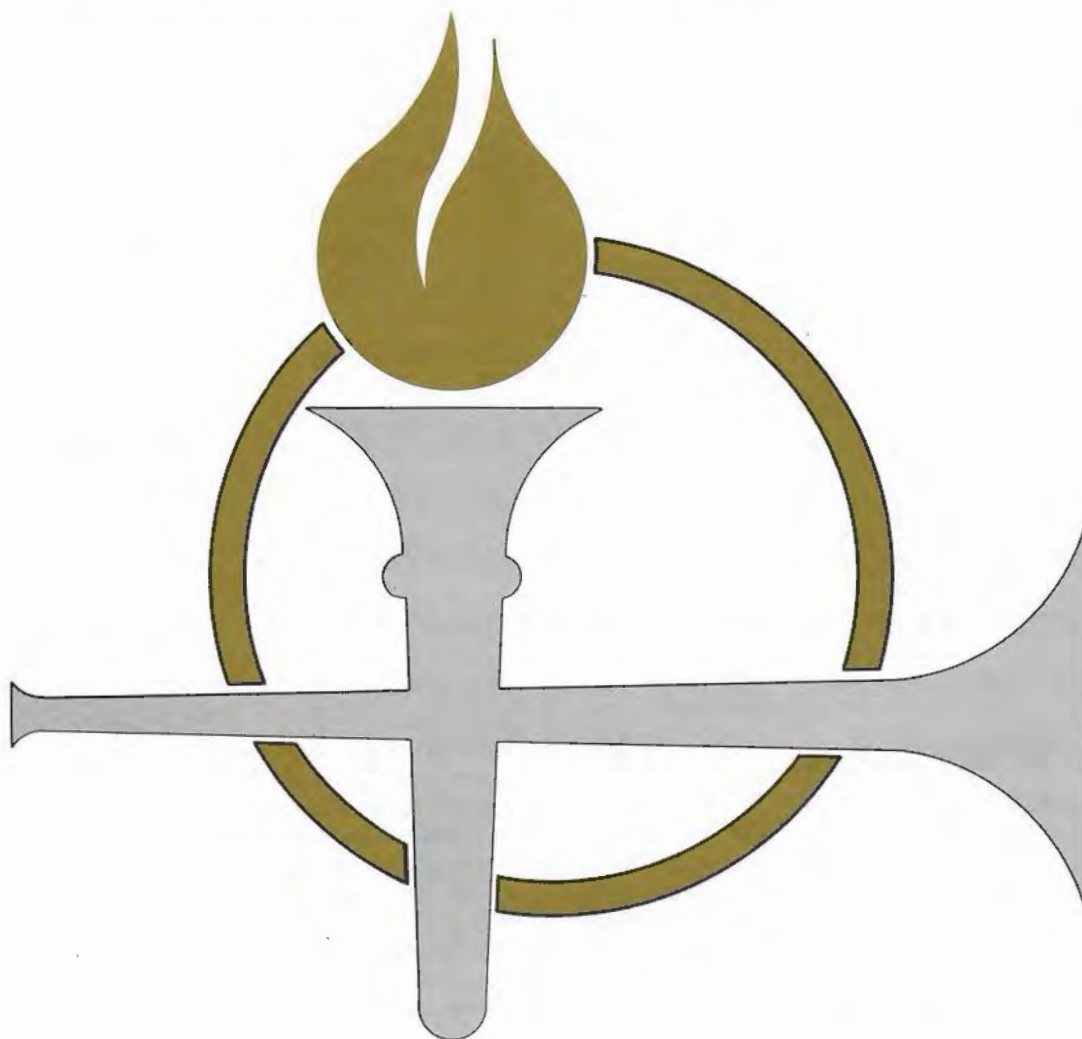


# THE OUTLOOK

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DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

JUNE 1985



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**THE WORLD ALLIANCE  
CRC SYNOD AGENDA  
REFORMED ROOTS**

# Joining WARC Means the Demise of the CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

Marten H. Woudstra

## The Proposal to Join

What could long have been foreseen has happened: The Interchurch Relations Committee of the Christian Reformed Church recommends joining the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC). It does so on erroneous grounds and with a radically revised notion of ecumenicity as compared to the church's past stand.

The World Alliance is a theologically mixed group of churches to which belong the Presbyterian Church which did not tolerate Dr. Machen in its ranks, and also the United Church of Christ (Congregational), called by the N.Y. Times the "most liberal Protestant church in the United States."

Through various circumstances, some of which are explained in the Agenda report of the IRC, this committee waited some twelve years before giving the church the information it needs to make up its mind. Within the very short time allotted I shall endeavor to set forth my objections to the committee's proposals and to the grounds adduced.

## Objections: We Must Compromise to Join!

Ground "a" (p. 203, Agenda) states that the CRC "meets all the requirements for membership (in the WARC) as outlined in the constitution." However, this is not so. The constitution makes a reference to the Reformed confessions but it goes on to state that it understands the Reformed tradition to be an "ethos" (way of life), rather than "any narrow and exclusive definition of faith and order." Only those churches that agree with this definition of what it means to be "Reformed" are eligible. But the CRC does not see things this way. For the CRC, being Reformed is, first of all, strict adherence to the Word as explained and confessed in "narrow and exclusive definitions." See for example, the rejection of Arminianism, Catholicism and other errors in its creeds. To become a member of WARC the CRC admits implicitly that it will not appeal to these narrow and exclusive confessions in its associations with WARC. This the CRC cannot do without becoming untrue to the Form of Subscription which states that we shall "diligently teach and faithfully defend the aforesaid doctrines," i.e., the precise formulations of the Three Forms of Unity. If the CRC is true to its calling it will not want to qualify for membership in WARC. Neither does it qualify.

Ground "a" also states that the CRC "can subscribe, without compromising its Reformed confessional and ecclesiastical character, to the constitutional basis of WARC." What has just been said also applies to the second part of ground "a." WARC wants churches that tone down the precise formulations of their creeds. It is erroneous to suggest that to join WARC means that there is no compromising of the church's confessional character.

## The False Appeal to 1944

Ground "b" of the Agenda report states that to join WARC is in keeping with the principles set forth in the 1944 report of Ecumenicity. That report spoke of some churches being fully Reformed, while others were Reformed in name but less so in practice, or not at all. The 1944 report urged the CRC to work toward "restoring" some churches, but it did not ever consider joining with them in a common alliance.

The Agenda report suggests that it is faithful to "1944," while in actual fact it is a major departure from it. The Agenda report scores "1944" for its feeling of "superiority." It tells the church to consider that differences in the perception of and loyalty to biblical truth which exist between churches (p. 221) are due to human and sinful limitations which affect all churches, including the CRC. While this is a useful reminder, it virtually rules out any concept of error or outright departure from the truth such as is signaled by the Belgic Confession, articles 28, 29. These articles clearly allow for some churches to be virtually "false" churches. This is different from saying that all churches equally suffer from a limited vision into God's truth and that therefore we can no longer agree with the principle enunciated in 1944.

If we must get off our high horse of "superiority," why then do we carefully cultivate "churches in ecclesiastical fellowship" while relegating the others to a somewhat secondary status? Does this not smack of the spirit of "1944"?

The IRC's appeal to "1944" is *entirely misplaced* and cannot possibly serve as grounds for joining WARC. The committee presents the church with a radically different approach to ecumenicity from that which has been accepted among us.

## An Alliance With Liberals

Continuing in the same vein, the Agenda report admits that the theological spectrum of the membership of WARC "runs the gamut of current theological options," (p. 227). Anyone

who is at all aware of today's theological scene knows that this means that WARC harbors error next to truth. The Acts of Synod 1959 give us a list of the contradictory and often erroneous views held in it. Theology since 1959 has not become better; it has grown worse. We should not dignify the denial of the infallibility of Holy Scriptures as just a "theological option," not to speak of other denials of truth. And we should not delude ourselves that within that dubious and self-contradictory context we can expect to bear a "Reformed witness." Our witness-bearing is a priority paralyzed by the admission we make upon entering the WARC (see above). There cannot be an appeal to well-defined and "exclusive" formulations of the truth. Such are anathema among the membership.

Ground "d" (p. 203) states that membership in WARC will enable the CRC "to support and strengthen the Reformed witness of those churches in the alliance" which carry on such witness. This is applying an individualist standard to what is essentially a corporate act. The corporate act which the CRC is asked to perform is to join an organization whose weaknesses have just been set forth. By joining WARC the CRC will be saying: Together with liberals and evangelicals we can "further" the faithful proclamation of the Word (Constitution, art. III, p. 232).

As I see it, this reasoning is the height of self-delusion. One either agrees with an organization's purpose or one does not. One either has a reasonable expectation that the purpose can be realized by the membership he joins or one has not. Does the committee want to tell the CRC that just any "theological option" can help "further" the faithful proclamation of God's Word? To pose the question is to answer it. Maybe the committee thinks it can be done, but it is clear that it cannot be done. How can those who themselves are disobedient to the Word through their erroneous theologies actually "order the life and worship of the Church in obedience to his Word"? (p. 232, art. III).

The committee's ground "f," concerning the warm reception given to those CRC people who were in some way connected with WARC over the years means nothing. Confessionally weak organizations always show this cordiality toward those who still stand firmly for the truth, provided the latter are willing to sacrifice their "exclusiveness" and "narrowness" upon joining. Otherwise, the cordiality suddenly stops.

### "Selling" It to the Churches

More could and should be said about this thoroughly weak report and its inclusivistic stand on ecumenicity. But time is pressing. As I have said earlier, this most important issue in which the church is invited to go down the path of world ecumenicity as commonly understood will have to be dealt with in a hurry. The committee in the meantime has all the advantages. It has known all along what the church did not know. It can now prepare its case, carefully analyzing some last minute and hastily prepared critiques. This is the basic unfairness of it all. Is this the way the grand cause of ecumenicity is to be promoted?

If the CRC joins WARC there will then be delegates from WARC addressing our synods, probably Dr. Alan Boesak and others. Standing on the same spot where the CRC office bearers solemnly vowed to adhere to well-defined and exclusive definitions of truth, these WARC delegates will urge us to catch the wider vision and to be done with lesser things such as creedal particularity and diligent defense of creeds

# THE OUTLOOK

(USPS 633-980)



Published Monthly

July-August Issue Combined

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

## JOURNAL OF REFORMED FELLOWSHIP, INC.

Send all copy to Managing Editor, Rev. Peter De Jong, 4985 Sequoia Dr., S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49508. Phone (616) 698-6267.

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES:** Henry Vanden Heuvel, President; Edward Knott, Vice President; Arthur Besteman, Secretary; Peter Wobbema, Treasurer; Clarence Werkema, Asst. Secretary-Treasurer; John Engbers, John Piersma, Harlan Vanden Einde, John Vander Aa, John Velthouse, Syburn Voortman, Jay Wesseling, John Ybema, Peter Yonker

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

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

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

**Subscription Policy:** Subscription price, \$7.50 per year, \$13.50 for 2 years (Canada rates \$11.50 per year, \$23.00 for 2 years). Unless a definite request for discontinuance is received, it is assumed that the subscriber wishes the subscription to continue without the formality of a renewal order and he will be billed for renewal. If you have a change of address, please notify the Business Office as early as possible in order to avoid the inconvenience of delayed delivery. Include your Zip Code.

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THE OUTLOOK

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

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

## Contents

June 1985	Volume XXXV	No. 6
Joining WARC Means the Demise of the Christian Reformed Church .....		2
by Marten H. Woudstra		
Meditation — The Church Alive with the Spirit .....		4
by John Blankespoor		
The "Readers Digest" Van Til .....		6
by John Campbell		
Comment and Opinion .....		8
by John H. Piersma		
Book Review Article — Tracing Our Reformed Roots .....		10
by Peter De Jong		
God's Changeless Word .....		13
by Board of Southwet Rural League of Mens Societies		
Christian Reformed Synod Agenda .....		14
by Peter De Jong		
So You're Delegated to Synod 1985! .....		19
by Peter De Jong		
The Contemporary Testimony .....		20
by J. Tuininga		
Women's Role A Critical Issue .....		21
by Sanford G. Shetler		
The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, 1685 .....		22
by A. R. Kayayan		
View Point:		
No Monopoly In Minister Training .....		23
by J. Tuininga		

and dogmas. They will not do this blatantly, but this will be the context from which they speak.

One of the IRC members who will seek to defend the committee's product before synod is the Rev. C. Boomsma. At one time he sponsored a report that agreed that there was no good reason for the CRC not to join the World Council of Churches. He should come well-prepared. This time he need not be bothered with another proposal as he was at that time. His viewpoint has now become the majority one. There is no real difference between joining WARC and joining the WCC. Rev. Boomsma is also the one who only a few years ago in a public address which was later published suggested,

however carefully, that the strict binding to the creeds as demanded by the Formula of Subscription had perhaps proved a hindrance to theological expression among us.

