." Paul tells the pastors at Ephesus: "Take care of yourselves and the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to be shepherds of God's church that He bought with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). He wrote to the Ephesians: "He who went down also 'went up' above all the heavens to fill everything. And He gave us some men to be apostles, some to speak the Word, some to tell the good news, some to be

pastors and teachers, in order to get His holy people ready to serve as workers and build the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:10-12)....

## (3) Their Work

(Ours), unlike most denominations, has always emphasized the importance of its pastors being able to study the Holy Scriptures in the original languages and knowing Christian doctrine and church history. Our pastors can't be authorities on every subject... but they should be able to tell us what God's Word says.

What is the pastor's work? A pastor is to "work" among his flock in the Word and doctrine as a good manager of God's hidden truths.... The pastor is to be a... steward, of God's word and it is God who is his real and final judge....

The pastor is an ambassador for Christ.... He has a commission from the throne of the Creator and Ruler of the world, the declaration of royal pardon for lost sinners who are destined to eternal Hell without it.... He prepares men not primarily to be good citizens for a temporal state, but He prepares them for citizenship in heaven....

A pastor is to "lead" as our text says "you in the Lord".... A pastor... is to oversee the flock in the name, in behalf, of the Lord by teaching, instructing, guiding and looking after its spiritual welfare.

## Congregational Love and Respect

What is the God-pleasing attitude of Christians toward their pastor? Paul says, "Love them and think very highly of them on account of the work they're doing. Live in peace with one another." Love him for his earnest endeavors to bring you to a daily realization of your sin, for helping you to increase your trust in Jesus as your all-sufficient Savior from sin... for warning you about the dangers which threaten your soul.... Pray daily for your pastor's success....

Not every pastor is worthy of the esteem of his congregation. If a pastor preaches contrary to God's Word or if he is unfaithful, of course, a congregation must act in accordance with God's Word and take appropriate action. But, thank God, you have a pastor who is faithful to God's Word. Love and esteem him highly for that.

Oh, may Thy people faithful be. And in Thy pastors honor Thee And with them work and for them pray and gladly Thee in them obey, Receive the prophet of the Lord and gain the prophet's own reward. So may we when our work is done Together stand before Thy throne and joyful hearts and voices raise in one united song of praise, With all the bright celestial host, To Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. ●

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*Editor's Note: Excerpts from a sermon printed in the July 12, 1982 Christian News, preached by its editor at a 25th anniversary celebration service on June 27 honoring Pastor William Bischoff at Bridgeton, Missouri. Pastor Herman Otten through his Christian News is credited with being a major influence in the remarkable return of the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church to confessional orthodoxy. Although he has for some two decades been the pastor of its church at New Haven, Missouri, he is still not properly accredited as one of its ministers because the seminary whose Liberalism he exposed would not give him the required recommendation!*

# CHOOSING YOUR PREACHER

Peter Eldersveld

*"Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."*

I Corinthians 4:1

What do you think of your preacher? I am assuming you have one—a preacher, a priest, a minister—it really doesn't matter what you call him. Maybe you do not even go to church very often, but there is someone you consider *your preacher*. If you had trouble, you would probably go to him. Or perhaps there is a minister or priest whom you know vaguely, but you have definite opinions about him and you tend to think of all clergymen in terms of that preacher you just happen to know a little bit about. Whatever the case may be, what do you think of your preacher? That is a very important question, because what you think of your preacher says something about the state of your soul.

As a matter of fact, if a man does not have the right preacher, there is a good chance that he will go to hell. And that is why the whole subject of preachers is pretty important for those who preach and for those who listen.

If you are like most people today, chances are you don't have a very high opinion of preachers in general and perhaps not even of your own preacher. The image of the ministry is badly tarnished. An article that appeared some time ago in *Christianity Today* describes the "Images of the Pastor in Modern Literature." It is pretty frightening. The article says, "During the twentieth century the image of the clergyman in fiction has changed. Once seen as a crusader, he has now become a doubter. Once a comforter, he is now an accommodator." In his book, *The Failure of Theology in Modern Literature*, John Killinger has said, "far from standing like lonely figures in the ship's prow, [the clergy] have tended to be found in far greater abundance on the poop deck."

The widespread disillusionment with the clergy's performance is being expressed by a raft of books that attempt to diagnose the trouble with the pulpit. One of them cynically states that most sermons today are half-baked, soft boiled, or cold. They lack the impelling force of the power of the living God. Helmut Thielicke points right at the pulpit as he diagnoses the trouble with the church. He remarks that the average churchgoer stands before a "rubbish heap of dead words." Another writer talks about the "famine of the Word" in the churches today. To be sure, there are some people who still go to church, but they go with the almost frantic hope of hearing something that will help them and their patience is wearing thin. In an article entitled, "A Layman Speaks to the Pulpit," William J. Samarin has said, "Speaking is so important to us that we often tolerate an

abundance of nonsense to get a few specks of substance. Yet our tolerance has limits . . ."

Because of the crisis of the clergy, many of them often feel frustrated and unsure of themselves. They experience a distressing conflict of roles: they do not know sometime whether they are to be a civil rights worker, a psychologist, a master of ceremonies, an entertainer, or what. I feel sorry for them. But I feel much more sorry for the multitudes of people who, as a result of the clergy's crisis, are like sheep without a shepherd. They are starving because no one is giving them God's living bread and God's living water is nowhere near to slake their terrible thirst.

So, what do you think of your preacher? Does he feed your soul? If he doesn't, you should start searching for one who does, because you need a preacher who really preaches, and your family does. What is a preacher's real task anyway? Do you know? You should know, and you should not rest until you have put yourself beneath the ministry of a man who is a real preacher of God's Word.

Fortunately the Bible gives us a great deal of information about what a preacher is and what we may expect of him. Take, for example, the information we have about one of the earliest churches, the church in Corinth. That church, incidentally, consisted of groups of believers who lived in or near the city of Corinth. They had preacher problems in that church. People were becoming attached to individual preachers, men like Paul and Apollos and Peter. As a result, there was division within the church. Speaking to that problem, the Bible makes a very significant statement about the ministry. In I Corinthians 4:1, one of those preachers, Paul, speaking for all of them and for all true preachers of all time, said, "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."

Now, right there in just a couple of phrases, you have what a preacher is. According to the Bible, he is *a minister of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God*. Another translation puts it this way: preachers are servants of Christ "who have been put in charge of God's secret truths." Now, when you choose your preacher you must keep this text in mind.

The first thing to remember when you choose your preacher is this: the kind of preacher who can help you remain close to God is a man who understands that he is responsible to Jesus Christ. Paul says, "A preacher is a minister of Christ." The word used for *minister* here is a word that means attendant or slave. It can even refer to the slaves who used to man the oars on a galley. You have seen pictures, haven't you, of those ancient boats that were propelled by the sheer muscle power of the slaves who pulled

on the oars? A preacher is a man whom Jesus Christ has assigned to pull the oars for Him.

This means that preachers are responsible to Jesus and they are required to please Him. That is why, when you are choosing a preacher, you should try to discover whom the man is trying to please. Is he trying to please you, is he trying to please his congregation, is he trying to please his board of trustees, is he trying to please himself—if you have to say yes to any of these questions, that preacher will not help you.

Oh, this doesn't mean that a minister may run rough shod over the feelings of his people—he must be tactful and loving; no one denies that. But unless he understands that his ultimate responsibility is to Jesus Christ, his ministry will fail to help anyone. The apostle Paul was a man who knew that as he carried out his ministry, he always had to be conscious of Christ's judgment, not men's judgment. He wrote in this same 4th chapter of I Corinthians: "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord" (vv.3,4).

Perhaps you go to a beautiful church, a successful church. The choir sings beautifully. And all your friends go there. And the sermons? Could be worse—quite eloquent sometime, as a matter of fact. Let me ask you this: have you placed yourself beneath the ministry of one who knows he is a slave of Jesus Christ? If you haven't, no matter how nice your church is, you're still in the wasteland.

The second thing you must keep in mind when you judge your minister or search for one who can serve you, is this: *a minister is a steward of the mysteries of God*. You know what a steward is: he is someone who is in charge of certain monies or foodstuffs and he handles this money or these provisions in the best possible way. A ship's steward, for example, is in charge of the supplies on board and he sees to it that they are available to the passengers when needed. A preacher is a man who is responsible to Christ for the proper handling of God's mysteries.

Now, what does this mean? Unfortunately, this little text has been mistranslated very frequently. There has been a misunderstanding of the word *mystery*. Somewhere along the line, the word *mystery* was associated almost exclusively with the word *sacrament*. You know what the sacraments are—the Lord's Supper, or Eucharist, and Baptism, and some churches have other rites besides, which they call sacraments. In any case, the word *mystery* came to stand for *sacraments*. Therefore the clergy were considered to be people who were in charge of the sacraments. They were stewards of the sacraments, and they dispensed them to those whom they considered worthy to receive them.

No one denies, of course, that one of the duties of the clergy is the administration of the sacraments. But when this is considered their main duty, a great deal of confusion results. For example, people are apt to conclude that, so long as clergymen dispense the sacraments, everything will be all right. That is why it is so important to point out that the word *mystery*, in I Corinthians 4:1, says nothing about the sacraments.

The *mysteries of God* are, rather, those truths about God which men could never discover by themselves, but which have become available through God's revelation. In the second chapter of first Corinthians, we find out what is meant by the word *mystery*: "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained

before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."

