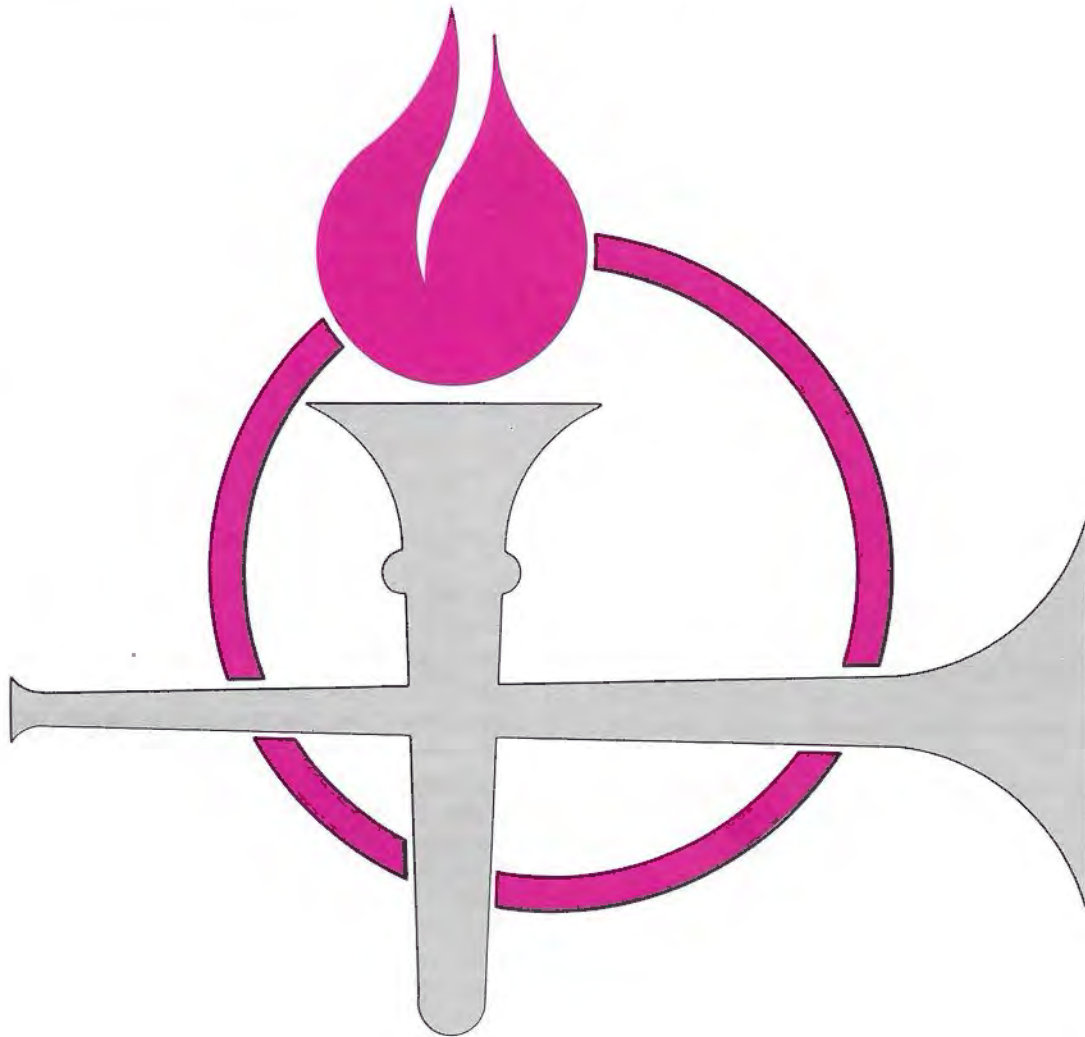


THE OUTLOOK

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

SEPTEMBER 1985



WORKAHOLISM
A PLEA FOR CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS
RETHINKING CONGREGATIONALISM

MEDITATION

Like a Baby Craves Milk

John Blankespoor

"Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that you may grow up in your salvation. . . ." (1 Peter 2:2).

In conversation a colleague remarked about certain members of his church, "They are just beautiful, growing Christians!" Although such a comment is not unique, it impressed me. Peter in the passage just quoted is speaking of such growth. Right after we were born as babies we began to grow. That normal growing process continues for perhaps eighteen or twenty years. We should grow similarly in a spiritual way. Most of us who are Christians, perhaps became children of God, or were "born again," early in our lives. After that the Lord wanted us to grow in our faith.