It is this Rev. Boomsma who will defend the position at synod that the CRC, when joining the WARC, need not be afraid of compromising its confessional character.

In conclusion, and for reasons stated above, I consider a vote for joining WARC a vote for the demise of the CRC as a confessionally faithful body and the outcome of a colossal delusion. ●

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

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## MEDITATION

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# The Church Alive With The Spirit

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John Blankespoor

*"When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled men, they were astonished and they took note that they had been with Jesus. . . Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:13, 18-20).*

On Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the church. That Spirit has come to stay, for the Lord has promised that He would "be with you for ever" (John 14:16). All real Christians have the Holy Spirit, while non-Christians do not (1 Cor. 12:3). That is the great difference between these two kinds of people. In this case there is no "grey area." Not only do Christians possess the Holy Spirit. They also give evidence of it by revealing the new life and power of that Spirit. This fact must be emphasized, in opposition

to the spiritual laziness, indifference and materialistic idolatry that characterize our age. A formal show of religion, including external church membership, is rather common, but the hearts of many people are not "in" it, and they reveal no spiritual vitality. True Christians, on the contrary, are alive with the Spirit and they show it.

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In Acts 3 we read of a man who had been lame for more than forty years, having been born so. He sat by the gate of the temple begging for alms. At the word of Peter, he was healed by the power of the Holy Spirit. He then entered the temple with Peter and John "walking and leaping and praising God." Naturally this created a sensation among the people who were used to the sight of the crippled beggar, and they began to ask questions about what had happened. The obvious miracle gave Peter the occasion for a sermon. What Peter and John could never have done had been accom-

plished by the power of the Spirit of the crucified and risen Jesus.

The leaders of Israel, hearing about the incident, immediately arrested and imprisoned Peter and John, intending to try them the next day. At their hearing they were asked by what power and in whose name they had performed this miracle. By the Sanhedrin's question it was admitting that a miracle had occurred. That question became the occasion for another sermon about the crucified and risen Lord Jesus and the power of His Spirit which had healed the lame man. Two facts caught the attention of the court: (1) Peter and John had been with Jesus when He was on earth. (2) The undeniable miracle of healing had occurred through these two apostles who confessed the name of Jesus and said that it had been done by His power.

Today the true church still proclaims the truth and power of the crucified and risen Christ. With the power of the Holy Spirit, it preaches that Jesus is and will always be alive. Through the disciples, the Holy Spirit worked, restoring physical health to the cripple. Like other special signs given on Pentecost, this one called attention to the Lord's saving power. Although He does not usually accompany the bringing of His Word with such special signs in our time, He still restores and renews people by the power of His word and Spirit. The truth of the matter is that all Christians should stand before the world as "healed," as "new creatures" in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). They have new and different motives and priorities. They have new goals and live by different principles. They become, as an old hymn expressed it, "strangers here, within a foreign land." This is not only to characterize a few unusual theologians or missionaries; it is just as well to distinguish every lay member of the church — all of us.

Is this the way the world sees the churches of our time? Aren't these identifying characteristics of the Christian often so effaced that it is virtually impossible to distinguish the professing Christian from the professing unbeliever? When such confusion exists is it surprising that the world pays little attention to us or our message? Although we may readily sing, "I love to tell the story of Jesus and His love," how many of us who sing it have ever told that story to anyone in the world? Although we sing "Come, hear all ye that fear the Lord, while I with grateful heart record what God has done for me," how many of us seldom or never talk of these things with fellow Christians or fellow-men? Why do elders making family calls find it difficult to strike up a spiritual conversation with many of those whom they visit? Although we may attempt to give many explanations in answer to such questions, is not the basic explanation that we largely lack the Spirit of Christ?

If we are really Christians we are "born again." We are "regenerated" or made new, given "new hearts." Then we confess our sins, trust in Christ as our Savior and love Him. This new life then has to come to expression. There will be evidence of the presence and power of the Spirit which has brought about this change. We remember how Peter and John gave evidence of this power of the Spirit. Recall too, how Jeremiah, the Old Testament prophet, having suffered much persecution because of his preaching, decided to speak no more of these things. But he could not be silent, because the Word of the Lord was like a fire within him which would not be suppressed (Jer. 20:9). So too, where the Lord is

present in the hearts of Christians and they know His saving grace, they cannot be silent about it. Their testimony must break out also in our age of indifference and formalism.

After performing the miracle the apostles preached about the crucified and risen Christ with boldness and courage. The Sanhedrin was impressed with the way which these "unschooled men" spoke of these things. How could these fishermen, "dumb" lay people, speak with such assurance? Despite the impression the court received, it sternly warned Peter and John to speak no more about this Jesus. The apostles replied, "we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." On the day of the Lord's resurrection they, bewildered by the previous event of His death, had stared into the empty tomb and realized that He was no longer there. Then they had met Him, standing before them, triumphant over death. Now they are being ordered to say no more about all this! One could easily order the sun to stop shining as compel them to be silent. They must speak. The Apostle John wrote in his first letter, "that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled . . . declare we unto you." For them, gripped and convicted by their experience with the risen Lord, it was impossible to be silent.

How different is this stance of the apostles from that with which many contemporary Christians face the world. Confronted by the demand to speak for Christ, they say, "We can't!" Forbidden to speak, these men said, "We cannot *but* speak!" Is it possible that we are no longer gripped by the great facts and implications of the Gospel as they are revealed to us in the Scriptures? Most of us would deny that there has been any lessening of our theological convictions. But that is not the whole of the matter. Are those convictions the kind that compel us to speak? When we truly believe, we not only lay hold upon the truths of the faith, but they lay hold on us! We come to know the Living Christ. Therefore we must speak. We must speak out of the joy of our salvation, knowing that we are sinners saved by His electing grace.

Are people who never speak up for the Lord and have no inner compulsion to do so really Christian? Let's not try to answer that question, but leave that judgment to the Lord. Such silence may indicate a quenching or grieving of the Spirit and seems to show little or no association with Jesus. The Sanhedrin had to connect the apostles' bold testimony with the fact that they had been with Jesus. We must learn to know Him better. We must come to know more of the publican's prayer, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." We must come to know more of the everlasting covenant mercies of our God which are "new every morning." The closer our association is with Jesus and His Word, the more the Holy Spirit will make us echo the testimony of the apostles to Him.

Sharing in the Gospel testimony of the Holy Spirit brings with it the assurance that the Spirit will never leave us (John 14:16). The Psalmist testified (Psalm 73:24) "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." Not only our souls, but even our bodies are to share in that glorious future. The Holy Spirit will raise them also on the final day to be made like the glorious body of Christ (Phil. 3:21). That is the future assured to all who, by the testimony of the Lord's Word and Spirit, come to know Him and confess His name.

# The "Readers Digest" Van Til

John Campbell

Have you noticed how many books about the Christian Mind and Humanism have recently appeared? Most have something of real value to offer, but many consistent Reformed thinkers rely upon Cornelius Van Til when they need a consistent theological approach. He continually returns the lines of argument to God, making us feel that "of God, and through Him, and to Him, are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36).

There are difficulties in grasping Van Til. His style is not as simple as that of his former students, Schaeffer and Carnell. His subject matter is often heavy, and shot through with obscure names, although anyone who perseveres soon discovers refreshing patches of clarity. Recent formulations of the classical, evidentialist approach have challenged his presuppositionalist method, and some have been too ready to ignore him. However, those who grapple with his writings (often without an experienced guide), find a growing conviction that here is something profoundly significant which enriches one's vision of God. I was thrilled to find on a recent visit to Toronto Baptist Seminary in Canada that an encouraging number of pastors in that country treat his contributions with the highest regard.

Van Til has some helpful interpreters, though few are "purist" in their approach. Jim Halsey's *For A Time Such as This* is the best. Rushdoony has published two critiques of Van Til, and both are helpful, although he has more recently diverted his own interests into the "Theonomy" field. Thom Notaro has a serviceable work on Van Til and the use of evidence, while William White Jr.'s biography, *Van Til: Defender of the Faith*, has interesting background information, but does not provide a careful entry into Van Til's central thought. John Frame's *Van Til: The Theologian* is brilliant and challenging, but not entirely accurate. Douglas Vickers of Amherst University, Massachusetts, has a vital introductory booklet called *Van Til and the Theologian's Theological Stance* (pub. Cross). Professor Vickers' friends have urged him to write more on the subject. Robert Reymond's *Justification of Knowledge* presents a reasonable picture of the essential issues.

This article is undertaken with the aim of encouraging ordinary pastors to come to grips with Van Til. It will not consist of a systematic summary of his teaching, but of a simple

presentation of some of his favorite illustrations. These word pictures are windows to his thought and show the profound clarity of his mind. They are attractive, though not all equally compelling. Some are unforgettable.

Van Til insists that our *starting point* is crucial. Many theologians and Christian philosophers begin with faith in man's ability to reason himself into a place where he can "believe in God with integrity." Van Til consistently exposes this assumed but specious "ability" of man, pleading after Kuyper that we have ignored the "noetic effects" of sin. He asserts that we should not copy Descartes method of "building bridges outwards from the autonomous self," but instead recognize our derivative nature, both in being and knowing. We are meant to be an "analogue of God," a "finite replica" of Him who made us in His image.

Van Til says that those who start with man are like *someone who buttons up a jacket* but soon finds that the *first button is in the wrong hole*, so that all the others are consequently misplaced. Similarly, apostate man's reason is like a *misaligned buzzsaw* which wrongly cuts all the planks. This sinful reason will cut its concept of reality according to fallen nature's dictates. Would-be autonomous man is also like a *pretentious builder* who ignores and abandons the exact plans drawn by the Master Architect. He vainly tries to reassign the specific functions of objects for the house, with the result that the building will never materialize unless the Architect steps in. The professor accuses secularists (*et al*) of putting the supernatural dimension *on the mystical bed of Procrustes*, and cutting off embarrassing or unwanted facets of reality that do not fit autonomously determined measurements of sinful man.

In contrast, Van Til says that we must start with the self-attesting Christ of Scripture, not with the evidentialist arguments, for the cosmological argument *presupposes* God, not *proves* Him. God is like *the beams undergirding the floor*. We cannot demonstrate their existence in the same way as e.g. furniture on the floorboards, but such beams are *presupposed* because without them the floor would collapse. In fact we need an *Archimedean Point* which *transcends created reality* in order to have an authoritative and true perspective. Any point *within* creation leads to relativity and im-

balance. Van Til distinguishes between proximate starting points and an ultimate starting point (see if you can find *the diving board illustration* in his works).

Furthermore, rebellious man is always confronted by God everywhere in life, even if he is not continuously aware of him. He is like a *man who tries all buttons on a transistor radio but always gets the same message* — he can never entirely turn off God's voice! (Psalm 139). He is also like a *child alone in a home* who vehemently denies that he has parents, and insists that he owns the house and is the sole resident. However, the total witness of the house so plainly declares the opposite (e.g. adult clothes, family photos, documents), that argument seems unnecessary, yet the rebel will persist. Indeed, created reality is like *linoleum that bears an indelible pattern* which will only be defaced when the linoleum itself is destroyed. Man can suppress, but never eradicate, his "sensus deitatis," which is God's greatest internal ally (Rom. 1) in making man aware of his true status.

Sinful man *lives on God's estates but pays no rent*, and uses all His provisions but offers no thanks, despite all the well-placed ownership signs. Scientists unwittingly assume an orderly, theistic creation in their logical methods — "they live off the borrowed capital of Christian Theism." (Rushdoony, Schaeffer and Guinness, *et. al.*, have clearly shown this aspect of science.) Non-Christians are "cattle rustlers"(!), living off the proceeds of Christian Theism, which alone is capable of providing a true (though not exhaustively detailed) explanation of the Cosmos. "Facts" are what they are by virtue of God's providence, just as the number "seventeen" only makes sense within the framework of a numerical sequence.

Even man's capacity to raise intellectual and moral rebellion against God is only possible because of the way God has created him. *Man is like a child slapping its father's face*, but who can only do so because father holds him within reach!

Nor can questing man establish God's existence by evidentialist arguments, just as it is ridiculous for *some to prove the existence of the sun by using a flashlight!* Such methods deny the true nature of man's knowledge: that it is derivative, dependent on special revelation, partial, analogical, finite, sin-affected and reinterpretive.

In the light of the God-awareness that persists in every person, Van Til warns that we should not accept an apologetic method that makes any concession to apostate man. Fallen man needs to be "blasted out of his last hiding places" in his own best interests. He needs an *honest Doctor* who shows love by stating the true medical state of affairs and who offers a surgical remedy, not a pill-happy medico who says "peace, peace" where there is no peace. By God's Spirit, man, unsure of his identity, needs to have his "iron mask" wrenched off to see himself before God. *His colored glasses*, cemented on, need to be replaced by the clear spectacles of Scripture.