The mysteries of God are the glorious truths of God revealed in the Bible. They are the truth of God's creation of all things, the truth of God's redemption through His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, and the truth of Christ's abiding kingship and ultimate return to judge the living and the dead. The mysteries of God are dominated by the redeeming figure of Jesus Christ, and they are focused upon the incomprehensible revelation of God's love that was expressed at Calvary's cross where Christ the mighty maker died for man, the creature's sin. Those who are stewards of the mysteries of God have one unending preoccupation: they must proclaim incessantly the glory of God's love and call men to repentance and faith.

Don't ever be satisfied with a speech when you go to church. There is a world of difference between a speech and the proclamation of the Word of God. A speech consists in a man's thoughts and there are numerous occasions when they can be useful. But the preaching that must mark the life of the church originates in God's revelation of His unsearchable wisdom. B. T. Forsyth, in his book, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, has contrasted oratory and preaching by pointing out that oratory attempts to make the crises of this present world clear to men, but preaching tells of truth that comes from an unseen world and it highlights the crises that arise when God meets men.

There are all kinds of words that are being fed people today, words that are supposed to be preaching, but they are not. Some time ago, a Baptist preacher from Missouri described the kinds of sermons that people frequently hear today. He talked about the elegant sermon and the overly psychological sermon, and he pointed out how some of them are just *chip on the shoulder* sermons, and others are purposely ambiguous. Some sermons today are adventures into the land of doubt. When you sit in the pew and listen to your preacher, don't be satisfied with anything less than the wisdom of God. That is the kind of minister you need. Anything less will cripple your spiritual life and you are going to suffer, and your children will suffer even more.

The kind of preacher you need is a man who knows that he is Christ's servant and a steward of the mysteries of God. Sad to say, men like that are rather hard to find today. There is a great deal of professionalism among the ranks of the clergy, and social climbing, and status seeking. That is too bad, for them. Preachers must always remember the words of the great apostle who said, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (I Corinthians 9:27). It is too bad when men who are supposed to tell others about the living bread and the living water have never eaten the bread nor drunk from the fountain themselves.

It is too bad for them, but it is also very dangerous for you. If you are satisfied with something that is less than the preaching of the Word of God, that means that you are satisfied with something less than God's grace. That means that you believe that you do not really need His grace for salvation. You can do without the message of the cross of Calvary. The trouble today is that countless thousands of people are willing to accept a substitute for the gospel of grace.

In Jeremiah 23, God makes some strong statements about His powerful message. He says, "Woe be unto the pastors

that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! . . . The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully . . . Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?"

If you are sincerely interested in the salvation of your soul, go find a man whose own soul has been riven through by the sword of the spirit, the living word of God, a man in whose mouth the Word of God is like a fire, a man who handles God's mighty message like a hammer. This does not mean that he must be an overpowering, intense, dramatic person. But it does mean that he must be a man who never forgets that he is a steward of God's mysteries. Possibly he will have all kinds of faults. And there may be many things about him that you dislike. But if he is truly a steward of God's mysteries, listen closely to his message of salvation through Jesus' blood, believe it, and obey it. If you do that, you will be saved.

Yes, you will be saved, because, you see, those who are truly preachers of God's Word have received a wonderful promise that concerns you directly. It is found in I Timothy

4:16. Listen: "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee." ●

#### PRAYER

*Great Shepherd who leadest Thy people in love,  
'Mid cherubim dwelling, shine Thou from above;  
In might come and save us, Thy people restore,  
And we shall be saved when Thy face shines once more.*

*Thy vineyard no longer Thy tender care knows,  
Defenseless, the victim and spoil of her foes;  
O turn, we beseech Thee, all glory is Thine,  
Look down in Thy mercy and visit Thy vine.*

*When Thou shalt revive us Thy Name we will praise,  
And nevermore turning, depart from Thy ways;  
O Lord God Almighty, in mercy restore,  
And we shall be saved when Thy face shines once more.*

*In Christ, Amen.*

(1963 Broadcast of Back to God Hour)

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# The Biblical Approach

Shirley W. Madany

Hardly a day goes by at the office without a request from some part of the U.S.A. or Canada, for either our evangelistic Arabic books, tracts, or cassettes, or for some advice on the subject itself — missions to Muslims. The book table ministry is expanding and is in itself a wonderful opportunity for witnessing. Book tables don't need to be restricted to large university campuses or to foreign student populations. Your local junior college or vocational school is a field also. Perhaps it is a ministry in which you could become involved.

However, as our field is the Arabic-speaking world and that world has moved right around us, we are in the midst of the action. Dedicated young Christians are eager to share

their faith with foreign students. Many have observed that the Muslim Student Association is active on their campus with its "resource tables." They sense that they should be doing something. When they hear about the availability of our books they are glad. But for many of them it opens up a tremendous subject about which they have little knowledge.

This is why, as we have mentioned before, we have prepared a very basic guide for such people. It is a book which anyone would benefit from reading because it demonstrates the basic Christian convictions which we all would like to share with our neighbors. This book, "Sharing God's Word with a Muslim," is presently being revised and printed for a second time. Many of the Christian workers



on university campuses who ask for help are graduate students with limited spare time for extra studies. They appreciate this material. We would like to share a portion of it which deals with the Islamic and the Christian doctrines of man, and the important bridge which such knowledge provides to the person who would approach a Muslim with the Christian gospel. Rev. Madany writes:

"In other words, the Muslim view of man and the Muslim understanding of the nature of the Fall do not leave any room for a Divine Savior. Such a Savior is not needed, since man needs *only to know* in order that he may *do the will of Allah*.

"Islam has never recognized realistically the consequences of man's rebellion against God. While admitting the fall of Adam as an historical event, Islam does not possess the Biblical realism which makes us acknowledge the seriousness of man's sinfulness. It readily admits the sins and shortcomings of man, but Islam does not really admit the sinfulness of man. As a Tunisian listener once wrote to me: 'I can well understand you when you talk about sins in the plural, but I cannot comprehend you when you speak about *sin* in the singular. What do you mean by *sin*?'"

"Today Islam is tremendously vulnerable in its doctrine of man. For the present mood in world literature, philosophy and the arts does not lend itself to the shallow optimism of the Islamic doctrine of man. The modern secular prophet tells us that man is dead. He sees no hope for mankind. How can he entertain any optimistic views of man after all that happened in Europe during the Second World War? And if the Muslim's answer is that these terrible things took place within Christendom, can he really maintain that human nature is any different in Africa and Asia? Such questions are not meant to embarrass any Muslim nor are they intended to show that the West is less sinful than the East or the nations of the Third World. The point is that modern history does not support any optimistic view of man or of his so-called native goodness. Much has taken place within Muslim countries to show that man is desperately wicked, and that man's depravity is general or total. One can point to the 100,000 Indonesians who were killed by their fellow citizens after the abortive communistic coup of the mid-sixties. Certainly, not all those who perished in the blood bath were confirmed or convicted Marxists! The many military coups which took place in the Arab world since 1949 and the terrible massacres which followed the Iraqi coups in 1958 and July 1979 do not point to the expected results of the native goodness of man.

"It is very strange that people can go on chanting about the decency of man when all the events around them shout aloud that man is desperately wicked and capable of surpassing the animals in his evils! Nevertheless, throughout all of these fourteen centuries, Islam has not yet learned the lesson which the Bible teaches so clearly: all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. There is none that does good, no not one!

"Since the Islamic doctrine of man is the most vulnerable one, what are its implications for the Christian mission to Islam today?

"Whether the Christian is explaining the Scriptures to a Muslim audience, or preaching on a certain passage of Scripture, or proclaiming the Word in a topical message, or simply reflecting on the problems and issues of contemporary life, he must always bear in mind the Biblical doctrine of the radical nature of sin and the devastating consequences of the fall. By doing this, he is not imposing a certain

non-Biblical scheme on the Christian proclamation of the gospel. He is simply witnessing to one of the main themes of God's special revelation. Furthermore, he is preparing the ground for the Biblical doctrine of redemption by the vicarious death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"What we must always remember is this: the Muslim not only rejects the historicity of Good Friday's main event — the crucifixion of Christ, but Islamic theology does not believe in the necessity of redemption. According to its teachings, man does not need to be redeemed by a Divine act. In Islam, perfection or salvation is achieved by doing what one learns from God's revelation! So, it is only after a Muslim has seen the necessity of Divine redemption due to the radical nature of sin, that he is ready to consider the claims of Christ.

"But here we must be very careful in our statement of the case. We must follow Biblical history and Biblical logic, if I may say, and not abstract logic. We cannot appeal to some so-called neutral arbiter to settle the problem in some abstract way in order that our case may become acceptable to the Muslim. The Christian missionary must always begin with the Bible and with Biblical history. The work of Christ on the Cross is a fact accomplished. God planned it from all eternity. He executed it in the fullness of time. Our argument is not based on human logic but on Divine action which took place in real history and which is inerrantly recorded and explained in Holy Scripture. We should never give the Muslim the idea or the feeling that our doctrine of salvation has come into being as a result of our own theologizing.

"Certainly God's way of salvation by the blood of Christ shed on our behalf on Calvary's cross is exactly what we needed. There was no other way of salvation. Man's case was desperately hopeless. There was no other way of escape except God's way. But when we speak in such terms we are not sitting on some neutral ground and arriving at these truths on the basis of a so-called autonomous human logic. When the Christian missionary speaks of the gospel, he speaks as one who has already tasted the salvation of the Lord. We who are called to go to Muslims with the message of the gospel have already experienced the Lord's redemption. But He does not redeem us in some vaguely mystical way, but by the application of the work of Christ in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. When we go to Muslims we go as those who are commissioned to proclaim the Word of God and as those who have already experienced the saving work of God in their hearts. We go as witnesses not as logicians.