There are a few important differences between physical and spiritual growth. Our physical growth may be almost involuntary. Regarding spiritual growth, we have a responsibility. We must, by the grace of God, do something about that. Our physical growth occurs only in the early years of our lives and usually ceases when we get to be eighteen or twenty. Our spiritual growth should continue as long as we live. Even when we become old we may still be far from full-grown Christians. Real maturity will come only when we arrive in heaven.

Spiritual growth is a common concern in the Bible. The Apostle Paul speaks of being strengthened in the faith, of growing up into Christ (Eph. 4:15), and of being "rooted and built up in him" (Col. 2:7). Psalm 84 speaks of saints going "from strength to strength" until they reach Zion. Christian parents ought to be more mature than their children or grandchildren. At fifty it should be evident that we have grown since we were twenty-five or thirty years old.

As fall comes and schools open their doors, the churches' normal winter activities usually also begin. People commonly begin to read more extensively in the winter months than in the summer. Although the farmer considers the summer his growing season, our spiritual growing season may be the

winter. At least, we should try to make it so by engaging in church activities and studying the Bible and other Christian literature.

Peter says that we must grow in our salvation. As a kernel of grain must grow into a new plant, Christians, given new hearts in regeneration, must grow up to become mature people of God. Salvation means to be delivered from the greatest evil and granted the highest good. Our Christian growth should produce increasing enjoyment of this deliverance and increasing evidence of it in the way we live.

Real Christian growth usually involves an increasing awareness of our sins and failures. It also includes a growing reliance on the forgiving love of God in the atonement of Christ our Lord. With this goes a growing amazement at the covenant faithfulness of God. Paul in writing to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:15) characterized himself as the "chief" of sinners, using the present tense. That awareness made the grace of Christ appear the more surprising. Accordingly too, the Christian is to grow in his hope, grounded in God's promises for the future. In the meanwhile, such a growing faith will produce the present fruits of Christian virtues: humility and godliness; love for God, the fellow-Christian and the neighbor; a greater appreciation of spiritual things and a corresponding less preoccupation with material things.

As minister, I have seen beautifully growing Christians whose homes it was a pleasure to visit. I have also encountered others of whom the opposite was true.

How can we grow in salvation? Babies grow by drinking milk. That includes all of the nourishment that the babies' bodies need in the early months of their lives. But it has to be good milk. Alluding to that as an illustration, Peter speaks of the "pure spiritual milk" of God's Word. Some older versions suggest that this is "unadulterated" milk of the Word. It must be only God's Word and nothing else—no substitutes, and certainly not the "word of man." Only God's inerrant

and infallible Word can nourish real Christians. This is needed in the preaching of our churches, the teaching of our schools, the devotions of our homes. It is needed in every area of our lives.

As "newborn babies" we are instructed to "crave" this kind of food. How eager babies are to receive their bottles or the milk of their mothers! We are incited to long for the Word of God with that kind of eagerness.

While a baby naturally desires food, the Christian is instructed to cultivate such eagerness for the Word of God. We must work at it. We must discipline our minds and wills to do it.

Psalms 119 expresses such eager enthusiasm about the Word and law of God.

I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your work (vv. 14-16).

My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times (v. 20).

How little such eagerness appears in many churches today. And there is accordingly little evident Christian growth.

Many Christians consider that the all-important question is whether one has received Christ as Savior and is prepared to die. The Scriptures plainly teach that we must not only believe in Christ, but must also grow in faith and godly living. Those who believe in and obediently serve Him in life will be prepared to meet Him at death.

There is a common complaint about the lethargy apparent in the lives of church members and churches, as many confess their faith and pay their budgets, but in their way of living are, for the most part, indistinguishable from the unbelievers around them. Many show little or no interest in the church (either the life of the local church or the course taken by its denomination). They are not interested in spiritual growth or in the Word of God by which we must grow. If in a family a baby showed no growth for a whole year wouldn't parents be disturbed and seek medical advice? A church leader observed that 95% of the church throughout our country is woefully anemic. Another observed that "the church is alarmingly ill. But the worst part of it is that she doesn't even know it."