Van Til's interpreter, R.J. Rushdoony, makes much of the concept that "the emperor has no clothes"! He shows how a consistent apologetic will reveal the philosophical and epistemological nakedness of man, whereas a traditional apologetic will allow that the "emperor" is at least wearing some item of clothing.

In other areas of theology, Van Til also communicates good insights through word pictures. Consider one in which he emphasizes the incomprehensibility of God. (This doctrine does not mean that God can't be truly known, but that he can't be exhaustively known.) This ties in with an analogical

view of language, and with the failure of thinkers to comprehend all facets even of general revelation (the cosmos). Time and effort will never achieve such knowledge, nor a *fortiori* will man ever attain to full knowledge of the supreme, unique, Triune God. We depend upon His self-revelation, and we can't even exhaustively comprehend the Bible.

Accordingly, Van Til employs the image of the "full bucket difficulty." This bucket is full, yet more can be added! God is unchanging, yet prayer changes things! God is full of glory (which *excludes* addition) but must be glorified (which demands addition). In this way Van Til indicates how we can live with apparent paradox without having to systematize every datum of theology, history and science. God's incomprehensibility and man's derivative nature and knowledge demand it be so. Behind a compulsion to systematize everything lurks the elusive ideal of *exhausting knowledge*, whereas consistent Reformed thinkers adhere to *principled knowledge*. Christians do not possess all truth, but in the Bible have the *Truth about all Truth*.

In another theological topic, Cornelius Van Til beautifully illustrates how the problem of textual variations in manuscripts does not negate the concept of biblical infallibility. The loss of the autographs does not necessarily create uncertainty, just as *temporary flood waters lapping over a bridge* do not necessarily make the bridge unsafe. We see the side rails, and other cars crossing. We realize that an inch of water only *covers* the surface; it does not *invalidate* it, nor *destroy* it, nor *erode* it. It still carries the same traffic, providing we don't go off the rails!

This distinguished professor (turning 90 in 1985) employs many other attractive illustrations. Read the beginning of *Christian Theistic Ethics* and see how he so clearly used the concept of a *Pilgrim* as a picture of the study of ethics (e.g. Destination? Road? Attitude?).

I have been blessed over a long period of time with my consistent forays into Van Til, and I hope this small window into his books will encourage pastors to take down those dust-gathering volumes and discover how powerfully Van Til addresses the modern situation. Readers will also appreciate that a pastoral heart accompanies his massive mind.

We conclude with his healthy picture of a childlike trust in God. He has been showing how the Bible presents a unified cosmos:

And if my unity is comprehensive enough to include the efforts of those who reject it, it is large enough even to include that which those who have been set upright by regeneration cannot see. My unity is that of a *child who walks with its father through the woods*. The child is not afraid because its father knows it all and is capable of handling every situation. So I readily grant that there are some "difficulties" with respect to belief in God and His revelation in nature and Scripture that I cannot solve. In fact there is mystery in every relationship with respect to every fact that faces me, for the reason that all facts have their final explanation in God whose thoughts are higher than my thoughts, and whose ways are higher than my ways. And it is exactly that sort of God that I need.

Pastor John Campbell, of Albany Baptist Church, Western Australia, has recently given two different series of lectures on the Van Til approach to groups in Australia; one related to pastors, and the other to Christian schoolteachers. He is connected with the Christian Community Schools movement in Australia. His church has its own Christian school and retirement village. Reprinted from the March-April, 1985 *Reformation Today*, 361 Aigburth Rd., Liverpool, England.

# Comment and Opinion

John H. Piersma

**NO HERESY!** — We mentioned before the fact that Classis Chicago South of the Christian Reformed Church was to meet in special session to consider charges of heresy against Rev. Neal Punt by the consistory of First CRC, Lethbridge, Alberta. After considerable discussion classis decided that the defendant was not guilty of violation of his church's creeds (most specifically, the Canons of Dort).

Readers of OUTLOOK deserve a full and fair report on this incident. We'll try to provide it soon. Now, however, *apartheid* in far, far away South Africa holds the dubious distinction of being the only recently recognized heresy in the CRC!



**THE ISSUE SUMMARIZED** — Most of us know that there is a religious denomination known as "Seventh-day Adventist." There are a number of interesting things in their history and practice (you can read of them in any good book on the different "churches" found in North America). In recent years this group appears to have put forth a more aggressive and progressive image, reflected in an excellently edited monthly entitled MINISTRY. It is sent free-of-charge to clergy everywhere.

In its March 1985 issue this journal reveals that the matter of ordaining women to the official Gospel ministry is "on the docket" among Adventists as well as many others. A very well-written statement of the argument for the introduction of this practice appears under the authorship of a certain Willmore Eva; another opposed is written by Bernard E. Seton. From the descriptions offered both appear to be or have been denominational executives.

Mr. Eva's contribution (Pro) begins with an excellent statement of the difference between the two positions with respect to their Scriptural interpretations. Without further comment (except to insert asterisks intended to point up sensitive areas) I quote here his summary of the "hermeneutical difference" between those who feel biblically warranted to recommend the ordination of women and those who don't. (Once again, recall that "hermeneutics is the study of the methodological principles of interpretation," in this case of the Bible). Eva writes:

In Adventist discussions of the legitimacy of women in the ministry, much of the disagreement over the Biblical data arises because of hermeneutical differences. The problem is not merely academic. It lies near the heart of our struggle to stand together. Complicating our hermeneutical differences is the fact that the Christian church

in our century faces many issues that had not arisen during the Biblical period. For this reason we must be especially responsible in the way we apply Scripture to any social or ethical question.

We might characterize one of the two hermeneutical approaches . . . as the literalistic approach. Its proponents tend to focus upon Biblical statements or specific scriptural cases. In contrast, proponents of the second hermeneutic tend to look for the general principles they find inherent in the flow of Scripture. They also take into account the historical and cultural dynamics within which the inspired writer worked.

One can readily see how two divergent, even opposing positions may be taken upon a question if two different hermeneutics are employed. Those who follow the first hermeneutic tend to view the others as ignoring, rationalizing, or compromising undeniable scriptural evidence. They also tend to accentuate the demands of law in Scripture when settling ethical questions.

Conversely, those who adopt the scriptural approach that settles ethical questions by wholistically searching out Biblical principles tend to see their counterparts as unaware of the central thrust of the combined Biblical and historical evidence. They see them as dogmatic in their adherence to positions the Bible never intended to be of eternal import. Their view of ethical questions tends to be dominated by their view of God's grace.

Our good readers can readily see that Seventh-day Adventists may look to us as being a bit strange, but that their thinkers are not necessarily stupid! One is tempted to comment extensively on these things, but I think we'll just leave it up to each one to draw his own conclusions.



**CHRISTIAN SCHOOL TEACHERS NEED "DOCTRINE BASE"** — In the CATHOLIC FREE PRESS, a Worcester, MA Roman Catholic diocesan weekly, Pope John Paul II is quoted as saying "that systematic study of Church doctrine is 'indispensable' for full-time and volunteer religion teachers." The Pope is reported to have told a general audience at the Vatican "that local Churches cannot merely rely on people who are willing to teach but are inadequately prepared in doctrine."

There is a program of catechetical indoctrination in the Roman Catholic Church and its teachers are called *catechists*. Pope John Paul values their work highly, this report indicates, regarding their training and effort as essential "for the development and vitality of the Church."

The Pope is said to have encouraged catechists to study in specialized institutes that can fully prepare them in Church doctrine. "Doctrinal formation is a fundamental necessity, because catechesis cannot be limited to teaching a minimum of truth that is learned and repeated by memory... A more systematic study is indispensable. In fact, sometimes circumstances have led those responsible for catechesis to have recourse to the collaboration of people of good will, but without an adequate preparation. Such solutions are generally deficient."

We of the Reformed persuasion can afford here to be reminded of an important truth, even if the reminder comes from Rome.

A few observations:

1. The place of systematic, biblical doctrine ought to be seen anew as of utmost significance for the life of God's people. There is such a thing as Reformed doctrine, and if we mean to be an honestly Calvinistic church we ought to teach it, know it, stand for it and love it. (Please don't tell me that a church doing this cannot grow. I know of more than one non-CRC congregation which emphasizes doctrine strenuously, and the growth of these churches by way of conversions "from the outside" far outstrips anything I know among us.)
2. I would add Christian School teachers to those mentioned above as "catechists." Pastors and teachers in school and catechism ought to agree in, and ought to share a high measure of competence and dedication in doctrinal matters. At this point the distinction I've heard made, "I'm an educator, not a theologian," is not helpful! "The development and vitality of the Church" does depend, humanly speaking, on a solid and loving instruction in the Truth. In that connection some of us have been more than a little disgusted by the replacement of doctrinal instruction with all kinds of "religious and moral teaching."
3. As Pope John Paul II dared to say, we need more than people of good will in the work of spiritual nurture. We need competence. And we ought not to sacrifice competence to good intentions!

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EVENING WORSHIP — As an emeritated minister I now enjoy preaching in the various congregations of the area as needed. It is a very enjoyable experience!

However...are we sufficiently concerned about the decline of attendance at the second (usually the evening) service in many of our churches?

As Synod appears ready to appoint study committees for almost anything in recent years, maybe we need a careful, "blue chip committee" to tell us just what is making our people unwilling to give the Lord the time it takes to attend two services on His day.

This might open our eyes to see the cause for more of our troubles.

• • •  
LIBERATION THEOLOGY — "Liberation Theology," with its roots in South American nations, has been covered in OUTLOOK a few times. We are not for it.

It strikes me, however, that there is a North American type of "liberation theology" which might be an even more immediate threat for the CRC. To illustrate here is a quote from

a report to a CRC classis from one of its (male) ministerial servants engaged in a classically-supported, special campus ministry. He writes:

Recently, I completed a series of visits to different residence halls, speaking on a subject designed to provoke discussion. We called it "Marriage-An Unnatural Act." It did. Provoking discussion among college students today is a challenge. So many are of the "Choke and Vomit" variety. They want pre-digested quasi-intelligent pabulum in order to 1. get a degree, 2. get a job, 3. get rich. Yuppies — the wave of the present.

There are some exceptions to this trend. In our fellowship for example. We are not an organized Church. We are a fellowship. Thus we do not write overtures to classis. We do on occasion write undertures. Here is an example of an underture which would be an overture if we were a church.

We would underture classis to overture Synod to:

1. Support the decision of Synod 1984 granting the privilege of ecclesiastical office to women.
2. Expand the decision of Synod to open all ecclesiastical offices to qualified and gifted Christian women.

Ground: The *liberating message of the Gospel* (italics inserted) revealed in the New Testament proclaims that in Jesus there is neither male nor female insofar as superiority or authority is concerned.

Comment:

(1) I used to wonder how denominations which once professed a certain (in this case *confessionally Reformed*) doctrine could change so radically. In my last years in the active ministry I met a pastor from one of America's leading Presbyterian communions who did not own a copy of the Westminster Confession and catechisms. He borrowed a copy from me, returning it later with the comment, "That's deep stuff." I came to the conclusion that it is possible to import any kind of thinking into a church by way of (a) the total neglect of church discipline with respect to heresy, and (b) a (subsequent?) sheer apathy.

(2) I say this here because anyone can see that the kind of thinking represented in the citation above is totally different from traditional, Louis Berkhof-Reformed theology. Please note the way we now speak of the New Testament in distinction from the Old (this has every kind of consequence!). Please note that in spite of the fact that various competent people have conclusively argued the invalidity of Gal. 3:28 as proof for the admission of women to church office, people go on quoting it anyway as if its teaching is plainly what they assert it to be. Is it possible that many of us are on a totally different doctrinal and theological path without many being aware of it at all? Or is it true that very few are able to discern such differences and still fewer care?

(3) If theological agreement among us is as divided as the above indicates to me, the possibility of maintaining the vaunted Christian Reformed unity (the basis for our quota system of giving, for example) is threatened, to say the least. Personally, I have no great enthusiasm for giving my money to support the kind of ministry represented by the author of that quoted above. I don't like saying things like that. And I'm not saying that my denominational loyalties and affections won't compel me to give in support of such projects. But my enthusiasm is dampened. I think that ought to make some people reflect on the value of continued rejection of standard and traditional confessional positions.

# Tracing Our Reformed Roots

Peter De Jong

**PERSPECTIVES ON THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH**, Studies in its History, Theology, and Ecumenicity, Peter De Klerk and Richard R. De Ridder, editors. 1983, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 404 pp. hardcover.

**DUTCH CALVINISM IN MODERN AMERICA**, A History of a Conservative Subculture, by James D. Bratt. 1984, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 329 pp. paper.

**THE REFORMATION OF 1834**, Essays in commemoration of the Act of Secession and Return, by the faculty of Mid-America Reformed Seminary, Peter Y. De Jong and Nelson D. Kloosterman, editors, 1984 Orange City, Iowa, 85 pp. paper.