"These lines are not the fruit of some abstract reflection on the Christian mission to Islam. Rather, they have been written as a result of a Christian reflection on the subject carried on during a busy and pioneering ministry of radio and literature mission in Arabic. It has been my privilege to process more than 80,000 letters from Arabs in every part of their vast world, more than half of which were from Muslims. I can testify that the gospel of Jesus Christ is tremendously needed. The approach as outlined in this chapter has been used in the proclamation of the Word of God to the Muslims since 1958. Many of them appreciate the Christian message, and some, by the grace of God, are now true believers in the Biblical Messiah." ●

*Mrs. Madany assists her husband who is the minister of the Arabic Broadcast of The Back to God Hour, 6555 West College Drive, Palos Heights, IL 60463.*

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# Idols for Destruction

Peter De Jong

IDOLS FOR DESTRUCTION, by Herbert Schlossberg. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983, 344 pp. \$8.95 paper.

This extraordinary book has gained praise and recommendations from a variety of sources. Carl F. Henry called it "one of the best, if not the best... buy of the year," and John M. Frame, in a 6-page review in the *Westminster Theological Journal*, characterized it as a worthy and, in some respects, superior successor to Os Guinness' "magnificent" 1973 *The Dust of Death*.

Mr. Schlossberg has a Ph.D. degree in History from the University of Minnesota and a Master's in Public Administration from The American University. He has taught history at the University of Waterloo, been Academic Dean at Shepherd College (West Virginia), and, in the book, was reported as currently a tax and investment consultant.

The title of the book was evidently suggested by the Scripture text mentioned on the title page, Hosea 8:4, "...they made idols for their own destruction." Dr. Schlossberg's thesis is simple and can be briefly stated: The current widespread pessimism and despair which one sees throughout our society can be best understood and explained, not by various secularist explanations, but by the Bible's teaching of God's judgment on man's idolatries. "The bulk of this book is an exploration of the forms these idols take in late twentieth-century America" (p.6). Chapters are devoted to idols of (1)history, (2)humanity, (3)mammon, (4)nature, (5)power, and (6)religion. Two concluding chapters look toward the future, suggesting the course Christians should take.

## 1. History

The ancient (and Eastern) world tended to explain man's history as a series of cycles (running in circles and going nowhere—"G.K. Chesterton said, it is fitting that the Buddha be pictured with his eyes closed; there is nothing important to see"). "Western civilization, in keeping with its Christian underpinnings, has always valued history highly." But, having departed from the faith, it sees history not as "the arena in which (God's) providence and judgment meet the obedience or rebellion of man," but sees history as itself "the vehicle of salvation" (p.13). Thus history is made "the whole show"—an "idol." When historians took this course, they "entered a blind alley." That "could account for the general abandonment of the study of history that began in the colleges in the 1960s," when students "turned in greater numbers to the social sciences, which claimed... the ability

to contribute to the solution of social problems and thus promised to be more useful to people who wished to make a contribution to society" (p.25).

## 2. Humanity

"Eve was the first humanist," tempted to rebel against God with the promise, "You will be like God" (p.39). Subsequently, self-worship became, in a variety of guises, the main religion of mankind. This humanism replaced Divine law with human desires. When human desire becomes supreme it produces envy or what is called (in French) "ressentiment," a festering hatred of the one who is envied. This attitude, often fostered in the guise of love for the poor or the right, is frequently the more or less hidden drive for social revolution. Schlossberg describes in considerable detail how this mechanism of envy drives much of the socially and politically "Liberal" movement of our time. Accordingly, as society moves toward equalizing incomes the demand for equality is not satisfied but intensified. People do not envy the millionaire as much as they do their neighbor who makes ten percent more than they do. "The leveling movement has nothing to do with justice, because its impulse is not to raise those who are down but to topple those who are up..." (p.55).

Our attention is directed to efforts to foster and exploit feelings of guilt because there are economic inequalities. John Kenneth Galbraith "wants rich countries to feel guilty because poor countries exist" (p.57). "It is ironic that those who have denied the existence of any objective reason for believing in guilt should be the ones to accomplish their ends by fanning guilt feelings" (p.57). "As wealth increases people redefine poverty." In this social movement, it no longer means a need for food, clothing and shelter, but a lack of anything which someone else has. "Humanitarian ethics finds it necessary to 'upgrade' the poverty minimums in such a way as to prevent the number of poor people from declining. Thus social service agencies may develop a vested interest in preserving or even increasing the number of their patrons.

"Humanitarian literature is studded with contempt for... the work ethic or the 'Puritan' ethic," but is seldom "contemptuous of the fruit of the work ethic" (p.64). When social insurance makes it pay to be unemployed it is simply a fact that many people prefer not to work. The writer cites Moynihan's observation that "dependency is a creation of the welfare system itself. France, which has no institutional structure to create and maintain dependency, does not have

a problem even remotely like ours. There are dependents but not the vast bureaucracy that feeds on and maintains dependency. One of the governing assumptions in France is that people are responsible for taking care of themselves" (pp.67,68). "Moynihan contends that the custodial quality of the welfare system is to be found nowhere but in the United States." Calling attention to our multiplying social problems, noting especially the growing atrocity of legalized abortions, the author shows how these may be best understood in Biblical perspective as exhibiting God's current judgments on the idol of humanity. "The god that failed is man."

### 3. Mammon

Our Lord, when He said that it is impossible to serve both God and mammon, called attention to one of the most popular idolatries of our time, the making of money and material possessions the goal of life. Schlossberg shows how this pursuit of money and the material, exalted to official government policy, has produced our monstrous problem of inflation. Governments, simply by increasing the amount of money which they print, proportionally decrease the value of that money as it competes in the marketplace for the same amount of goods. By this kind of manipulation of money supply, governments transfer property from the people to themselves. Thus they legitimize what is really a form of theft. The policy has popular appeal to all who borrow, because it enables people to buy with expensive dollars and pay back with cheaper. Thus the inflation "that wipes out one's debt" "destroys another's wealth." "A society that inflates its currency tampers with a moral value." "Inflation is like a country where nobody speaks the truth." "The Hebrew prophets denounced...changeable weights and measures as a form of oppression that merited judgment" (p.101). "Inflation is both a cause and effect of moral decline. The citizens like it because they perceive that it gives them something for nothing." As our seemingly uncontrollable government deficits and consequent inflation increasingly worry people on all levels of our society, Schlossberg appropriately reminds us that these problems of our country and others who depend on its economy should be seen in the light of the Bible as God's judgments on our worship of the idol, mammon.

### 4. Nature

Ancient Israel, called to worship God who had revealed Himself in history as its Savior and Lord, was constantly tempted to join its neighbors in Baal-worship, the idolatry of nature. In an essentially similar way, man today worships nature and the study of nature, natural science, as his idol. In a variety of ways the writer traces the development and the destructive consequences of this kind of idolatry in our present society and men's disillusionment with it.

### 5. Power

"Perhaps the most characteristic feature of modern history...has been the development of the nation-state." That has come to be regarded as the savior, the idol of our time. "It is only the action of the state," says Schlesinger, "that can solve our spiritual problem and lead us to 'the promised land.'" Thus the state is transformed "from being a gift of God, given to protect us against violence, into an idol. It supplies us with all blessings, and we look to it for all our needs." "When Galbraith says that in the power of

the state lies our only chance for salvation, he gives us a premier example of what Ellul calls 'the new soteriology.'" Attention is directed to the way in which the Internal Revenue Service regards "any money the citizen is permitted to keep" "as if the state had graciously given it to him"—plainly revealing the assumption that "the state...is the real owner of everything." Thus we see the development of socialistic schemes which promise utopias and the development of government (and academic) bureaucracies which seek totalitarian control of our lives. Our public school system is being developed toward centralized control and exploited to serve that purpose. That state control in a variety of ways attacks and undercuts the family. In both the totalitarian states and the "democracies" which move in the same direction, we see the development of an idol that calls for and exhibits the judgment of God upon all idolatry.

### 6. Religion

"Any institution can become idolatrous, but it appears to be a particular hazard with institutions of religion." A final chapter dealing with current idolatries focuses our attention on the way in which churches become apostate. Schlossberg reminds us that Christ was crucified by both church and state. "When the state joins forces with historicism and humanism in forging the great brutalities of the future, we should not be surprised to find the representatives of the establishment churches fuglemen (leading soldiers) for the idolatries, earnestly assuring us that God's will is being done."

### Looking Ahead

After this comprehensive survey of some prominent idolatries, the author hazards some predictions about the future. "We shall be painting a somber picture of the future of this society, but...as the wicked generation that populated Nineveh was saved by repentance, so can any other" (p.261). "When the people turn to idolatries, and the outcome of those faiths become incarnated in society's institutions,...rot sets in." We see especially among educated people a "flight from moral behavior," with desires (often called "needs" or "rights") taking the place of obligations (p.266). Thus our Western culture returns to its pagan past. We must wake up to realize that we are in a religious war. One sees this coming to expression especially in the increasing opposition, sometimes from the government, to the multiplying Christian schools. Our increasing economic problems are really moral, and they resist solutions because "moral government does not come from an immoral people." Indicative of the same demoralization of our society is its increasing lawlessness. In these developments we are seeing how idolatry destroys those who indulge themselves in it, just as Israel's prophet said, "With their silver and gold they made idols for their own destruction." People, as the psalmist said (Ps. 115:8), become like the idols which they have made. Unless we seek the remedy for our predicament in repentance and faith, "the future holds nothing but grim judgment."