We live in a society that is becoming increasingly estranged from the Bible. Even in its churches there is growing denial of or questioning of the Bible's inerrancy and infallibility, and a corresponding indifference to it and ignorance of it.

In such an atmosphere, it becomes the more urgent that we resolve to honor God's Word for what it is and prayerfully and systematically study it. We need to have it faithfully preached in the churches and faithfully attend churches where that is done. And we need to accompany and support such church direction with daily devotions in our homes in which God's Word takes a central place. Maintaining such family devotions may become difficult when members of the family are involved in many diverse activities, but it is too important to neglect. Perhaps we need to get up earlier in the morning to provide the time needed to begin our days with family devotions around God's Word.

We must develop a hunger for God's Word that is comparable to a baby's desire for milk. That is the way to Christian growth in knowledge of God and in salvation. Such growth produces the virtues of love, joy and peace. That is the way we should become "beautiful, growing Christians."

®

THE OUTLOOK

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

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How We Know the Things of God

Peter DeJong

1 Corinthians 2:9-16

Questions About the Bible

Why should I believe the Bible? When natural science has exposed the errors of so many old beliefs and is making so many new discoveries, isn't it foolish for anyone to take such an ancient book as his guide? As we become increasingly aware of the way changing times influence or control the views of people in each age and society, why should any educated person today believe the Bible's old teachings, visions and prophecies? Growing up in a California parsonage and attending very liberal public schools for a dozen years, these were the questions that most troubled me as a teenager over 50 years ago. Today these are questions that in one way or another appear in almost every significant debate of our church synods and in every important issue that increasingly divides our own and many other churches. How shall we answer them?

The Bible's Own Answer

Perhaps the best answer to such questions that I have encountered in over a half century, and one that generally seems to have gotten remarkably little attention, is that given by the Apostle Paul in the first two chapters of his First Letter to the Corinthians. Especially in the latter part of the second chapter he deals with the problem of how we must come to know the things of God. He points out that they are by nature (1) inaccessible to man's own investigation, that they are (2) revealed only by God's Spirit, and that they are (3) communicated to us only by that Spirit.

1. Their Inaccessibility to Man's Investigation

To turn to the Bible to seek answers to these modern problems is not as inappropriate as it might seem, for we soon discover in our study of the Bible that there is nothing essentially new about these problems. Although we may encounter them in slightly altered forms, they are essentially the same as those Jesus met among the Sadducees or those Paul faced in Athens. What in our time affects their formulation and makes them especially urgent is the popular reverence for the natural sciences. Many people will admit that these sciences, among which physics and chemistry take a leading

role, have replaced religion in their lives. (One recalls Anthony Standen's amusing book, *Science Is A Sacred Cow*.) While we must acknowledge that these sciences with their methods of measurement and experiment have been very useful in certain areas and have produced remarkable discoveries, we must also recognize their unsuitability to other, more peculiarly human areas of man's life. The most important things in life, those that are characteristically human, just cannot be observed, weighed, measured and manipulated by these methods. While one can carefully weigh a pound of coffee, he can't do that to such things as love or loyalty.¹

Turning now to the letter of the Apostle Paul, we observe that the limitations of these methods, already evident when one tries to apply them to human relations, become even more glaringly obvious when we confront the highest and most important matters. These, says the Apostle, are "things which eye saw not and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God prepared for them that love Him" (v. 9). These things of God are beyond the perception of our senses and even beyond the reach of our unaided imagination!

(a) Truths Beyond Our Reach

The apostle supports his argument with an analogy. "Who among men," he asks, "knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him?" How can anyone know what is in another person's mind unless that person will tell him? A man with serious problems was once persuaded to see a psychiatrist. The doctor could do nothing for him, however, because he stubbornly refused to talk. We can penetrate another man's mind only to the extent that he is willing to reveal it to us and that we are willing to listen to him. "Even so," the Apostle continues, "the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God." If we cannot even know what is in the mind of our fellow man unless he will tell us and we will listen to him, how could we possibly expect to discover the mind of God by our impersonal "scientific" research?