In a time when it has become more popular than formerly to try to trace one's roots, these books all focus attention on some areas of the history of the (Dutch) Reformed churches. And they all furnish worthwhile information about that history.

## Family

The first book is a commemorative collection of essays in honor of Dr. John H. Kromminga at his retirement after over a quarter of a century of service as president of Calvin Theological Seminary. A biographical sketch by his brother, Professor Carl, highlights the problems of living and working in the "dilemma of orthodoxy versus relevance" in our changing times. In some surprisingly frank concluding comments the writer observes that the seminary, in order "to retain and in some instances regain the church's confidence," "had to assume a larger part of the traditional role (of guiding the church membership) which over the years it had somewhat relinquished in favor of speaking to the broader areas of theological scholarship" (p. 17).

The Krommingas belong to the numerically small, but disproportionately influential, German minority in a denomination that was mostly of Dutch origin. Many of the

German immigrants settled in central Iowa to form a "Classis Ostfrisland," a name which they carried with them from their ancestral homeland. Herbert J. Brinks provides a brief, but colorful sketch of their early history entitled "Ostfrisians in Two Worlds." His and a later, more detailed, essay by Henry Zwaanstra (pp. 109-150) recall the effort of the German immigrants to establish their own program for higher education at Grundy College (1916-1934) and seminary. Among the factors contributing to the painful failure of that school (especially during the depression years) was the hostility of the Dutch and their denominational institution at Grand Rapids, Michigan. (We can see a similar institutional jealousy in a current effort to increase Calvin Theological Seminary's monopoly control of access to the denomination's ministry.) After Grundy's demise it provided Calvin with some of its most influential professors.

Donald J. Bruggink, whose specialized interest is appropriate church architecture, observes that the colonists were preoccupied with the Word and worship of God to the point of being virtually uninterested in the symbolism of the buildings (p. 43). Elton J. Bruins focuses attention on the masonic controversy in Holland, Michigan before and after 1880. The fact that the older (Americanized) Reformed Church tolerated the membership of Masons while the seceders (Christian Reformed) did not, led the Dutch churches to favor the secession here and to channel their emigrating members toward the CRC, thereby contributing to the rapid growth of the new denomination. Editor Peter De Klerk charts the abortive attempts to establish immigrant settlements at Rilland and Crook in Colorado in 1893 and the competitive efforts of Reformed and Christian Reformed to extend help. Lubbertus Oostendorp writes a colorful account of "The Americanization of Hendrik Pieter Scholte," the independent and erratic leader of the Pella colony.

Diedrich Hinrich Kromminga, father of Professors John and Carl, was a pastor who for some years taught at both

Grundy and Calvin, where he was an extraordinarily fascinating teacher of church history. Although he personally held a certain premillennial view of eschatology, because of his awareness that this was in a measure in conflict with the form of subscription to the churches' creed, he scrupulously avoided promoting it either in his teachings or writings. It is ironic that Dr. Harry R. Boer, who has publicly attacked that form of subscription, writes a generally competent analysis and criticism of D. Kromminga's premillennial views.

Richard R. De Ridder deals with "The Lifetime Tenure of Ministers in Reformed Church Policy." As the church especially since 1973 is tending to emphasize adjustments to historical circumstances rather than recognizing any fixed Biblical order, there is evidence of a trend away from lifetime tenure.

## Covenant

Anthony A. Hoekema surveys discussions in the denomination about the "Covenant of Grace," aptly tracing the way in which various leaders, Vos, Bosma, Heyns, Van Lonkhuyzen, Hulst, Ten Hoor, Berkhof, Hylkema and Kuyvenhoven dealt with it. Generally they recognized that the Bible speaks of the covenant in a narrower sense as including only the elect and also in a wider sense as including believers and their children, some stressing one, others the other use of the word. Attention is directed to the important bearing of the doctrine on the Christian home and the education of its children. I believe that this informative article might have been made even more comprehensive and illuminating if it had noted the demoralizing effects of the presumptive regeneration idea in the Dutch Reformed Churches and if it had referred also to the Protestant Reformed exclusive emphasis on one aspect of the covenant and the opposite emphasis of the followers of Professor Schilder and the "Liberated" churches, which eventually split the Protestant Reformed churches.

## Kingdom

Fred H. Klooster provides an illuminating article on "The Kingdom of God in the History of the Christian Reformed Church." He divides the past 90 years of that history into three thirty-year periods. In the first period, in which Abraham Kuyper's concern about the rule of Christ everywhere was especially influential, there was keen interest but also intense debate about the subject. In the second, between the wars, interest waned and organizations earlier set up to implement these Christian convictions in various areas of society collapsed. The third period has been confused and Klooster sees little beside the activities of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod initiating an authentic Kingdom perspective. The last part of the essay highlights the valuable writings of Gerhardus Vos on the subject, a little known but important 1913 lecture of Louis Berkhof on "The Church and Social Problems," and Samuel Volbeda's moving but never published, forgotten lectures about covenant, church and kingdom. Reflection on the illuminating but distressing historical survey recalls the Lord's words, "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say" (Luke 6:46)? Unmistakably contributing to the collapse of a great deal of conviction and some idealistic enterprises for "God's Kingdom" has been the current compromise with Biblical criticism which makes everything the Lord said subject to debate. (And that fatal compromise is especially apparent

in the current disintegration of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod.) When the church loses its conviction of any clear Biblical authority it is soon lost amid conflicting opinions.

Harvey A. Smit considers the relative lack of missionary zeal in the first sixty years of the denomination's history up to 1917, attributing it especially to a general emphasis on self-maintenance that was far greater than any stress on its responsibility to bring a gospel testimony to unbelievers.

## Antithesis

Henry Stob, for many years a most influential seminary professor, contributes a brief but highly significant article on "the Antithesis," a term which Abraham Kuyper used to refer to the cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil, God and Satan, Christ and Antichrist, the church and the world. Although God said to the serpent, (Gen. 3:15) "I will put enmity between you and the woman," the professor maintains that the origin of this opposition was the devil and God's work was really the removal of it. "The antithesis, in short, is what the gospel is out to destroy" (p. 245). Following the carefully reasoned discussion helps the reader to understand the enthusiasm which Dr. Stob often aroused in his students and also the tendency they often showed to move away from such doctrines as God's sovereign predestination and toward Liberal compromises in the name of common grace.

## Ecumenism

The concluding part of the book is devoted to ecumenical relations. John H. Bratt deals with the Christian Reformed Church and its part in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council. John Hesselink, Jr. provides an article on "The Future of a Distinctive Dutch American Theology" in his Reformed church and the CRC, which we might describe as blandly ecumenical. Doede Nauta traces the history of the relations between the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and the CRC. Observing that the American organization is really older than the Dutch, he characterized the attitude of the Dutch church toward the U.S. denomination as at first rather apathetic, and traced later developments since the second world war to the present arguments and rifts. Klaas Runia, another representative of the same Dutch denomination, writes about the relations of the CRC to the World Council, toward which he considers the denomination "too negative" (p. 342). Paul Schrottenboer, long-time secretary of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, reviews the CRC relations with that body. Especially in recent years the Liberal movement of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands, in particular their identification with the World Council, has brought the RES under increasing strains as a number of smaller conservative Presbyterian bodies have been abandoning it and the CRC delegates have, by a compromise policy, vainly tried to hold the disintegrating venture together. In the book's concluding article William van't Spijker traces the history of relations between the Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands (which had never joined with the larger Reformed Churches, the GKN) and the CRC in North America. Each pursues a somewhat independent course.

## Dutch or Calvinist?

James Bratt's book on *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America* clearly reveals an impressive amount of research — Consider the effort involved in collecting 80 pages of footnotes and

working through 17 pages of bibliography. And the author is frank and free with his opinions and judgments as he writes in an entertaining style.

His concern, the title states, is with Dutch Calvinism in modern America, and his doctoral work was done under Sidney Ahlstrom, whose massive *Religious History of the American People* also shows a special interest in ethnic perspectives. Unfortunately the Dutch side of the title gets much more careful treatment than the Calvinism, for whose real character the author, despite his study, shows little or no appreciation. Henry Stob has divided (CRC) Calvinists into three different "minds" as though one could pick his style of Christianity according to personal preference. N. Wolterstorff has done the same, speaking of "pietism," "doctrinalism," and "Kuyperianism" and applying them to the entire history of the CRC. Fred Klooster in the previously mentioned volume points out how misleading this kind of categorizing really is when he observes that "Authentic Kuyperianism displays a rich kingdom vision coupled both with doctrinal sensitivity and genuine piety" (p. 211). This kind of categorizing Bratt pursues with a vengeance. Just how misleading his hasty labeling can be is perhaps best exemplified in his caricature of Louis Berkhof as one who virtually "made doctrine the whole of religion," and whose work was "utterly devoid of imagination and feeling" (p. 135) and lacking any "social corporate emphasis." One has only to turn to Fred Klooster's 4-page summary of Berkhof's lecture on "The Church and Social Problems" in the volume just reviewed (pp. 216-219), a booklet which Zwaanstra called "the most significant work to appear in the CRC on the task of the church in society" to see how grossly Bratt misrepresents him.

Perhaps even more serious than his hasty "pigeonholing" of people into such artificial compartments in which they do not fit, is the fact that he attempts to deal with "Calvinism" while manifesting a complete lack of appreciation for what defined that perspective for Calvin himself, the authority of the Bible as God's Word. Ralph Janssen, the early promoter of Biblical criticism, is portrayed as a mistreated hero, and the line of thought represented by the *Reformed Journal* is presented as almost the only Christian Reformed scholarship worth mentioning. Thus we are left at the conclusion of Bratt's interesting but rather cynical excursion into the story of Dutch Calvinism in America, with the *Journal's* rather futile efforts, Robert Schuller's empire and the Amway Corporation as about the only traces the Dutch Calvinist movement leaves as it is seen merging into "the full measure of freedom and banality that is the promise of American life" (p. 221).

The dreary ending of Bratt's book is not really surprising. If all that distinguishes Dutch Calvinism is really "Dutchness," that is, of course, certain to disappear in a generation or two in America. John Calvin himself had no concern for preserving the "Frenchness" of his own teaching. What determined and distinguished his teaching was not his ethnic roots, but the fact that he had received and sought to teach "God's message . . . not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the Word of God, which also performs its work in" the believer (1 Thess. 2:13). Bratt's in some ways able work shows no appreciation for that. The larger composite work we have reviewed, giving many glimpses and perspectives on the C.R. Churches, has indications of the same loss of perspective as it reveals a church moving toward an ecumenical Liberal main stream. In that

situation, trying to retain a few Dutch traditions, as John Hesselink recommended, is a rather useless business; it is a far from adequate ground for trying to preserve a church. The only thing that distinguishes a real church is its living by the Word of God. When it loses that, it becomes, as our Lord said, "salt that has lost its taste" (Lk. 14:34, 35) and, even if it joins some large majority, is headed for the trashpiles of history. Only the church that seeks to live by the Word of Lord will endure (Matt. 7:24-27).

Considering the position of Reformed churches in the present confusion, as these books prompt us to do, suggests that instead of futilely trying to perpetuate Dutch ethnic church traditions, we ought more consciously to merge our efforts with those of the Presbyterian who, sharing the same faith, also seek to live by the Bible as God's Word.

### Secession Roots

It is appropriate that the third, smaller booklet issued by the faculty of a new school that was established to provide Biblically Reformed training of ministers, should commemorate an event that occurred 150 years ago as a product of the same kind of conviction that inspired its founding. A century and a half ago a small but growing group of people, at great cost, broke away from a politically controlled and doctrinally apostate Liberal church to reestablish a church fellowship that would honestly believe God's Word and try to live according to it.

Two essays by Dr. Peter Y. De Jong recall the background and development of that secession. Nelson Kloosterman then analyzes its doctrinal significance. Henry Vander Kam in an exceptionally interesting essay traces the later history of the secession movement on into the 1940s when the "Liberated" Reformed churches again broke away from a fellowship that had largely fallen back into the former apostasy. Timothy M. Monsma focuses attention on the educational ideals of the seceders who emigrated to the U.S. and the way in which they tried to realize them in the schools in their Michigan colony. Mark Vander Hart follows the seceders who especially under the leadership of Hendrik Pieter Scholte, settled west of the Mississippi River.

This is a useful booklet to acquaint the people of our churches with their increasingly unknown religious history. A better acquaintance with the way our predecessors, although under superficially different circumstances, had to "fight the good fight" for the faith, would be far more helpful to us than most modern people realize. Some knowledge of history often helps us, by the grace of God, to recognize, understand and overcome current problems that many people who do not know that history, regard as totally new and baffling. The observation has often been made that it is especially those who will not learn from the past who have to repeat its lessons.

As we, entreating the Lord's guidance, seek to profit from Biblical and later history, we need to see clearly what needs correction in our churches' current plight and try to make the correction. Sometimes we must, like our forefathers, begin building anew what has deteriorated beyond repair. When that may seem discouraging, we have to learn, like our predecessors, not to "despise the day of small things" (Zech. 4:10) but to recall what God has done and may do again with efforts begun in faith and obedience to Him.