Exposing the idols of our age is only a preliminary step. We must positively return to the true gospel in both faith and practice. That includes a return to the standards of God's law. The church must unmask the idols and expose them for what they are—something it can do only on the authority of the Bible. God is the Owner of all things and we must learn to regard ourselves as stewards of what He has entrusted to

us. In unity with fellow-believers we must oppose the powers of our age. That may entail persecution, as it has done for believers in the past. "Biblical faith finds great power—as does its imitator, Marxism—in the conviction that history is going its way. Or rather, that since Christ is the Lord of history, it is going history's way." "Thy kingdom come . . . is not a pious wish, but a certainty." "Christians' minority status in a world headed for the brink of disaster holds the promise of providing more excitement than most Christians are expecting." "In the late twentieth century the West is . . . plagued with major and minor idols, some of them all but invisible. It is hard to imagine a more important or satisfying role than to embark on the spiritual, intellectual, and political adventure of working toward stripping them, root and branch from the land."

It is impossible in a review to summarize many of the fascinating observations of this remarkable book. Although one may be inclined to question some details of Schlossberg's treatment, his thesis, that we must understand many of the perplexing developments of our time in the light of the Bible as manifesting God's judgment on men's idolatries, is true. And Schlossberg's reminder is urgently needed. The Apostle John concluded his first letter's marvelous summary and application of the gospel with the warning, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." We need to heed that warning and to seek also to turn others "from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven . . . even Jesus who delivered us from the wrath to come" (1 Thess. 1:9,10). May Schlossberg's book encourage many to join in that adventure. ●

## Dr. Van Til AT NINETY

### Old Guardian of a New Apologetics

Paul C.H. Szto

#### The Indiana Farm-boy

Cornelius Van Til was born on May 3, 1895, at Grootegast in the Province of Groningen, The Netherlands. In 1905 his family migrated to the Highland-Munster area of Indiana, near the Illinois state line, about 25 miles from Chicago.

In a family of eight sons, Van Til had to work on the farm for a number of years. His father, who helped found a Christian school in the community, had a strong Christian influence on his growing son, who finally decided to prepare for the gospel ministry in the Christian Reformed church.

After the beginning of the first world war he went to Grand Rapids, Michigan, to study at Calvin College. Describing his education there, Van Til wrote, "The faculty of the college taught us high school preparatory work as well as proper college subjects. While we were in the 'prep school' and in the college, one of the seminary professors taught us Bible history and later, Reformed doctrine one hour per week. We were taught Greek as well as Latin in the 'prep school' and Hebrew as well as German and French in the college" (p. 6 of an unpublished manuscript entitled, "Toward a Reformed Apologetics").

He obtained his B.A. degree in 1922 while he included some seminary work in his last year of college. (Like King David, from a family of eight sons) Cornelius was the first of the family to graduate from college. He went on to develop

into (in the words of Meredith G. Kline) "the prince of 20th Century Christian apologetics."

Deeply attached to his Christian home and Christian Reformed Church, he found it a difficult decision to transfer to Princeton Seminary in the fall of 1922. His study at Princeton, however, brought him into contact with Dr. Machen, who gradually changed the direction of his ministry and service.

#### Dr. Machen, the "Older Guardian"

In May of 1922, Harry Emerson Fosdick had preached his sermon, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?," bringing the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy to a new peak of intensity. Dr. Machen contributed many articles to *The Presbyterian* to combat this modernist movement, and in 1923 published his *Christianity and Liberalism*.

In the meanwhile, Van Til received the Th.B. degree in 1924 and a Th.M. in systematic theology in 1925. He married Rena Klooster (born July 24, 1895), an Indiana neighbor and girl friend for many years. Then he continued his philosophical studies under Archibald Allan Bowman from Scotland, at Princeton University, receiving his Ph.D. in 1927 with a dissertation on the subject, *God and the Absolute*. He accepted a call and was ordained as the pastor of Spring Lake Christian Reformed Church in western Michigan.

While Van Til pursued his graduate studies at Princeton, Dr. Machen (1881-1937) was being recommended by the

Board of Princeton Seminary as professor of apologetics to succeed William Benton Greene, Jr. (1854-1928). However, the general assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1926 refused to approve the appointment and decided to investigate the seminary instead.

As a result, Dr. Machen withdrew his acceptance in June, 1928 and opened the way for the appointment of Van Til as an instructor in apologetics for one year. Machen wrote his mother that "Van Til is excellent material from which a professor might ultimately be made" (p. 437 of *J. Gresham Machen*, the biography by Ned B. Stonehouse.) In fact, Van Til "was so extraordinarily successful in his instruction that the Board elected him (as full professor, to the Chair of Apologetics) the following spring." Yet he resigned with Machen when Princeton was reorganized in 1929 and began his work as Professor of Apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary.

### New Guardians of the Old Orthodoxy

The founding of Westminster Seminary at Philadelphia in the fall of 1929 changed the lives of Machen and Van Til and many others in the years to come, years that paralleled the Great Depression and the New Deal.

Machen was deeply interested in foreign missions. Some of the graduates of the new seminary were not accepted by the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. With the publication of *Rethinking Missions* in 1932 and the Pearl Buck case in 1933, Machen was drawn more and more into a concern for truly biblical foreign missions. On June 27, 1933 the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions was organized with Machen as its president.

As a result of this challenge to the Church's official agencies, Machen was brought to trial and suspended from the ministry on March 29, 1935. The Constitutional Covenant Union was formed on June 27 to preserve true Presbyterianism at whatever cost. A year later, on June 11, 1936 that Union dissolved itself in order to form what is now named the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. As a close coworker with Machen, Van Til became a minister in the new denomination.

In the following years, by the grace of God, both the seminary and the church have stood up well, particularly with the help of the New Apologetics of Van Til, who became "the old guardian" of the faith. In 1975 a new classroom and chapel building at Westminster were dedicated as Van Til Hall in a tribute to him and his half century of labors as guardian and watchman for the faith.

Dr. Van Til's first love was the pastoral ministry. After a year as pastor, he asked for a leave of absence to teach at Princeton, but returned to the pastorate after resigning from Princeton. Only very reluctantly did he accept the invitation and challenge from Dr. Machen to join with another Christian Reformed minister, the Rev. R.B. Kuiper (1886-1966), in coming to Westminster.

The young professor soon developed a love for teaching and for his students. He continued to preach from time to time. In fact, he has been one of the most powerful preachers of the gospel during those years. His preaching was both biblical and practical.

With a Dutch background and a training at Princeton, Dr. Van Til in his teaching uniquely combined the best of these two traditions and made them more consistent with the self-attesting Christ of the Scriptures. In the early thirties he began

to develop a series of syllabi for his courses. These came to include *The Metaphysics of Apologetics*, *Christian Apologetics*, *Evidences*, *The Psychology of Religion*, and *Theology of Crisis*. Thus a new apologetics was developed at Westminster, and came to full expression in the volume, *In Defense of the Faith*. Van Til is convinced that the Reformed faith alone does anything like full justice to the cultural and missionary mandates of Christ.

### A Continuing Defense of Reformed Truth

As Dr. Van Til was developing this Christ-centered apologetics, he discovered that there was a group of professors at the Free University of Amsterdam seeking to work out a truly consistent Christian and Reformed philosophy. Thus he not only read the works of H.Th. Vollenhoven (b. 1882) and Herman Dooyeweerd (b. 1894), but encouraged many of his students to pursue graduate studies under these men after the second world war. One of these students was H. Evan Runner, who began teaching at Calvin College in 1951 and in turn sent many of his students to the Free University.

During the 1969-1970 school year, an important project began to take shape under the initiative of a former student of Van Til. Edward R. Geehan did his graduate work at Utrecht in the Netherlands and edited a book to honor Van Til on the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday and fortieth anniversary as professor at Westminster. *Jerusalem and Athens*, when published in 1971, immediately produced lively discussions about the theology and apologetics of Dr. Van Til. In the volume among other items from his pen was a short piece by Van Til called "My Credo."

At the end of the school year in 1972 Dr. Van Til retired from full-time teaching, though he continued to serve for a while as a part-time lecturer. In a pamphlet, "Toward a Reformed Apologetics," he indicated the chief purpose he had in his writings. His aim throughout had been "to show that it is the historic Reformed faith alone that can in any adequate way present the claims of Christ to men for their salvation." The pamphlet displayed the pastoral passion and compassion of an "old guardian" for Christ and His church.

In *Jerusalem and Athens*, Dooyeweerd contributed a long letter to which Van Til gave a lengthy response, pointing out that in his later writings Dooyeweerd began to waver in his commitment to Scripture and to fall back to some sort of neutrality. Van Til concluded his response by saying, "I hope too that this interchange of ideas between us may help others, after us, to listen more humbly to the words of the self-attesting Christ of Scripture in order that they may better bring the word of truth to all men everywhere—all to the praise of our triune God. Soon we shall meet at Jesus' feet" (p. 127).

Van Til closed his pamphlet on Reformed Apologetics with some retractions and clarifications. "I beg forgiveness of those whom I have hurt..." (p. 24)—the true Christian humility of an "old guardian." He expressed the hope for the future that he "may be given grace to be more true to the Christ of the Scriptures" (p. 26). May the triune God and the self-attesting Christ of the Scriptures continue to guard this "old guardian" and faithful servant of the Lord. ●

*Rev. Paul C.H. Szto is the pastor of the Queens Christian Reformed Church at Jamaica, New York. We are grateful to him for alerting us to Dr. Van Til's 90th birthday and providing us with this sketch of his life based on a tribute to Dr. Van Til which Rev. Mr. Szto wrote for the May, 1975, Presbyterian Guardian on the occasion of Dr. Van Til's 80th birthday.*



# Worshipping another GOD

Peter De Jong

## Lewis' Observation

One of the most profound observations about the feminist movement to place women in leading offices in the churches was made by C.S. Lewis in a 1948 essay on "priestesses in the Church?"<sup>1</sup> He suggested that the issue involved was not really that of the ability of women to function in offices, but of the nature of Christianity as revealed religion. When we decide such matters by prudence, convenience or common sense, "we exchange revelation for... Natural Religion" (in other words, paganism.) That is about the sharpest observation about the nature of this movement that could be made and it is one that ought to get some attention at this time.

## Belittling the Issue

Since last year's C.R. synod decisively opened one of these leading offices to women, we are seeing increasing efforts on the part of those who have been promoting this movement to minimize its significance. They are telling us that nothing has really been changed. Although churches that have special "needs" are permitted to make a slight adjustment in making nominations for office, no members' or churches' convictions or consciences are being threatened. Nobody is questioning or denying the authority of the Bible or any other of the churches' doctrines. The differences of opinion only concern a few texts about whose meaning the overwhelming majority of experts on successive committees have said the Bible is unclear. We are urgently admonished with pious appeals to I Corinthians 13 and other Biblical injunctions to promote love and peace, to reassure uneasy church members and to try to restore unity and tranquility in the troubled churches.

While God's Word indeed commands us to act and speak in love, and to seek the unity and welfare of Christ's church, it orders us to speak "the truth in love" and to seek "the unity of the faith" (Eph. 4:13,15). The trouble with these current appeals to love and unity is that they misrepresent what is happening.

## A Different Kind of Religion

The issue we face is not about an honest difference of opinion regarding the meaning of a few obscure texts; it is about whether the church may deliberately ignore Biblical commands for the church that are so clear that nobody can misunderstand them. Delegates at our last synod reported that promoters of the change no longer even attempted to Biblically justify it; only those who opposed it appealed to the Bible and they were voted down.

And if the Bible can be, as it has been, so officially ignored in the deciding of the churches' course, we should not be surprised by seeing that the churches' creeds can be, and have been, treated just as casually as the Bible. In our March OUTLOOK Professor Norman De Jong alerted us to the way in which the old, legally adopted Belgic Confession has been rewritten by a committee that was authorized only to translate it into more contemporary English.

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* . . .

We are reliably informed that the contents of our churches' hymnbook are being similarly edited to remove expressions and even hymns, such as "Faith of our Fathers" which feminists find distasteful. We learn that the Publication Committee is also recommending that Dr. Emily Brink, temporary musical editor of the new Psalter Hymnal, be given a permanent position in the education department as music and liturgy editor. We are not facing only the placement of women deacons or helpers in a few churches; we are to have a woman expert in charge of the denomination's liturgy and revisions of its way of worshipping God.

One of our foreign missionaries recently reported that when the supervisory Latin American secretary job opened, "the call went out for ordained or unordained, male or female, candidates!" Our April OUTLOOK contained a report of the address of Dr. Alvin J. Vander Griend, the Associate Minister of Evangelism for the denomination, fervently advocating the removal of all restraints on women's service in any church office. Especially striking in the address, besides his flagrantly irresponsible exegesis of some Scripture texts, was the fact that he was not just expressing a private opinion, but plainly trying to fulfill his assigned job in the denomination's Home Missions administration, of promoting and guiding evangelism. This kind of propaganda is now part of our churches' common "home mission" program. This list of items is by no means comprehensive, but only a random sampling of reports that happen to come to the attention of a retired minister. They show, however, that the feminist movement in our churches involves much more than a difference of opinion about trivial details. It increasingly seems to affect every part of the churches' faith and life.

## A Different God

C.S. Lewis helps us to understand the otherwise surprisingly wide effects of the feminist movement when he explains that it really involves worshipping a different kind of god! That is why it has to have a different Bible, different creeds, changed liturgies, and different kinds of churches and missions. It is really a heresy not a bit less radical than was the old Arian heresy which denied the Trinity. If we are going to eliminate all "sexist" language, how can we continue to worship the Father and the Son? John Hultink, editor of *Christian Renewal* (March OUTLOOK, p. 17) called attention to the fact that one of the professors of the AACS Toronto Institute (which continues to be officially recommended for support by our churches) had the "distinction" of referring to God as a female on national television for the first time in the history of Canada. As early as August 29, 1983 Institute professor, Dr. Hendrik Hart also wrote in *The Banner* on "Must I Believe in God as Father?" "Our Lord's Prayer and the Apostle's Creed have made 'our father' a key to the faith." "Jesus, the Bible, the Lord's Prayer, our confessions, doctrine, tradition, songs, and the organization of our faith can be said to be circles which have 'God the Father' as their center. Still, for a person whose history has made 'father' a source of anguish rather than comfort, betrayal rather than trust, enmity rather than love, we have no doctrine which commands the use of that image." "Certainly it would be wrong to say: God is not our father; instead she is our mother. I don't believe that. But is it wrong to say: God may also be worshiped, loved, known, feared, prayed to, refer-

red to, spoken of via that other parental image, mother? I really don't believe that it would be wrong. . . . I'm fairly convinced that we have to make room, also in our worship service, for those who are growing up with the wonderful message of God as their mother. I'm nearly convinced that if we don't, we will be wrong."

## God Tolerates No Compromise

This is not to suggest at all that everyone who is misled by present feminist propaganda is therefore a heretic who denies the Trinity. I am sure that most of our church members have no intention of becoming that. But why should our churches let themselves be pressed into compromising with and making concessions to a movement which increasingly shows its anti-Christian origin and motivation? Such a policy only exposes the church and its message to deserved ridicule. The secular world seems to be becoming disillusioned with the feminist drive for power. The church, when it borrows worn-out secular slogans in effort to be "contemporary," becomes like the false prophet that Isaiah (9:15) described as the tail wagging along behind the dog of the faithless politician.

It becomes increasingly evident, as C.S. Lewis observed, that the feminist movement in the church is really a different kind of religion. It is, in principle, a heresy, as radical as that of the ancient Arians. Instead of making foolish concessions to it, we need to learn again one of the earliest lessons reflected in our most ecumenical creeds. The Arian controversy too could be and has been misrepresented as making much ado about nothing—Gibbon quipped about its splitting Christendom over one letter, "i," the smallest in the Greek alphabet, (which distinguished the Arian statement that the Son was *like* God from the orthodox statement that He *was* God.) When, for a time, the heretics had grabbed all the positions of power and seemed to overwhelm all opposition, a lone Athanasius was ready to stand adamantly "against the world" for the Deity of Christ. And he taught his multitude of orthodox followers to unitedly sing, or shout in the face of the enemies, "Glory be to the FATHER, and to the SON, and to the HOLY SPIRIT, as it WAS IN THE BEGINNING, IS NOW, AND EVER SHALL BE, world without end. Amen." Thus, in the mercy of God, the orthodox gospel was preserved against its deniers.

When the church is confronted by the worship of a false god it may not compromise. God commands, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." And He is far from Dr. Hart's tolerant indifference to the kind of images with which people might like to represent or misrepresent Him. He warns in the second commandment that He detests and condemns such carelessness about this matter. He is "a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate" Him (Ex. 20:5). He condemned that policy when the Jews slid back into worship of the Queen of Heaven (Jer. 7:18). He continues to warn especially against all compromise with idolatry. The Apostle John concludes his exposition of the Christian faith and life (1 John 5:20,21), "And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us an understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. Little children, guard yourselves from idols."

1. The article is found on pp. 234-239 of the collection of his essays under the title *God in the Dock* published by Eerdmans in 1970.

# Preaching

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## THE WORD OF GOD — C. Van Til

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John H. Piersma

For some time I have noticed that preaching in the Christian Reformed Church has not only changed, but that it is also no longer a definable entity. When you said "sermon" in my youth everyone knew quite well what you were talking about, but the consensus among us on this point, as on many others, seems to be lost! The implications of all this are many, of course. In fact, this just might be our most important problem (in a day when *important problems* are not in short supply).

For those of us who believe in the indispensability of the preaching of God's Word (Lord's Day 25:65, Heidelberg Catechism,) and that in terms of our soul's very salvation, an address by Dr. Edmund P. Clowney, president-emeritus of Westminster Theological Seminary, is a rare treat!

It is that for a number of reasons.

Just one of these is the vital importance of the subject. Anything said nowadays about preaching from a Reformed perspective is apt to be helpful. A man even more experienced than I as a preacher said recently that the task is ten times harder than when he began. I'm inclined to believe that he might not be guilty of undue exaggeration.

Another reason is exposed by quoting the full title of Clowney's paper: "Preaching the Word of the Lord: Cornelius Van Til, V.D.M." ("V.D.M." won't let you put doctor's bars on your pulpit gown, but it is a very prestigious title meaning "Minister of the Word of God.")

Those acquainted with the history of this periodical will remember that Dr. Van Til, long-time professor of systematic theology and apologetics at Westminster, was willing to be identified with its founders in the earlier days of our existence. He often wrote for us and he was the principal speaker at one of our first "annual meetings" (attended by about fifteen people). It was a great speech, sending us into

another year of service convinced that ours was the victory through Christ, the Lord.

I have had the privilege as well to hear Dr. Van Til preach. It is my conviction that Van Til's work as Christian theologian, teacher, apologist and philosopher was surpassed only by his work as a pulpiteer. I was present when he delivered the sermon at his only pastoral charge (the Christian Reformed Church of Spring Lake, MI) on the occasion of its 75th anniversary. It was the kind of biblical, Reformed preaching that one can't forget. And it was delivered with passion and enthusiasm, with a whole-hearted, driving urgency. . . . No wonder that those of us who were touched by his kind of Gospel-preaching, so love "Uncle Case" (He preferred the Dutch version, *Oom Kees*)!