*Somewhat paradoxically, the denomination, as it loses its sense of being directed by the Word of God, is also deliberately fostering ethnic diversity — as though there were, could and should be black and white, red and yellow varieties of Christianities, creeds and church orders!*

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# God's Changeless Word

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## The Board of the Southwest Rural League of Men's Societies

Dear Christian Friends:

In recent years we have seen a trend in our denomination that has developed into a stance on Scripture completely foreign to our Reformed confessions. We had been taught that our Creeds are to be interpreted in the light of sacred Scriptures. Now the trend is to interpret Scripture in the light of secular society and personal experience. Some deny the authenticity and accuracy of the creation account because it does not "square" with scientific views. There has been a more subtle change, regarding our obedience to Biblical teachings in general. Much is said about the "cultural conditioning" of Scripture — making the power and authority of Scripture subservient to the times in which the individual books were written.

These views often find their origin in the schools of higher learning where standards of judgments are applied which are not rooted in faith, but rather in scientific developments. Secular standards are used to criticize and test the truth of the Scriptures. In contrast, our Savior in reply to Satan says, "It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Verse 10 of the same chapter reinforces this authority of the written Word.

The apostle Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians (I Thess. 2:13) establishes that "when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectively worketh also in you that believe." Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, again wants to make sure that the church accepts the Word preached, as well as the Old Testament writings, as the Word of God and not as the word of man. II Peter 1:20 reads "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation." This is a very important statement, which he follows up with verse 21, "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." In view of the grounds given, how should we, the Church of the 20th century, approach Holy Writ? In spite of the apostle Paul's claim that his message was not his but God's, its authority is being questioned by the decisions of our own denomination. Although when Paul speaks on some doctrines he may be upheld, when he writes about the offices of Elders and Deacons, he suddenly becomes time-bound, and his writings are not binding, for they can't be the will of God!

In Galatians 1 we find Paul again establishing God's Word over against false teachings. Chapter 1:11, 12 say "But I certify to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Paul reminds the church that though he came as an apostle of late birth, (I Cor. 15:8) nevertheless he was accepted by James, Cephas and John. They had heard about him and were acquainted with his teaching, and had plenty of material to object to if they so desired. In verse 9, however, we learn that "they gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcised."

There are beautiful pictures of the work of the women in the churches in Holy Writ. Proverbs 31:10ff praises the virtues of a good wife. In the Old Testament we find evidence of women who prophesied. Is that the norm in the Old Testament? No. However some Old Testament women have been mightily used in the service of the Lord. Deborah, who was a judge of Israel and a prophetess (Judges 4:4), was not afraid of battle; Miriam, a prophetess lending moral support, encouraged the children of Israel (Ex. 15:20, 21); and Hulda, also a prophetess, the wife of Shallum, delivered the word of the Lord to King Josiah of Judah (II Kings 22:14).

In the New Testament we also have several references to women who were in supportive leadership roles: Anna the prophetess who departed not from the Temple (Luke 2:36, 37); the daughters of Philip who prophesied (Acts 2:19); plus Lydia, Mary and Martha, Phoebe, and the husband and wife team of Aquila and Priscilla. It was this latter couple who taught Apollos more fully the Gospel message (Acts 18:26).

These labors of love were gratefully received by Christ, the apostles, and the church. In the establishment of the offices, however, not one woman is mentioned. There is not one scriptural evidence that women were entrusted with this leadership role. Jesus Himself appointed 12 disciples who were all men (Matt. 10:1-5). The 12 disciples also appointed Deacons who were all men (Acts 6:5-7). Besides this we should not forget the clear instructions of the apostle Paul concerning the offices of Elder and Deacon. The third chapter of I Timothy is an excellent example of the clarity of Scripture on the matter.

Friends, our concern is that the Scriptures are being altered by the Christian community to conform to the pressures of a society that places men and women together in competitive roles. More could be said, but we are reminded that the Bible is God's Word, and if He deems it fit to keep certain biases in it, who are we to correct the Triune God?

"Therefore brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught whether by word, or our epistle" (II Thess. 2:15). Our prayer is that we, with the Bereans (Acts 17:11), might be challenged to search the Scripture to see if these things are so.

# CHRISTIAN REFORMED Synod Agenda

Peter De Jong

## Back-to-God Broadcasting

"The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught" (Isa. 50:4).

"Praise the Lord for the word that sustains the weary! Praise the Lord for the way He wakens us each day and tells us the message that must be announced to the world. Our message is ancient, but God says, 'Ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls' (Jer. 6:16). The age-old message has never been needed more desperately.

"In the writings of our brother Isaiah, the message we proclaim over the airwaves can be found. 'Turn to me and be saved all you ends of the earth; for I am God and there is none other. I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. I will create new heavens and a new earth' (45:22, 44:3, 55:6, 7, 65:17).

"In Christ Jesus all the prophet's words have been fulfilled. Now it is the blessed duty of the church to herald the message of salvation through the cross to the ends of the earth. On the pages that follow, which scan our denomination's widespread work and outreach, every issue, every plan must be evaluated in the light of the Savior's program which will bring every knee in obeisance to His glory. We submit this brief summary of this agency's work with the prayer that those who read it may give God the adoration for what He has enabled our church to do in this particular expression of our mission. May it be read with interest, evaluated with wisdom, and used to provide us who represent you with direction and counsel." Could one think of a better introduction to the whole agenda of the church than this superb preface to the report on its work of broadcasting the gospel?

Our program of bringing the gospel through the electronic media differs from many others in that it is supervised and supported by the church and in that it employs natives of foreign countries to prepare messages for these countries and to broadcast them.

In addition to many broadcasts and follow-up in the English language at home as well as in other parts of the world, this agency has been bringing the gospel in several other languages. The first of them is Arabic, in which Rev. Bassam

Madany has for over a quarter of a century been addressing the Arab (Islamic) countries. From those parts of the world, largely closed to other forms of missionary testimony, there is coming a growing mail response of more than 9,000 letters a year. Spanish programs, under the direction of Rev. Juan Boonstra, are going out over 237 radio stations. Chinese programs under the direction of Rev. Isaac Jen cover the great land and feature (1) evangelistic programs, (2) programs targeted to young people and (3) a "Theology of the Air" designed to give urgently needed training to the multitude of house church leaders who have appeared throughout the land. Rev. Aaron Kayayan reported in our last OUTLOOK on a new Reformed church movement which has appeared in Africa largely in response to the French broadcast he has been leading. In addition to extensive Japanese and Indonesian broadcasts, there is also a Russian language program, which has recently doubled its coverage. The denominational program is under the over-all direction of Dr. Joel Nederhoed who has been its (English) Radio minister since 1960.

## Publications

In contrast with the careful and clear, Biblically supported and formulated, objectives of the radio work, the report on the churches' publications begins with a vague slogan about aiming at "an evangelized church in a covenantalized world." It proceeds to eulogize *The Banner*, (p. 48, 57, 58). It defends *The Banner's* editorial policies even against having to be justified before the synod when Classis Florida (April OUTLOOK pp. 10-12) brought and was denied placement of an overture asking for an accounting for its editorial policy's evident conflict with the form of subscription.

## Publication of the Dutch paper, *De Wachter* is to end this year.

By its own testimony, our publications organization is becoming "less like a traditional church 'agency' and more like a Christian publishing company" — over two thirds of the customers for at least some of their products are now outside of the denomination (pp. 49, 52). It states, "As another example of our businesslike approach we more and more look to our customer's needs to help us determine the direction we should go, and the products we should develop."

The agency's own admissions raise some questions about the propriety of a church setting up what is more and more becoming a general publishing company which increasingly

gears its production to the wishes and desires of its customers, most of whom have no connection with the churches who are supposed to own it, subsidize it and pay its capital expenses. The reader may gasp at reading that last year's proposed over one and a half million dollar new printing plant has now swollen to a Synodical Interim Committee request for FOUR AND A HALF MILLION DOLLARS for this expansion (involving in one way or another an increase in quotas of about \$10 per family for the next 10 to 15 years — see pp. 308, 304).

It was evident already last year that the publication board was inclined to seek unlimited expansion in many directions. This year's report picks up one of its proposed new ventures, "the publication of a monthly periodical . . . to aid and equip . . . church leaders" perhaps "in multilingual editions." It admits that in this proposed venture, "we were in a typical 'answer in search of a question' situation" (p. 62). In other words it wanted a "leadership periodical," and now it sought reasons to warrant having it, consulting with and advised by the Calvin College Social Research Center! And so it seeks an enlarged new printing plant. A synod, plagued to a greater extent than ever before by the destructive effects of the feminist heresy which has been promoted especially by our denomination's publication and educational agencies, might properly hesitate to authorize one of its agencies to engage in a costly expansion program to train and guide the whole denomination's leadership. Its ability to give that kind of leadership to the church is hardly being convincingly demonstrated.

The committee also wants to produce video materials (p. 61).

A further indication of the ambitions of this committee to expand its power is found in the proposal, in connection with the production of the new *Psalter Hymnal*, that the liturgical committee be merged with it. This, in effect, means that the publication committee, and more specifically, its "temporary" musical editor (p. 63), be put permanently in charge of the denomination's liturgy! Have the churches ever indicated that they need such a permanent agency, and, more particularly a woman "bishop" to dictate how they are to worship God?

In connection with the new hymnal, this board also decided "that synod be requested not to entertain motions from the floor that would add, delete, or alter any particular hymn but to entertain motions that refer back to the Board of Publications any inclusions, omission, replacement, or alteration . . ." (p. 55). Who is supposed to be governing the churches, the synod or this board?

### Liturgy: Dance

The perhaps last report of the Liturgical Committee (pp. 242ff.) (which envisions merging with the Publications Board) is devoted to defending and promoting the liturgical dance in view of the fact that the committee believes that some churches are now "ready" for it. It traces the past discussions and decisions about dancing, and by a survey of history, studied manipulation of the rather scanty Biblical references (to children's games and David's "dancing," for example), citing of unspecified cultural changes and appeal to a few academic specialists, seeks to rationalize now making liturgical dancing a feature of congregational worship! It tries to make its radical proposals more acceptable with a number of pious qualifications: The dancing must be "an act of worship," not "some form of entertainment" and must only "be

done in an edifying manner." "The committee would regret it if the synod's decision should result in serious division among us. Yet the development of liturgy cannot be frozen at a certain moment" (pp. 253, 254, 256).

It is curious that at the time when more of our churches than ever before are showing that their confidence in the denominational leadership has been rudely shaken, this proposal should arise to further demolish that confidence. If any people had illusions about the propriety and spiritual sensitivity of some of our more recent liturgical innovations, this final proposal of the committee should help to disillusion them. The committee's rationalizations somewhat resemble those of Aaron when he attempted to justify his concessions to the Egyptian calf-style of worship at Sinai with the announcement, "Tomorrow is a feast to the Lord" (Ex. 32:5). He forgot, as our committee and church forget, that God was not merely concerned about Whom we worship, but also how we worship Him. The first commandment is followed by a second which warns of His "jealousy" about that point. As our increasingly forgotten catechism points out, this commandment clearly teaches that we are not to worship God "in any other way than He has commanded in His Word" and that "He wants His people instructed by the living preaching of His Word," rather than by visual imagery. Perhaps few if any things in the agenda, document more clearly than this committee proposal our current departures from this guide.

It may be recalled that Dr. Samuel Volbeda once produced a well thought-out, but complicated "uniform order of worship" for our churches. Despite its virtues, when it proved too elaborate to gain general acceptance, it produced more diversity of worship than there was before. One senses that our last ten years of amateurish multiplication of liturgies have been inspiring more impatience and disgust than respect in large areas of our churches. Is it too much to hope that this synod, instead of encouraging and financing this committee's proposed expansion under the Board of Publications (where it is envisioned as guiding not only the denomination but also the broader family of churches!), may call a halt to its ill-considered and expensive adventures?

### Missions

As our churches themselves reveal a disconcerting uncertainty about the proper worship of the true God, difficulties also increase in missionary efforts to lead others to such worship at home and abroad.

The rather brief home missions report (pp. 26ff.) seems largely preoccupied with the mechanics of organization — a five-year plan and 46 "goals." It lists the many places where work is carried on and expresses some concern about a decline in financial support.

Our world missions are involved in some 27 nations overseas (pp. 114ff). Their report also notes some decline in financial support. Churches which our missionaries serve in Africa continue to grow, having "an approximate baptized membership of 250,000 and an approximate average attendance at worship of 550,000" (a figure that may soon double the total we could report at home). As the work of these churches in Nigeria becomes more and more independent of us, attention is being given to newer and projected missionary ventures on that continent. The report briefly covers developments in other fields, giving somewhat more attention to the rapid expansion of work in the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

In connection with this report, that of the Synodical Interim Committee devotes several pages (293-298) to the investigation of the mission's problems in Mexico where its executives were accused of contributing to the split of the Presbyterian body with which we have long cooperated; (The executives in question are leaving or have left the administration).