Dr. Clowney's address was the Van Til Lecture for 1983-84, delivered at the Seminary in Philadelphia. It was published in the *Westminster Theological Journal*, the fall 1984 issue. Its purpose is "to show the close relation between Dr. Van Til's biblical apologetics and preaching." (Apologetics is a branch of scientific theology which deals with the history and possibility of efforts to establish an effective defense of the Christian Faith against all manner of attack from those outside of that Faith.)

What was "Van Til's apologetics?" Clowney attempts the following brief summary:

At the heart of Van Til's apologetics is the conviction that the Christian cannot begin with an abstract framework of philosophy or logic assumed or established apart from the presence of the living God. It would be the height of folly to attempt this with, of all books, the Bible. We cannot first establish the authority of the Bible by a philosophical or theological propaedeutic that is impersonally theoretical, and then be introduced by that pro-

paedeutic to the God of whom the Bible speaks. To the contrary, the living God made us, gave us life, and formed us in his image. We cannot think anymore than breathe apart from his provision. The Bible is the Word of God written, the inspired record of God's speaking to men and women in their sin and need. When God speaks, his creatures cannot evaluate his Word by criteria apart from God; they cannot erect or discern criteria to which he must measure up. If they attempt to do so, they actually bring God before the bar of their own reason, their own traditions, their own pride. When God speaks, it is the voice of Satan that asks, "Hath God said?" The voice of man made in God's image must be, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

For this stance Van Til paid a high price. In 1971 a book was published "in his honor." We place that in italics because even in this volume (*Jerusalem and Athens—Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.) the editor, E.R. Geehan, finds it necessary to say on the very first page, "Prof. Van Til's writings, with their depth and logical rigor as well as prophetic urgency, have not won him many allies. His warnings against the church's parasitic existence on the wisdom of the world divide his readers into equally adamant friends and foes."

An illustration of this is to be found within the book itself. G.C. Berkouwer, the Dutch Reformed theologian of the last half-century, vigorously disclaims more than traditional affinity with Van Til, using such language as "far reaching differences" and going so far as to suggest that Van Til might be guilty of "an unreformed sanctioning of tradition." The vehemence of Berkouwer and other Van Til critics indicates that somehow this friendly, kindly person must have been saying things that made some glad and others mad.

Dr. Clowney faces this question, Was Cornelius Van Til's apologetics and theology the basis and origin of his preaching, or did not preaching "shape" his apologetic system? Here is his answer:

... was Van Til's preaching more reflective of the Dutch sermons he had heard in his youth than of the apologetic system that has made his name a household word—at least in Reformed households? It is my conviction that the reverse is true. Not only is Van Til's apologetics consistent with his preaching; it is preaching that has shaped his apologetics: preaching, not the philosophy of personalistic idealism that he studied at Princeton University; preaching, not the "common sense" philosophy of James McCosh that influenced old Princeton; preaching, not even the Calvinistic philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd. It would be foolish to maintain that none of these philosophies influenced Van Til's thought and teaching. Of course they did, some more by the reaction they triggered than by any positive influence. But none of these, nor all of them together, provide the ground of Van Til's apologetic. The Reformed view of preaching does that.

I agree, Van Til was a Reformed preacher. He opened the Scriptures to and for his hearers so that they had to be convinced of the glories of sovereign grace. You can be sure that I like this concluding paragraph in Clowney's address:

Amazing, however, for all the sweep of his vision of preaching, for all of the crusading fervor in which he storms the citadels of humanistic pride, Van Til never loses his focus on the gospel. The Christ who is Lord

of all is the Christ who was crucified. I like to remember a picture in a Westminster Bulletin that showed Cornelius Van Til preaching the gospel in the open air on Wall Street, New York. At an age when most surviving Ph.D.'s would be drowsing over a novel, he was still ready to be a street preacher, a fool for Christ's sake, Cornelius Van Til, V.D.M.

## Reformed Confessing Church of Zaire Organization

A.R. and C. Kayayan

*Rev. Aaron R. Kayayan is the minister of French Broadcasting of the Back-to-God Hour at Palos Heights, Illinois. The following account is reprinted by permission from the January, 1985, newsletter of the broadcast, Perspectives Reformees.*

We would like you to join us in sharing the good news and in giving thanks to the Lord for the work He is accomplishing through His Spirit and His saving Word by means of PERSPECTIVES REFORMEES, the French Radio ministry of the Christian Reformed Church.

I have just come back from a three-week trip to Africa (Zaire). On Friday, November 30, at 3:00 P.M. in the office of Kishimba Nyombo Kasantika, in the presence of ten official representatives and many members of other reformed groups, and with the fraternal assistance of the Reformed Church of the USA (Eureka Classis) Rev. Paul Treick—representing—the official constitution of the Eglise Reformee Confessante au Zaire (Reformed Confessing Church of Zaire) was declared.

This was one of the most moving moments of my whole ministry. After years of proclaiming the Gospel, of prayer

and perseverance God has once again shown His goodness and we are seeing results. It is now time for the "harvest." Listeners of Perspectives Reformees and readers of our publications converted several years ago had decided to form a Church that would be faithful to the Word and to live their lives worthy of the Gospel. They were truly convinced of the rightness of Reformed doctrine and perspectives.

On Sunday December 2, at 2:00 P.M. I joined Rev. Treick in placing hands on the new first minister of the Church, Kishimba Nyombo Kasantika as well as on three elders representing three different regions of Zaire. Soon others will follow. Kishimba is one of our converts whom we sent to France to complete his theological studies. After three years of brilliant results he returned home to Zaire and accepted the call to serve the Reformed Confessing Church. Other students will follow.

On Sunday, December 9, at 9:00 A.M. (Rev. Treick had returned home two days earlier) I celebrated the first service of Baptism and Holy Communion. I had the immense joy and privilege of baptizing 73 children and teen-agers all of them members of Reformed confessing families, as well as baptizing some 12 adults. Almost all of them, except the new-born infants had been waiting for more than five years to receive this Holy Sacrament and become full members of the Reformed Church. The testimonies rendered at this ceremony by young men and women were most eloquent and moving. By listening to the radio broadcast of Perspectives Reformees they had come out of their crass paganism and pernicious cults. Others of them had decided to rededicate themselves to the Lord. There were young mothers baptized with their children in spite of the indifference or even hostility of their pagan husbands. With glowing eyes and shining faces they bowed down their heads in order to receive the Holy Sacrament. Pronouncing "In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" 85 times—what an extraordinary experience for a minister, indeed!!!

The year 1984 saw the twenty-fifth anniversary of my effective ministry. I was so happy to "celebrate" it in such a dramatic way, right on the field. My African friends were happy and were praising the Lord. I also know that in our midst there was ANOTHER ONE who was happy for this event under that humble roof of an African mud chapel. It was God our Lord who rejoices in the conversion of even one sinner and who takes pleasure in any good event. Soon other groups from many centers in Zaire and even from other francophone countries will join this church. (The French Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism and a Church Order-Discipline have been supplied to these Christians.)

The official constitution of the Eglise Reformee Confessante au Zaire is the result of the Grace of God. Our first attempts at starting a Reformed Church in French-speaking Africa met with little success. The advice was to forget about it and send all the converts back to their old chapels (Islam, Roman Catholic, pagan cults, or liberal and dead churches.) However, the Head of the Church decided otherwise.

For us to send anybody back would not merely be a failure in ecclesiastical strategy but also the giving up of our deepest Reformed-Calvinistic convictions. We would perhaps be leaving the sheep to the wolves. We are persuaded that all who sincerely share our Reformed conviction will rejoice with us at this exceptional event.

The establishment of a truly Reformed Church on the African continent is in our eyes not a mere church-planting

policy. It represents a real promise of discovering the Way, the Truth and the Life amid the turmoil of the Black continent as well as providing some urgent and necessary remedies in the face of unspeakable evils.

Instead of the Africanization of Christianity we propose the BIBLICIZATION OF AFRICA.

Let me then conclude by stating my old conviction for my own ministry and for the mission of the church: "THE MESSAGE IS THE MISSION."

THE MESSAGE—not talks about missions—not international conferences about professional missionaryism—not juggling statistical figures based on hypothetical demographic explosions . . . in the year 2023!! A mere missionaristic professionalism of the Christian church reminds me of the Great Sahara Desert which, as everyone knows, expands more and more every year but never flourishes.

"THE MESSAGE IS THE MISSION" means simply that today whatever the demography of the world population, we have to preach the Gospel with the utmost urgency. The Spirit and the Word arouse this conviction in our hearts. The faithful proclamation of the Gospel will hasten the coming of the Kingdom of Peace, Justice and Holiness.

To the King of Creation and the Lord of the Mission we give thanks and glory. ●

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## California Church is Removed from ALC Roster

"Trinity Lutheran Church has received the very good news that it is no longer on the roster of congregations of the American Lutheran Church as of November 1, 1984" writes Rev. Pomeroy J. Moore, pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church & Christian Day School, 4101 East Nohl Ranch Road, Anaheim, California.

Pastor Moore adds in his "From the Pastor" column in December, 84 — January 85 *Trinity Tidings*:

"This is considered Good News because this has been the desire of the congregation for three years as it has observed the steady and, apparently, irrevocable departure of the ALC from its Biblical foundations; a trend that has been



accelerating since 1965. When the ALC announced its intention to form a New Lutheran Church by merger with the Lutheran Church of America and the liberals who left the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod to form the AELC, it became quite obvious to the informed observer that future association with the ALC would mean abandonment of key Biblical doctrines and the Lutheran Confessions in any literal sense. This has been proven by the various documents which have been generated by the Commission for a New Lutheran Church, official statements by synod leaders in synodical publications and public statements of synod and district presidents.

"Initially the congregation joined with those who sought to alert the churches of the synod through conventions, publications and materials which called attention to the doctrinal problems developing within the ALC. When a conservative Lutheran seminary was formed by Lutherans Alert National in Tacoma, Washington, to provide an alternative for seminarians to the curriculum offered by the ALC seminaries that is based on use of the Higher Critical Method of Biblical interpretation, Trinity gave her support. Yet, despite efforts to gain acceptance as a legitimate expression of historical Lutheran theology within the ALC, the liberal ALC leadership refused to accept the Tacoma seminary, rejecting any fair consideration of its graduates. The ALC finally manifested its repudiation of the historic interpretation of Scripture as a basis for pastoral training by suspending Central Lutheran Church in Tacoma for calling a Faith Seminary graduate to serve as an assistant to the ALC pastor of the congregation. Central's appeal to the ALC was denied showing the determination with which the ALC intended to root out the confessional approach to theology represented by Faith Seminary. At no time in the seminaries nine-year history prior to the suspension of Central Lutheran Church in 1978 was there any serious attempt by the ALC to consider its merits as an expression of a theology still held by a majority of ALC church members. The die had apparently been cast!

"But, when Trinity Lutheran Church of Anaheim, California, concluded that this was an appropriate way to express her faithfulness to the Confessional statement of the ALC constitution, by calling a graduate of Faith Seminary as its pastor, and at the same time assuring its removal from the roster of ALC congregations, as executed against Central Lutheran, the ALC 'waffled.' Postponing action against Trinity for over two years, the ALC has now 'suspended' the congregation, effective one day after receipt of a resolution passed unanimously by the voting members of the congregation which declared their withdrawal from the ALC. It would seem that the timely action of the ALC was designed to defuse the situation. In any event both parties have what they want: The ALC is rid of another 'doggedly conservative' and recalcitrant congregation and Trinity is no longer tied to a church that is fast becoming apostate to its former doctrine. We accept that as Good News, even though it is sad that it had to happen.

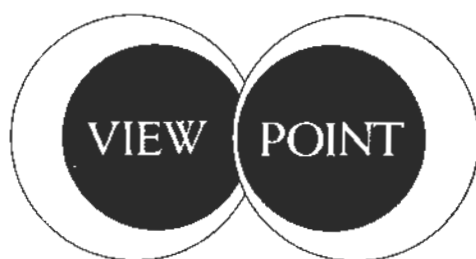
"In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.' (1 Peter 1:6-7)" ●

*News item from the Jan. 7, 1985 Christian News.*

## The Immutability of CHRIST

"Theology hath nothing new in it except that which is false. The preaching of Paul must be the preaching of the minister today. There is no advancement here. We may advance in our knowledge of it; but it stands the same, for this good reason that it is perfect, and perfection cannot be any better. The old truth that Calvin preached, that Chrysostom preached, that Paul preached is the truth that I must preach today, or else be a liar to my conscience and my God. I cannot shape the truth. I know of no such thing as the paring off the rough edges of a doctrine. John Knox's gospel is my gospel. The great mass of our ministers are sound enough in the faith, but not sound enough in the way they preach it. Election is not mentioned once in the year in many a pulpit; final perseverance is kept back: the great things of God's law are forgotten, and a kind of mongrel mixture of Arminianism and Calvinism is the delight of the present age. And hence the Lord hath forsaken many of His tabernacles and left the house of His covenant; and He will leave it till again the trumpet gives a certain sound. The old truth of the Covenanters, the old truth of the Puritans, the old truth of the Apostles, is the only truth that will stand the test of time, and need never be altered to suit a wicked and ungodly generation. Christ Jesus hath not changed His doctrines; men may ridicule and laugh, but still they stand the same. They shall not be moved or altered." ●

*From the Sermon, "The Immutability of Christ" by Charles Haddon Spurgeon.*



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# Moral Leverage and Church Giving

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## Moral Leverage and Church Giving

Recent reports about the Ethiopian famine and relief efforts in this Marxist African country are tending to assess the situation more in terms of misdirected government agricultural policies than in terms of natural catastrophe. One such report appeared in the February 15, 1985, *Des Moines Register*, entitled "Famine Blamed on Government, not Lack of Rain." Others now argue that we're seeing not only a failure to engineer irrigation and water conservation measures, but also the deliberate use of donated goods for political purposes, to neutralize opposition within Ethiopian provinces to the Marxist regime.

## The Politics of Famine

These reports generate a host of questions about the church's witness to and responsibility for the victims of famine-as-a-political-tool.

On the one hand, given the opportunity to contribute to an offering for Marxist-encouraged organizations like the African National Committee which seeks the overthrow of the South African government, most of us would likely let the plate go by. For several reasons: negatively, we don't like to use Sunday worship to supply people with bullets and guerilla fatigues, and we are not at all sure that the demon cast out by Marxist-inspired insurrection won't return in sevenfold strength to occupy the land; positively, we'd like to employ benevolence offerings given in Sunday worship for extending the claims of Christ's mercy revealed in His gospel and sustaining His suffering church.

But on the other hand, what must we do when the plate comes by for Ethiopia?

I mean, knowing what we know—that our relief-directed dollars are likely to be changed by government officials into rations, not for a starving village, but for a hungry army—what must we do? Knowing that, based on past performance, our funds will likely be forged not into tools for irrigation, but into tanks to ride in parade formation celebrating the "salvation" that has come through Marxism? Are we to keep on giving, knowing that we'd not be *funding* revolution W.C.C. style, but probably *abetting* it, evangelical style?

The church's position appears to be one of moral impotence: the victims are real, the famine is real, the political redirection of relief is real; and we can't, by our giving, change those realities. What the church needs is moral leverage, a position from which moral pressure can be applied to the situation.

The church is confronted with an irony here. Assert that the proper response is to work at securing the church's preaching of the gospel in Ethiopia, and you'll be told: but *that* doesn't *do* anything to change the situation. And so we are told, by mass media sensitizing campaigns, by bulletin covers and diaconal projects, to *give*. But, really now, what does that *do* to change the situation?

Is the church, then, impotent to "help?"

## Deed Subservient to the Word

It appears that we need here a perspective on the church's business in the world, on the power of preaching, a perspective that doesn't choose between missions and benevolence, between a sermon and a bowl of soup, or between Word and deed. The church's conscience can be neither salved nor satisfied by simply giving-with-no-questions-asked; we must seek an understanding of the deed *serving* the Word. Whether diaconal service channels our giving to the local community

or the global community, the giver with his gift must meet the recipient (the "victim") under the Word of the gospel. Giving the cup of cold water "in the name of Christ" has nothing to do with baptized humanitarianism, and everything to do with pressing the claims of Christ's mercy revealed in the gospel. Diaconal work in this way serves the Word.

This meeting under the Word of the gospel is far different from the encounter under the "word" of Marx proposed by liberation theology. That fusion of gift and "victim" fuels the fires of class struggle; liberation theology presses claims, to be sure, the claims of the proletariat. But these claims are pressed by a moral leverage fashioned out of the economic, social and political ends of man himself.

Any moral leverage the church may possess resides in the Word that brought her into being. But nowadays the great stumbling block is this: that leverage can be applied only where the church proclaims that Word and obedience is rendered to the God whose Word it is. The church stumbles into a prone position when she imagines that by simply "giving to the needy" she can "help" them or improve their situation. The illusion of somehow helping by forwarding donations while trying at the same time to "get in" with the

gospel is shattered by those recent reports mentioned earlier. Governments like the one in Ethiopia leave you endlessly filling out the entrance forms at relief headquarters, while they go and "distribute" your donations. Here at home, municipal, county and state relief agencies are more and more inclined to "permit" the church (through diaconal cooperation) to "help" people, but not to evangelize them. If the church (through her deacons) accepts those terms, she emasculates the Word and enslaves herself. The deed and the doer are robbed of power, since neither serves the Word any longer.

This perspective on the deed of benevolence serving the Word needs to be considered, then, before the plate goes by, even before the deacons fix the list of offerings. How shall the deed serve the Word of the gospel? How shall the suffering church of Jesus Christ be helped? How shall the claims of Christ be pressed and the mercy of Christ, obtained and bestowed through His death, be extended? That is to say, how shall the giver with his gift meet the recipient under the Word of the cross?

*Nelson D. Kloosterman, Orange City, Iowa.*

## WHY BE NEGATIVE

## ? A Comment

No preacher in his right mind wants to have a reputation for being negative. It is possible to point to preachers who increased their congregations by advertising controversial subjects in which, to be sure, either a leader or a system would receive a blasting.

Systematic preaching is one way to try to keep to the balance contained in Scripture. In that way it will soon be seen that it is impossible not to be negative. You can state the Ten Commandments positively but that is inadequate, just as it is insufficient to put a sign beside a dangerous precipice, "to keep to this path is to be safe and happy." That would be tantamount to murder. It is essential to erect a barrier and to put up a sign, "anyone falling over the precipice will die."

Hence our Lord warned, "Except you repent you will perish" (Luke 13:3). He was scathingly negative about the Pharisees and Scribes (Matthew 23). His purpose in that was positive. He wished that the people be liberated from that cruel system.