## World Relief

The World Relief Committee reports (p. 148f.) on its far-flung activities. It calls attention to a shift in its "focus from owning and operating its own programs to the development and strengthening of local institutions . . . that are engaged in addressing deficiencies in their own communities, regions, and countries." It notes that its Special Hunger Fund "will need \$1,000,000 during 1985-1986 to continue to pay for the Sierra Leone and the hunger education program." We are not told how successful this experiment at large scale relief is proving to be in its 5th year. As the report goes on to survey the various areas where it is involved, it is obvious that its efforts to work with existing organizations in various places raises endless questions about how and with whom we should be so involved.

## World Mission and Relief

A major problem that has complicated both our world missions and world relief programs has been that both, representing the same churches and working in many of the same fields, have been working independently under separate and different administrations. Recent synods have resorted to the extraordinary measure of appointing a special committee with unusual authority, to bring the two together. That committee reports (pp. 408ff.), listing the kinds of difficulties that arise in trying to combine the two agencies under one administration.

We notice especially two objections that arise to its proposed solution of its problem. A committee member, Mr. Gerard Berghoef, in a 4-page minority report ably points out that though the committee tries to combine Word and deed ministry in bringing the two agencies together, it fails to do justice to *"the priority which both the Bible and our forms of unity give to the preaching of the Word"* (p. 442, italics mine). The "synod must lay down guidelines so precise, and so clear that both board and agencies will unmistakably recognize the priority of the Word preached in creating faith and the role of deed in authenticating that proclamation. This perspective . . . is the key to a harmonious relation in the future" (p. 444).

Furthermore, in effort to resolve the difference between the two agencies the committee is recommending that the synod "appoint a committee to restudy the question of the delegation of deacons to major assemblies" (p. 442). In other words, in an effort to resolve this mission field problem the committee wants to restructure our whole church order by giving the deacons the same authority as the elders in the government of the churches. It argues for doing this because our practice is coming to demand it! Thus it would have the Biblical distinctions between the two offices, already confused in some of our practices, virtually discarded! It would be very unfortunate if the well-intended efforts of the committee to resolve a real problem would result in moving our churches to further reject the guidance of God's Word in the way we try to carry out His mission.

## Calvin College and Seminary

The eighty page report on the college and seminary (pp. 140ff.) is mostly a list of faculty appointments for the synod to approve. Even in the case of seminary appointments there is no longer a choice offered between nominees as the synod's approval tends to become little more than a rubber stamp.

The board has approved a policy of admitting women to the seminary's M. Div. program, but will not require exhorting in its requirements for the degree for women students. The school will not solicit, promote, or provide opportunities for exhorting by its women M. Div. students, or place them in field education assignments without the clear understanding that exhorting is not required nor expected.

## Interchurch Relations

This committee lists the 22 denominations with which ours maintains fellowship, observing that the relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN) is now somewhat restricted. It comments on the discussions about that body's departures from Biblical faith and practice which occasioned the restriction. A recent official tour of our churches by two delegates from it have not removed our objections to full fellowship, but rather confirmed them. Yet this committee wants to continue relations with this denomination.

Our last year's synod hastily and without troubling to ascertain facts or give any significant Biblical grounds, branded the South African churches' failure to vigorously oppose their government's apartheid policy a heresy (Nov. and Dec., 1984 OUTLOOKS). (Judging by the standards it formulated it would have to declare our own churches also heretical because we are not vigorously protesting our government's "discriminatory" efforts to exclude at least some illegal immigrants from crossing our southern borders.) The committee which had pressed for this action now reports on its dealings with the South African denominations. From both the general report and a supplementary report (Appendix C) it appears that the Gereformeerde Kerk in South Africa has been remarkably long-suffering with the officious judgments by its visitors from abroad, and while that committee of our visitors reports its visit "neither a complete success nor a total disappointment" it advises continuing relations with these South Africans (although the race committee and Overture 24 want to break relations).

Many of our relations with other churches have come to expression in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. That body is, in the words of the committee, "in a very critical condition — its very existence is threatened," "Primarily because of . . . developments in the GKN (Dutch Reformed Churches) . . . doctrine and moral practice, and the racial issue in the South African churches" (p. 203). According to a supplementary report (p. 212) six churches have terminated their membership, five of them because of dissatisfaction with the GKN. What the reports do not stress is the fact that though our delegation to the RES has been somewhat critical of the Dutch churches, it sided with them in opposing efforts to exercise the necessary discipline against their doctrinal and moral apostasy and it took a leading part in the hypocritical and hasty condemnation of the South Africans, thereby helping to destroy this ecumenical organization (Nov. 1984 OUTLOOK, pp. 4, 5).

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches, begun 110 years ago, is the oldest confessional ecumenical body. Un-

fortunately, it has through its history steadfastly refused to clearly define what it meant by "Reformed" and accordingly has come to include in its membership some of the most Liberal churches of our time. In view of that fact our denomination through the years has refused to join it. The Free Church of Scotland, an active member from the beginning, in 1954 withdrew because "it had been primarily advocating the claims and aims" of the World Council, and "because of modernism leadership" (April, 1983 OUTLOOK p. 17). Now our Interchurch Relations Committee is recommending that we join this organization (p. 203). Dr. Marten Woudstra of our seminary has from time to time called attention to the way in which this committee has, without giving any information to the churches about what was really involved, been moving in the direction of trying to bring us into this alliance (OUTLOOKS, May, 1983, March, 1985, and this issue). His articles showed how the initiatives for such a move came not from the synod but from the committee which would first ask the synod to approve what it wanted to do and then make this approval a synod "instruction." Now the committee, without giving the churches any opportunity to consider the matter, presses for a decision. As Dr. Woudstra points out, the basic ground the committee offers for such a decision is false: "a. The Christian Reformed Church meets all the requirements for membership as outlined in the constitution, and can subscribe, without compromising its Reformed confessional and ecclesiastical character, to the constitutional basis of WARC." Article II of the WARC constitution states that membership is limited to churches "in general agreement with the historic Reformed confessions, recognizing that the Reformed tradition is a biblical, evangelical and doctrinal ethos, rather than any narrow and exclusive definition of faith and order." In making its members' confessions merely "A" characteristic belief and *not* any "EXCLUSIVE DEFINITION" this basic article excludes any church that takes its creeds seriously as defining what it believes, and throws the door wide open to the outspoken Liberals of the Alliance.

Similarly, the committee's repeated appeal to the 1944 decisions of our churches about ecumenical relations to justify our joining the alliance is plainly a misrepresentation, for the committee at the same time severely criticizes the 1944 statement about our ecumenical responsibility as far too narrow, arguing that its "assumption of our superiority and the consequent role that assumption provides for the CRC in its ecumenical task must be modified." "The 1944 report does not take sufficiently into account the human and sinful limitations that also hinder our understanding of the biblical truth and faithfulness to it." "... We are called to bear witness to the saving work in Christ to which the existence of every church bears witness." The committee's report "recognizes that all Christian churches by being Christian churches possess some of the truth and also in some sense practice it, but also that all churches... are imperfect..." While it is true that there are no perfect churches, notice the unmistakable move toward relativism and the false assumption that in today's world there are no apostate churches with which we may not have fellowship. When the Lord sternly warns us to "be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor. 6:14ff.) may we let considerations such as the welcome we would be given and the committee's embarrassment at staying out any longer move us to ignore that? No one has given a shred of evidence that this alliance has moved

toward holding a more orthodox position — in fact, the committee admits that it harbors all kinds of beliefs — "runs the gamut of current theological options" (p. 227). Why should we now reverse our century-old stance of staying out of this unholy alliance with enemies of Christ and His Word? Our joining would not be an indication of the improvement of the alliance but an unmistakable demonstration of the growing apostasy of the Christian Reformed Church (as the committee itself in some degree recognizes in regretting the conclusion that it anticipates may be drawn from its recommendation — p. 228).

The same movement toward betrayal of the Reformed faith embodied in the committee's recommendation to join the Alliance is also reflected in its "ecumenical charter" which it wants the synod to accept (pp. 237ff). That charter after passing reference to 3 Bible passages and an equally loose reference to the creeds proceeds "while making such adjustments in emphasis and approach as are suggested by the experience of the church." Notice from a few quotations the relativism and compromise that result as it turns from the sure ground of God's Word to the relativities of always imperfect and diverse human viewpoints: "Though all Christians confess one God, one Lord, one hope, and one faith, they give theological articulation to this confession out of different mindsets, conceptual apparatus and terminology, traditions and schools of thought... Through... ecumenical dialogue we must trust God to teach us all, and thereby unite us through a deeper common grasp of His truth." "The unity of the church must be visibly manifest. The ideal form of this unity is not yet known. The unity we seek is one of mutual renewal and acceptance through mutual giving and receiving." "The Christian Reformed Church should seek rapprochement with all churches of Christ..." The leveling tendency of this document will be apparent to any careful reader. Will the synod uncritically endorse also this proposed course of compromise with the current ecumenical apostasy?

## Creeds

A new translation of the Belgic Confession is being submitted to this synod for final adoption. The report (pp. 337ff.) devotes considerable attention to the harsh expression regarding the Anabaptists in Article 36 proposing that it be included in the text but disclaimed in a footnote. Rev. L. Verduin in a minority report proposes instead that we continue to condemn the erroneous views but simply not mention the Anabaptists by name as people who hold it. That suggestion seems worth considering.

Professor Norman De Jong, a delegate to the synods that dealt with this matter, in our March OUTLOOK called attention to a much more serious flaw in this new "translation" that seems until now to have escaped general notice. The new translation was supposed to merely state in more modern English what the church has officially confessed in this creed. What it did was radically revise at a particularly critical point what the church officially confessed! As Dr. DeJong said, "Although it did not come to the attention of the synodical delegates in 1979 and 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 someone had pointed out in what way he thought the creed should be revis-

ed and given reasons for making such a revision the procedure would at least have been honest, but when such a radical revision is silently made under the guise of merely up-dating the English this is nothing but a deception (like stealing a family's possessions when no one is watching). Consider what a serious business this is. There is today no more immediate and divisive heresy threatening the unity of the Christian Reformed Church than Feminism. The points in our creeds that most clearly state what we officially confess as the plain teachings of the Bible about this matter are exactly these articles of the Belgic Confession. When anyone quietly reverses these articles it amounts to a most serious kind of treachery to our Christian confession. If the synod meekly accepts this fraudulent change it will be breaking the promise to maintain the confessions which each delegate solemnly made before God in the opening session.

A new translation of the Canons of Dort is also being submitted for the first time to the churches for their study. In our time when public attacks on the Biblical doctrine of election confessed in the Canons are becoming common even among our leaders, a careful, critical study of the proposed revision of this creed is the more urgent.

Creeds have historically been formulated to clearly confess Biblical truth and distinguish it from threatening errors. In our time, however, it has become common for some churches to prepare creeds for an opposite purpose, to cover and protect errors by vagueness and ambiguity. It is regrettable that the Contemporary Testimony (not called a creed to gain easier acceptance, but widely used as one) is more ambiguous and vague than clear. The comments made in the report (p. 388ff.) though rather bland and not incisive and digressing in many directions, may at some points be useful. Must the church admonish the Israeli government about Zionism?

## Race

For a decade the Committee on Race Relations has been engaged in the contradictory business of ostensibly removing racial discrimination by seeking advantages and making grants on the basis of color. This year (pp. 277 ff.) it comes, as usual, asking an increased quota (from \$3.95 to \$5.26 per family). It seems that one of its two heads, Mr. Westerhof, is leaving, and the other Rev. W. Ipema, is recommended for a terminal 2-year appointment.

A special committee on Ordination of Pastors from Multiracial Groups (pp. 446f.) is now recommending that Calvin Theological Seminary, in order to accommodate those who come from other cultures, "develop four culturally oriented tracks of study; one for Asians, one for Blacks, one for Hispanics, and one for American Indians. . . at the earliest possible date. . . Each should be headed by a coordinator who is of the culture of that particular track. All four tracks must include special course offerings germane to the culture, and all should have the majority of course offerings on location where that culture is present. Not more than one year residency at Calvin Seminary. . . should be required in any of these four tracks." There is a great deal more about the special procedures and treatment that should be given people of these diverse cultures.

As Christians we should firmly oppose discrimination on the basis of color. But the way to do that is simply to stop operating with such distinctions. When our churches try to do it by an opposite course of making all kinds of costly special allowances and arrangements for color, as they have

long been doing with SCORR, and they give one of its heads a leading role in such a committee as this, by sowing discrimination they are simply going to reap more and costlier discrimination. Although we have always made room for special arrangements for training some ministers where that was necessary, the saving doctrines of the gospel do not come in all kinds of special ethnic varieties and we should not indulge in the nonsense of training ministers for our churches as if they did. Imagine what Paul would have said about such an ethnic heresy as this!

## Overtures and Appeals

The Agenda concludes with 64 pages of overtures and appeals. Overture 2 proposes a restructuring of denominational boards. Number 5 wants to provide for choosing for office by lot. Classis Columbia proposes that all important reports be published in the synod acts a year before decision is made — a move toward preventing a lot of decisions now made before the churches know about them. Overtures 8, 9 and 10 would move toward requiring two third majority votes on constitutional matters. Overture 23 would have the classes license students attending other seminaries to exhort instead of the change arbitrarily made by the 83 synod placing this under Calvin's Board. Classis Eastern Canada (Overture 25) proposes that the upper limit of salaries for denominational employees "not exceed double the minimum salary for ministers on the Fund for Needy Churches scale." It finds the \$65,098 (US) maximum adopted last year unreasonably high. The way in which this matter has been handled and as much as possible kept secret, in defiance of repeated decisions of synods has long been a scandal which a responsible government or business would not tolerate. Even the figure reported does not list the extra (in the past over 27%) fringe benefits as a synod said it should. Will this finally get an airing and perhaps some correction? (OUTLOOK March, 1982 and Jan., 1983. Interested consistories should ask the Stated Clerk for a copy of the *Financial and Business Supplement* to the Agenda for this kind of information to which synods said they are entitled.) Overtures 26 to 29 address the problem of trying to correct the world mission-world relief relationship. Overtures 31 to 41 and 51 ask the synod to clarify the proper role of the deacon in view of last year's contradictory decisions. Overtures 42 and 43 raise the issue of deacons being delegated to governing assemblies. Number 44 would forbid the device of "adjunct officebearers" to place women in roles from which they are excluded by church order. Numbers 46, 48 and 49 want a moratorium declared on the women in office issue. Number 47 would exclude women from the offices of minister, elder and evangelist. Overture 45 asks for a study of what in the Bible is time-related and what is permanently valid.

The Clerk has, rather arbitrarily it seems, relegated all overtures and other communications on last year's women in office decisions to the category of protests and appeals. Some fifty of them from classes and churches and additional personal appeals object to those decisions, usually listing their conflicts with Scripture, the creeds and the church order as well as with synod decisions, and calling attention to the trouble they are producing in the denomination.

## Conclusion

The Back to God Hour report established a very high level for this year's survey of the denomination's business. It is regrettable that as one looks over the rest of the agenda most

of the course seems to run down hill. It is not only last year's decision to place women in office that is disturbing. That is only one symptom among many, of a much more comprehensive and threatening church disease. Its results are betrayed also by the proposals to turn worship into a dance, to put social and economic help on a par with gospel preaching in missions, to relativize all creeds and let them be fraudulently altered at key points, to join some of the most

flagrantly apostate churches in an unholy alliance — the list runs on and on. Let us pray that the Lord may grant to our whole church body a genuine return to His Word — or, if the church insists on turning further away from it, will give the growing multitude of aroused members who want to unconditionally commit themselves to that Word the wisdom and courage in God's time to break the unholy ties that would drag them and their families along with those who don't.

# So You're Delegated To Synod 1985!

Peter Y. De Jong

Each year the Christian Reformed Church assembles in a synodical session.

To it four delegates (two ministers and two elders) are elected by each of the forty classes. These men represent the churches in their respective area. And what they decide — in harmony with Scripture, the three *Forms of Unity* and the *Church Order* — is to be considered settled and binding upon all.

For a man to be so delegated is a high honor. It is also a grave responsibility.

The CRC is constituted by congregations properly organized with consistories; not by individuals. And no congregation, minister or elder may "lord it over another" by means of an exercise of undue influence of power. Our synods are intended to be deliberative assemblies; every word tested by Holy Scripture and every vote taken before the face of the Lord of the church.

That responsibility should weigh heavily on every delegate. Here we do not ordinarily attempt to bind our delegates by means of previous decisions of consistories or classes. At the same time every church member has the right to ask where a proposed delegate stands with respect to all the major issues. No one has the moral right to vote without due regard for the true welfare and unity of the churches which he represents. He attends not as an individual believer; he is an accredited representative. Altogether too often this seems to have been disregarded by some.

No doubt one of the greatest obstacles to proper reflection and deliberation on the issues to be decided has been the lateness with which official agendas have been forwarded. Especially elders are unable to acquaint themselves thoroughly with the agenda. Even consistories receive little time to reflect on the numerous reports with their recommendations. The resulting pressures on men who would act conscientiously have sometimes become quite unbearable.

As long as our churches insist on holding annual synods, with agendas appearing but few weeks before sessions, this difficulty cannot be overcome. Nor will the churches with their members ever attain to a measure of quiet reflection and rest. We seem to be moving from one "crisis" to another. How much better for the CRC to return to the pattern of Dordt, proposed several times among us but rejected, which requires regional synods held annually with a general synod once every three years. Our present system gives, often without full realization, altogether too much influence and power to boards, standing committees and study committees. Too much opportunity is now afforded for garnering votes before and especially between synodical sessions, which bodes ill for the welfare of the congregations.

One danger is focusing on a single issue. Does it surprise you, then, that at times other equally important issues are decided too casually, perhaps even quite thoughtlessly and yet with serious consequences for the peace and unity of the churches?

Synod 1985 again faces the "women in ecclesiastical office" issue. Some fifty or more protests, appeals and overtures will be on the synodical table. Dissatisfaction with previous decisions is now rife. Many are unalterably opposed to what was decided; some would seek modifications if possible; still others openly choose for opening all such offices to women. Perhaps more time will be spent by synod 1985 on deciding "technicalities" (points of order) than even on the issue itself. Delegates do well to listen sharply and decide clearly on every motion, lest the churches be led where they do not in good conscience want to go.

But more, many more issues will have to be decided.

Do you as a delegate know how you will vote on, for example, the proposed revision of our *Belgic Confession*? Against the majority recommendation the Rev. Leonard Verduin has sounded a much-needed warning; he has also presented a minority report.

What do you think about the report on the "liturgical dance"? Do you agree with the principles which it urges?

Are you and especially are the churches willing to have the Liturgical Committee prepare literature and organize demonstrations, so that such forms of worship may be introduced into churches which confess to be Reformed?

We trust you have acquainted yourself thoroughly with the report of the Inter-Church Relations Committee, including its recommendation that the CRC join the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. Against this Prof. Martin Woudstra has raised in print some serious objections. This could well be another step in the direction of joining the World Council of Churches. If we join the one with all its "weaknesses," why not also the other?

Do you agree with the recommendations of SCORR, especially with those seeking to dissolve our relations with the Reformed Church in South Africa, and that while maintaining such with the Reformed (Gereformeerde) Churches in the Netherlands despite their serious doctrinal and ethical deviations?

Did you already work through the report and recommendations dealing with the proposed revision of our *Psalter-Hymnal*? Here, too, there is much more than meets the casual eye.

Only a few of the many important issues facing synod 1985 have been mentioned here. More, much more demands the careful and prayerful consideration of every delegate. None should dare participate in the coming synodical deliberations and decisions, unless he with pen in hand has "crept through" the agenda while burning the midnight oil. And this will have to be done also during the days when this synod is in session.

For the propriety of synodical assemblies our Reformed churches have always appealed rightly to Acts 15. Such sessions can be a tremendous blessing for the congregations; they can also, especially when decisions are reached by slim majorities, create increasing confusion, distress and even discord. It cannot be denied that this has been happening with growing frequency.

Let us pray much, also in our churches, for all the delegates to synod 1985. Much of their work will determine the direction in which the CRC will be going. For some our churches are much too narrow and straight-laced; for others much too lax in loyalty to the Bible and the creeds. During the past fifteen years (and more) hundreds have left for more "liberal" churches. More recently hundreds have departed to unite with what they are convinced are churches more faithful to God and His holy Word. And many, many more are on the verge of leaving, be it often with heavy hearts and wounded spirits. Increasing numbers are also convinced that they can no longer in good conscience before the Lord contribute some or even all of the proposed quotas. Whatever one may think about all this, delegates do well to bear in mind what has been happening throughout the CRC.

Dare we still hope that every delegate to synod 1985 will be able to say of their decisions what the apostles and elders in Acts 15 said of theirs? "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things." (RSV)

*Dr. Peter Y. De Jong is a retired C.R. minister and professor living at Sioux Center, Iowa.*

VIEW POINT

## The Contemporary Testimony

J. Tuininga

The other day I was talking to one of the committee members which authored the "Contemporary Testimony." I was mentioning the fact that I thought the document was quite bland and general in many respects, and that it lacked specificity and conciseness in confessing our biblical faith. His answer was revealing: "If we make it too specific, it will be outdated in ten years." My response was that that was now precisely the major problem with this entire document. It makes all kinds of questionable and controversial statements, many of which reflect the spirit of the age in which we live, and that is precisely why they will be outdated in ten years. A good confessional document (like we have in our Three Forms of Unity) does *not* become outdated in ten years! I mentioned the fact that the Canons of Dort were as relevant today as they were when they were written. The same can be said of the Heidelberg Catechism. The reason is obvious: These documents reflect biblical teaching; they confess — that is, they "say the same things" as the Scriptures. That is why they are enduring, timeless.

But what we're trying to do in this Contemporary Testimony is zero in on all kinds of problematics with which we're faced today in society, without a clear direction as to

which way we should go. The world sets the agenda, one might say, not the Bible. And that is putting the cart before the horse.

I maintain that the biblical principles with which we are to face society are fairly well spelled out in our present creeds, and they give us the basis from which we can proceed to analyze and answer the problems facing us today. The principles may have to be applied differently at different times in history, but the principles remain valid. And the confessions must deal with basic principles, not with the latest fads or with symptoms. Matters such as the arms race, environmental pollution, multinational corporations, etc. not only have no place in church confession, but they can be tackled on the basis of that which we already confess in our present creeds. (Think of Belgic Confession Arts. 12 & 13; the Heidelberg Catechism L.D. 10, 12 & 42. e.g.)

If the enthusiasm which some in our circles appear to have for the Contemporary Testimony were matched by an equal enthusiasm for our present creeds, it might not be so bad. But I don't see much of that: the Three Forms of Unity are often treated with apathy and a shrug of the shoulders. And that worries me not a little.

# Women's Role

## A CRITICAL ISSUE

Sanford G. Shetler

One of the very prominent issues on the church's agenda today is the ordination of women. Those favoring ordination ignore the irrefutable evidence of the Scriptures and of church history and build their case on a few prooftexts which they interpret to their own fancy. It is a strange irony that plain Scriptures on other matters are either ignored or violated or given "private interpretations," while at the same time whole new doctrines are built up on a few misinterpreted verses. In Peter's language the Scriptures are being "wrested" (or distorted), (II Pet. 3:16). In some cases heretical "scholars" are quoted to support the ordination of women.

A good example of using a prooftext and of distorting Scripture is the pet verse of feminists, Galatians 3:28, which states that in Christ male and female are equal. Many things in life are equal in one respect or another, but this certainly does not carry through in every respect. A car and a tractor, for example, are equal for the fact that both have four wheels, a motor, a steering wheel and brakes, but they are also so different in other respects that the analogy becomes ludicrous. They differ too in the roles they play. This whole equality argument has become a travesty among church leaders who apparently have decided to sacrifice integrity for the sake of going along with the times.

It is egotism of the highest (or lowest) order to presume that we of this century have at last come to the truth regarding church structure and the role of males and females in society and in the church. Such new revelations are in essence not a whit different from those claimed by leaders of cults, for example, the Prophet of the Mormon Church, who in recent years claimed to have received a new revelation concerning the admission of blacks into the life of the church.

It remains an undisputed fact that the present effort toward "equality" and "liberation" has come about through the influence of the women's liberation movement. The church instead of being a *voice* in society has once more become merely an *echo*.

One of the methods proposed by church leaders of the various conferences and synods which are making an effort to ordain women, but who find much opposition in the grass roots churches, is to put the whole issue on a congregational basis, allowing those churches which desire to ordain women to do so. This makes it appear less crucial and as representing an opportunity to exercise "brotherhood." The ostensible intention is to respect those who definitely oppose the ordination of women, and at the same time solicit their forbearance toward those who "interpret" the Scriptures differently! The Southern Baptists, who operate more or less congregationally, took this course, passing a resolution at their 1984 convention opposing the ordination of women, but allowing churches to act independently.

But the fallacy of all this is that it defies the unity of the brotherhood. In other matters — budget, for example — denominational bodies or area conferences or synods are not that generous! The account of the Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15) does not point toward congregationalism. There, after "much disputing," the assembled group arrived at a final answer, issuing "decrees for to keep" in *all the churches*.