Paul was alarmingly negative about the Judaizers. Let them be accursed! (Gal. 1:8). Why was he so unkind? Answer: he indicated by his terseness that salvation itself is forfeited

once God's way of salvation is forsaken. This explains why religious controversy has sometimes raged fiercely. It is necessary to warn against any errors which undermine or supplant the Gospel or the Scriptures which support that Gospel. That is why Luther and Calvin were so hostile toward the traditions which had corrupted the Church. The Reformers were negative too about the Anabaptist Charismatics of their day. With our heritage, and the advantage of hindsight, we can see how misguided were both Protestants and Roman Catholics in physical persecution. We believe in freedom of conscience but not in silence which can be damning to souls. If those entrusted to our care veer in directions which could unhinge their faith, then we must not hesitate to be as negative as the Scriptures are in places like Jude and 2 Peter 2. Just as it is essential to be negative with our children in warning them against the perils of poison, of fire, or of busy highways, so sometimes it is essential to warn against liberalism, sacramentalism, materialism or the new apostolicism.

*Reprint of an editorial comment in Nov.-Dec. 1984 Reformation Today. The editor is Erroll Hulse.*

# A LOOK AT BOOKS

## NOT FOR DADS ONLY:

### A LITTLE LIST OF BOOKS FOR FATHERS

Stephan R. VanEck

Geoffrey Thomas suggests a list of twenty-five books "aimed at a student contemplating the vocation of the ministry of the gospel, who wants some guidance as to the theological books he should be reading."<sup>1</sup>

This little list of books for fathers comes as an idea spawned by Thomas' article and seen as an extremely important matter for fathers to consider in their role as father and teacher in the home.

As fathers we should be familiar with the Bible and encourage its teaching in our homes. Our own church articles of faith ought to be familiar companions as well. However, when it comes to theology it seems that many think that it is irrelevant, outdated, or not understandable except by ministers and theologians. But, theology is alive and powerfully expresses biblical truth and helps to sharpen our understanding of the Bible as we, indeed, derive our theology from the Scripture and do not seek to conform the Scripture to our theological system.

The following list of theological works for fathers has been selected on the basis of fidelity to the Scriptures and their readability, that is, the theology they express is *understandable*. While scholarly, none of the volumes are aimed at the

theologian but at the man in the pew who should not consider any of them burdensome.

Some of the headings and even many of the titles also appear in Thomas' list. His list will give further description of some of the books and further recommended bibliographies can be found in places like *The Grace of God in the Gospel* (John Cheeseman, et al. London: Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 1976) and in R.C. Sproul—*Knowing Scripture*, (see below). Most pastors should be ready and willing to suggest quality books to meet the needs of inquirers. In short, there is ample material available of both quality and understandability. We fathers simply need to digest them and incorporate them into our teaching as aids to lead our families to the truths of Scripture.

#### 1. BIBLE:

R.C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture*, I.V.P.—A.W. Pink, *Profiting from the Word*, Banner of Truth Trust.

Why study the Bible? This is not altogether an unnecessary question for evangelical Christians. R.C. Sproul underscores the Biblical warrant for the personal study of Scripture. As he puts it, "We live as human beings under an obligation by divine mandate to study diligently God's Word. He is our Sovereign, it is His Word, and He commands that we study it" (p.31). Read this volume and profit from the excellent discussion on the interpretation of the Scriptures and rules for their application to our lives.

A.W. Pink's little *Profiting from the Word* is an unacclaimed classic. I have used it profitably with Jr. Hi and Sr. Hi students in a discipleship context to encourage a deepening dependence upon God's Word in the various areas of the Christian life which the author discusses. The chapter on "The Scriptures and Obedience" gives an excellent distinction between true obedience and the lip-service so commonly expressed today.

#### 2. THE ATTRIBUTES AND BEING OF GOD:

A.W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, Baker Book House. A.W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, Banner of Truth Trust. J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, I.V.P.

A.W. Pink was a communicator of great spiritual truth in a limited space which makes his devotional material thoroughly absorbing and full

of compelling spiritual impact. Pink's *Attributes of God* is a masterful blend of cogency and clear expression of profound Scriptural truth. In the Preface the author writes, "Something more than a theoretical knowledge of God is needed by us." Reading his *Attributes* will convince you that A.W. Pink truly knew his God and has successfully accomplished what he intended as he further remarked in the preface, "An effort has been made to set forth some of the principal perfections of the Divine character."

Pink's overreignty of God should be read and assimilated by all. I would encourage the Banner of Truth edition over the Baker reprint for the reasons listed by Iain Murray in his *Life of A.W. Pink*, (Banner of Truth Trust).

*Knowing God* is as Thomas states, "a devotional classic." It should be read by all and all who read it will acclaim it a classic as well. Packer encourages us to know God, not just know things about God. Learn and experience the difference; read the book!

#### 3. THE DOCTRINE CONCERNING MAN

James M. Boice, ed., *Our Savior God; Studies on Man, Christ and the Atonement*, Baker Book House.

Boice's *Our Savior God* is a superb collection of addresses given at the 1977-1979 Philadelphia conference on Reformed Theology and covers the top of what we know as The Five Points of Calvinism. The articles on the Doctrine of Man are included here for their simplicity and clarity, as well as depth in covering a topic which does not generally seem to be otherwise addressed except on a scholarly level. All the articles are worthwhile reading and give a splendid introduction to the great truths formulated at the Synod of Dordt.

#### 4. THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST

John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, Banner of Truth Trust. R.B. Kuiper, *For Whom Did Christ Die?—A Study of the Divine Design of the Atonement*, Baker Book House. Robert A. Morey, *The Saving Work of Christ*, Studies in the Atonement, Grace Abounding Ministries, Inc.

John Murray was a scholar of great learning and insight. This has unfortunately led many to

avoid his writings of which *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* was especially described as "compelling reading for Christians with no academic background."<sup>2</sup> One is reminded of the fact that many great articles have appeared in the pages of "The Outlook" and "The Presbyterian Guardian" which subsequently became collected into book form (for example, R.B. Kuiper's *The Glorious Body of Christ*). These publications exist for the church, not simply to promote the construction of more theological tomes.

Particular redemption seems to be greatly neglected in our day and increasingly misunderstood. Having whetted your appetite by reading the article on Particular Redemption in *Our Savior God*, you ought to relish the compact yet comprehensive treatment given to the question raised in the title of Kuiper's *For Whom Did Christ Die?* Then you will want to indulge yourself

in the pastoral approach in Morey's *The Saving Work of Christ*. He is scholarly and at once personal and practical with one of the most precious doctrines of Scripture.

#### 5. THE REDEMPTION OF MAN

Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Know Your Christian Life*. I.V.P.; John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, Banner of Truth Trust.

Geoffrey Thomas lists these titles under The Redemption of Man as books that "deal with the fulness of man's salvation. How is the work of Christ applied to us today?" (p.29) Murray's *Redemption* is thrilling reading covering the experiences of God's grace in the life of the redeemed sinner. Ferguson's *Know Your Christian Life* is an excellent theological introduction to the truths of the Christian life and is written with great ability to communicate those truths simply.

#### 6. THE HOLY SPIRIT

John R.W. Stott, *The Baptism and Fullness of the Holy Spirit*. I.V.P. Stott's *Baptism* addresses the question of the experience of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life. In a short space (60 pp.) Stott reemphasizes the biblical warrant for being filled with the Spirit and distinguishes that from misconceptions some have concerning the work of the Spirit.

1. p. 27, June 1983, The Banner of Truth, No. 237.

2. Iain Murray, "The Life of John Murray" in *Collected Writings of John Murray*. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982) Vol. 3, p. 135.

Rev. Stephan R. VanEck is the pastor of the Bible Fellowship Church of Denville, New Jersey.

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the Editor

IN THE TRENCHES (March OUTLOOK)

Dear Editor,

I share Norman Haan's thoughts in the March OUTLOOK ("In the Trenches"). We certainly should know the positions of those going to Synod. But a fellow minister and I have met great resistance in pushing this at Classis Cadillac. Other ministers expressed dismay at this kind of "unChristian" attitude. Surely we should trust the judgment of fellow believers and let the Spirit guide them. They carried the day—the motion to give opportunity for questions regarding positions was defeated. Our battle in the trenches was lost. We do not know the positions of our delegates on any issue! LORD, have mercy on us.

Rev. Harold Westra  
McBain, Michigan

# Who Am I?

Glenn P. Palmer

I am a king who went out to battle against my enemies. In order to prevent being singled out for special attack and killed, I adopted a disguise. Nevertheless, I was mortally wounded by an arrow, taken out of the battle, and died shortly thereafter in Jerusalem. Thus I am a king of Judah and not of Israel. I am not a \_\_\_\_\_, but I am \_\_\_\_\_.

I am a "devout observer of the law;" yet when I was ordered by the LORD to go on a mission that might produce

trouble, I became afraid. I protested to the LORD that I might be arrested, but the LORD said, "Go!" Accordingly I went and laid my hands on the man to whom I had been sent, telling him that the God of our fathers had chosen him to know His will and to be His witness to all men. Then I told him to go and be baptized. Who am I? ●

1. Glenn P. Palmer is now stationed at 453 Worley St., NETA, Newport, RI 02841.



# ANNOUNCING

**WHO:** Committee of Concerned Members  
of the Christian Reformed Church

**WHAT:** *INSPIRATION RALLY*

**WHERE:** Fine Arts Center Auditorium  
Calvin College

**WHEN:** May 15, 1985

**SPEAKER:** Dr. W. Robert Godfrey  
Professor of Church History at  
Westminster Theological Seminary,  
California