The point is, as we have already seen in the Mennonite Church, a woman minister ordained by a church in Illinois, presumably on the basis of local option, is now being used in various meetings of the conference, and, in fact, in the denomination. In short, once a woman is ordained she becomes a part of the whole ministerial body, forcing churches which had opposed this policy to accept her in the larger body — the conference or synod. This kind of pluralism is not supported in any way in the New Testament and represents an imposition on the large majority who do not approve the ordination of women.

This editorial is reprinted from *Guidelines for Today* an evangelical Mennonite publication (published at P.O. Box 565, Johnstown, PA 15907). Many of our readers may be interested in a paragraph appearing on the same editorial page which calls attention to a development remarkably similar to one in our circles. It reads:

### Fellowship of Concerned Mennonites

Registration cards are coming to our FCM office weekly designating the desire to become a member of the new organization.

Incidentally, all of the major denominations now have concern groups, many of these having started a decade or more ago. It is remarkable how the concerns of the various groups coincide. The issues are essentially the same in all churches. It seems apostasy has struck Christendom in full force. Many people across the church, however, are simply not ready to go along with all the changes taking place under the argument that change is simply to be expected.

The issues are well known, but many church leaders refuse to face them courageously. The Apostle Paul, in Acts 20, had warned the elders that grievous wolves would "enter in among you, not sparing the flock" and of your own selves, "shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." This we see happening today.

There are those who have tried to cast aspersions on the FCM, trying to attribute false motives to the word of the organization. I wish such could see the roster of those who have signed up as members, pledging to uphold the ideals and concerns of the new organization. These are by no means critics and dull conservatives. The hour is late and unless there is soon a turn in the road the Anabaptist Mennonite faith will have lost its distinctiveness and thereby its right — or need — to exist as a separate denomination.

It is time that every one becomes not only a concerned Mennonite but a concerned Christian, of whatever faith, and returns to the basics of historical Christianity. This is not time for silence. With Jude we must "earnestly contend for the faith."

Write for a registration card and copies of the Berea Declaration, the Constitution of the Fellowship of Concerned Mennonites and other information.

# The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, 1685

A. R. Kayayan

"Worse than a mistake, it was an error," Jeanine Garrisson-Estebe, a French protestant historian writes in her new book on the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 by Louis XIV. This year French protestantism will commemorate one of the most sinister epochs of its history, and France may recall one of the most fatal errors committed by one of her despotic monarchs. In 1598 Henry IV, the "Good King Henri" and grandfather of Louis, had promulgated this edict. After thirty years of civil and religious wars (eight in all), he hoped by this edict to establish peace in the country to those whose throne he finally had access. It is true he gained it at the price of recanting the reformed faith, though the famous words attributed to him are certainly an apocryphal saying ("Paris vaut bien une messe" — Paris is worth a mass!). Though one of the best sovereigns that France has ever had, Henri shrewdly wished to grant to his former co-religionaires, the Huguenots, the necessary toleration on religious matters and at the same time to ensure himself of their military support in his fierce struggle against the Roman League.

There were at this period some two million protestants in France and more than 1,300 temples — places of worship. According to the Edict, the Huguenots were allowed in worship in more than one hundred of the most important cities of the kingdom and in castles, but also could have access to any and all official functions. It was a model, an unprecedented one, both of religious toleration and of the nature of normal relations between Church and State. However, Roman Catholics judged it as too favorable towards the heretics.

After the maelstrom which had lasted for thirty years, the Roman church was seriously recovering and was determined to crush the Huguenot party, the main enemy of France. At the same time, there was also a remarkable spiritual growth among the Huguenots, and reformed churches were converting crowds of Roman Catholics. It is important to mention this, since it was argued at the time of the Revocation that protestantism had stopped being an important social and religious body, had practically disappeared, so it was no more necessary to grant the too liberal measures of religious toleration.

The harassing measures against the protestants, the Religion Pretendue Reformee (the so-called reformed religion), had started already around 1660. Inhuman treatment had already forced many of them to choose the way of exile. Some did actually recant. Among those measures were the *Dragonnades*, the *Bastonades*, and the *Galeres*.

The *Dragonnades* were one of the most diabolical measures ever intended for such a purpose. For weeks and months a detachment of soldiers would occupy the home of a protestant family and under cruel treatment attempt to convert them into the Roman religion. The *Bastonades* were the beating of people, sometimes to the point of death, unless they would recant. The *Galeres* were the galleys of the royal navy where recalcitrants unwilling to give in were sent.

The Revocation was ratified by the French Parliament in October, 1685. All church buildings would have to be destroyed. (Some 700 were destroyed). All external signs of the R.P.R. were to be destroyed. Huguenots were forbidden to sing hymns aloud. Their dead could not be buried during the daytime. Ministers could no more wear their pastoral robes nor preach in more than one place. In fact, they had to either recant or leave the country in fifteen days. Schools and academies had to be closed. Children whose fathers were Roman Catholics would be baptized Roman. Money would be extorted if families did not recant or if they tried to recover their children taken away from them. No protestant could exercise his profession — as lawyer, doctor, or even businessman.

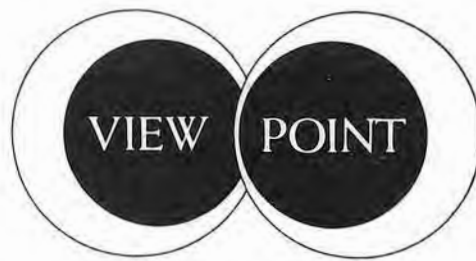
Some 300,000 French preferred to leave the country. They chose to go to the British Islands, to the Netherlands, to the Swiss Cantons, to Germany, to the Scandinavian countries, to Russia, to North or South America, or even as far as South Africa. (It has been one of my pleasures, during my many visits to this lovely country, to meet the du Toits, the Marais, the de Villiers, and the Malans, all genuine descendants of French Huguenots.)

It is impossible to evaluate in two pages all the disastrous effects of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Suffice it to mention the impoverishment of France at financial, cultural, and social levels. Even four years after the Revocation, Vauban, the Prime Minister and one of the forefathers of modern statistics, was recognizing this fact in a report presented to the despotic Louis XIV. One may with confidence state that most of the modern troubles plaguing France are due more to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 — which means a religious issue — than to the Revolution of 1789.

Instructed by this negative experience, one has to ponder both the nature of the relation between state and church and the role that the Roman church has exercised in the past and is still playing in countries which she claims as her own. Even though we may not follow all the conclusions of the sociological analyses of Max Weber or R. Tawney, we will readily recognize the immense impact of the evangelical faith on the culture, economy, and even politics in reformed protestant countries. What a difference between them and so-called Roman Catholic countries.

Finally, one has to ask a question to modern French protestants: "What is the use of commemorating past events and blaming the errors of other epochs if one is not ready to behave like his forefathers and show the same faithfulness and determination to witness to the Truth which his forefathers witnessed to"? Mere ornamenting of the tombs of ancestors does not rekindle their spirit. We are asking questions like this in our own radio ministry and in our writings in order to bring French protestants and non-protestants to the truths that in past centuries remarkable people had discovered in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Rev. A.R. Kayayan is the French Radio Minister of "PERSPECTIVES REFORMEES" of the Back to God Hour at Palos Heights, ILL.



# No Monopoly In Minister Training

J. Tuininga

Calvin Seminary and its Board of Trustees want to maintain their monopoly in the training and licensure of candidates for the denomination's ministry. President De Jong recently emphasized that again in a contribution to "Soapbox" in *The Banner*. He seems to feel that things will be better for the church if we keep all our eggs in one basket. But history has not proved this. In several instances students who have studied at Westminster Seminary were more theologically alert and had stronger Reformed convictions than those who had studied at Calvin Seminary. That is not only my own observation; elders have made similar comments.

With respect to the whole matter of licensure, we should keep a few things in mind:

1. The initial reason for having seminary students take one year of study at Calvin Seminary no longer holds. At the time the rule requiring such study was made there were few Reformed seminaries on the scene, and the church was concerned to ensure that future ministers would receive a Reformed training. (Even then, I do not consider the reason valid: classes could examine men as to their Reformed convictions and qualifications. Some men, like J. G. Machen, come out of liberal seminaries with stronger Reformed convictions than before.) Now, however, we have several other Reformed institutions which can do the job as well or better than Calvin: Westminster, Mid-America, Reformed in Jackson, Gordon Conwell, etc. And most can teach the courses students are expected to take in Calvin's last year equally well.
2. Church communions such as the R.C.A., O.P.C. and U.P.C. have classes (presbyteries) license candidates, and some of their spokesmen are surprised that we give this important matter into the hands of a Board, contrary to good Reformed church polity.
3. When one looks at the history of licensure in the CRC, he finds that the Board itself, and also committees appointed to study the matter, never questioned the right

of classes or consistories to examine and license candidates. Already in 1924 we read that "Curatorium does not contest the right of the respective Classes to do this for their own area." This was repeated as late as 1983 in these words: "The report does not question classes' rights to license students to preach in their churches, but it stresses that this does not promote good order." Van Dellen and Monsma in their older edition of the *Church Order Commentary* make the same point: "We do not mean to say that Classes have not the right to license young men belonging to one of our Churches . . . They have this right." Also in 1924, the consistory of the La Grave church overruled synod to amend the rule, since the rule would "seem to encroach on the Reformed principle of free study and might lead to absurdities as, for instance, in the case of a theologian who has spent four or five years at Princeton Seminary, but has not attended our school." There have been such absurdities, but fortunately, there have also been several exceptions to the rule.

4. One cannot avoid the impression of a kind of paternalism that is behind the rule. In 1954 one reads in the report of the Board of Trustees that it desired to acquaint "immigrant ministers" (from Holland, J.T.) with the CRC, and that this could be done by having them "spend some time on the campus of Calvin College and Seminary." It reads as though there were a special aura of holiness on those campuses, a kind of halo, and by walking around them one might imbibe some of this aura by way of osmosis — an example of "provincialism" if there ever was one!

I believe it is time that we re-examine this whole matter, and return to the Reformed principle that "the Church itself is held responsible for the purity of doctrine and of life. As the Church controls the ministry by its exercise of discipline, so the Church must likewise control the entrance into this office" (Report of Study Committee, *Acts* 1946).

## Is My Mother Still Alive?

I sometimes catch myself wondering whether my mother is still alive.

My mother lives some distance away across a couple of state lines. Sometimes the distance seems to be getting greater as we do not often get to visit her. She is slowing down a bit and her gray hair makes her look like her mother did years ago. I sometimes worry about her.

I catch myself recently having rather similar worries about my ecclesiastical mother. Last June it was as though that mother was in the hospital in critical condition in the intensive care ward. A number of doctors and specialists were consulting with one another about her condition and debating about what treatment should be followed. Some of the specialists were really excited about a sophisticated new method of treatment sometimes called the "new hermeneutic." It promised to do wonders for her, but as it diluted her blood it almost killed her.

Now I am the more worried because she faces surgery again. And the specialists want to attempt more of the same kind of treatment.

I noticed that one of our standard medical books (We still accept the Belgic Confession as a standard, don't we?) right from the beginning (Articles 2, 3, 5 and 7) stresses the fact that life depends on the Word of God. And later Article 29 points out that that makes the difference between a living and a dying church. It says that a dying church "ascribes more power and authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God." That makes me worry more than ever about my church mother.

I am troubled too as I notice that some of my friends are among the experts who are enthusiastic about the new treatment. It sometimes seems that the ablest ones are among the first to vote for that. Some have been my closest friends and some have been my professors. I admire their scholastic ability, but wonder what has gone wrong.

Professor Henry Zwaanstra once told a class that heresy rarely appears as something entirely new — usually it is an "old heresy in a new dress." I have been pondering that remark for the last year.

The Church has struggled with the "new hermeneutic" before. In Thyatira (Rev. 2:18, 19) (where evidently a woman was exercising some kind of "office") a "Jezebel, who calleth herself a prophetess" seduced God's people to fornication. How could that happen? That was easy; all one had to do was dismiss a few texts as "time conditioned." Verse 24 tells us that God's true people were ridiculed for not properly "understanding."

Early in the history of the church Tertullian faced the same problem. Seeing Christianity threatened by the philosophical wisdom of men, he urged Christians to cling to the great divine "foolishness." When we have to choose between intellect and faith, we must subject the human intellect to faith in God's Word and faithfully follow that (1 Cor. 1:18-31; 2 Cor. 10:5).

When I talked to another professor about this he said, "The conservatives just have not done their homework." The implication is that if one studies the reports of the synod and follows their reasoning he will arrive at their conclusions. It becomes plain that when God's Word says one thing this "new hermeneutic" abandons that in order to follow the "wisdom of men." I am sure that these people do not intend to be misled, but Satan seems to have beguiled many of my friends into voting against God's Word. That grieves me.

Do you see why I am worried about my ecclesiastical mother's June surgery? I will pray much for her. I will plead that the Lord, the Great Physician, will, in spite of the experiments of some of her doctors, grant her recovery and life.

Warren H. Lammers  
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