(b) Our Native Blindness

Paul points out that there is, in addition to the inaccessibility of these matters to our research, still another reason why it is impossible for us "on our own" to discover the truth about ourselves, the world and God. That reason is the

condition of our own minds and hearts. "A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" (v. 14). The Bible teaches us that by nature we have become blind to such matters. I once roomed with a landlord who was a gifted amateur artist. He had a serious handicap, however, in that he was color-blind. His work was as good as it was only because he had learned to rely on his wife's perception to select colors. To try to discuss the differences between colors with him was frustrating. He could only talk of what appeared lighter or darker, because to his perception, color distinctions just did not exist. This, the Bible teaches us, is exactly the condition of the natural man with respect to spiritual things. His objections to and arguments against God's revelation only reveal the more clearly the insensitivity which he would like to deny. Such spiritual "color-blindness" to God is the natural predicament of all of us.²

2. Their Revelation Only by God's Spirit

But if most of the facts of the matter are not accessible to our research, and we would not be able to perceive them if they were, how can we or anyone else get to know them? The Apostle's answer to that question is that what neither we nor anyone else could or can do is being done by the Spirit of God. He knows and reveals these things. "To us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God." And "we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God that, we might know the things freely given to us by God" (vv. 10, 12). That Spirit, working outside of us, reveals the things of God which are inaccessible to our investigation, and working inside of us, cures our blindness so that we can see and believe them.

3. Their Inspired Communication

Paul explains further that the Spirit of God not only revealed these things to him and to others. He also enabled them to speak of these things to the world: "which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words" (v. 13).

This Inspiration Even Determined the Words Used

Observe that the Apostle does not say that he was only given certain insights or certain revealed principles which he must somehow try to express in whatever imperfect way he might consider appropriate or most effective. The Holy Spirit even taught the choice of words to be used to convey these things. This is *verbal inspiration*—the direct, detailed guidance which the Bible in many places states that its writers received, so that what they wrote could be properly quoted as "The Spirit says . . ." (e.g. Heb. 3:7). It should hardly surprise anyone that He who gave the revelation of Himself ensures that it be even more accurately conveyed than information verbally conveyed by important human documents or contracts (Gal. 3:15ff.).

Why This Kind of Revelation?

This claim of the Bible to be the verbally inspired revelation of God is especially criticized in our time. Although the Bible repeatedly insists on this as a fact, it also helps us to understand why God should choose such a method of reveal-

ing Himself: "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1:21). "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise . . . that no man should boast before God" (1:27, 29). Mankind had fallen away from God through pride, God deliberately chose a way of revealing Himself to save them that no man could proudly misrepresent as his own discovery!

Paul, in passing on this revelation, is deeply concerned that it always be presented in such a way "that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (2:4). At this point as at others, salvation is shown to be impossible as a human achievement; it must from first to last be understood and shown to be a gift of God's grace (Matt. 19:26).

What increasingly impressed me as I first faced these problems as a teenager and then encountered them again and again in a half century of dealing with others, was the effective way in which this simple presentation of the Apostle deals with the questions of doubt and unbelief that we often regard as peculiarly modern. Such arguments will not in themselves convert the unbeliever. They may seem to provoke only further argument. But they are the answers God's Word teaches us to present to those who ask reasons for our faith (Cf. 1 Peter 3:15). As the testimony of God's Word, these are the kinds of answers that the Holy Spirit, who inspired that Word, will use to break down the obstacles of doubt and unbelief, to lead men to recognize their own condition as lost sinners, to receive Christ as their Savior and Lord, and to find that in Him "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3).

Notes:

1. The effort to apply the methods of physics and chemistry to the individual life by behavioristic psychologists and to the collective life of people by sociologists who try to reduce everything to what is statistically measurable seems to have created much of the confusion and frustration that one often encounters in those fields. I recall how the veteran historian, Henry S. Lucas, when discussing differences between the views of the 16th Century Reformers, quipped that some people at this university thought that they could understand these matters by studying rats.

2. In order to avoid misunderstanding, we should observe that, while the Bible teaches that in our natural human condition we are kept by both the nature of God's mind and works and by our spiritual blindness from perceiving the "things of God," this must not be understood to mean that we are totally ignorant of them. The teaching of 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 needs to be complemented by that of the same Apostle in Romans 1. There He states that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity . . . For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator . . . (1:18-25). In other words, although man cannot investigate scientifically what occurred long before he was born, the evidence of the Creator's work is so apparent everywhere that he cannot escape from it. His "blindness" toward it is not total ignorance, but a moral opposition or prejudice that drives him to resist what he ought to acknowledge. That is currently rather dramatically demonstrated in the persistence of evolutionists (including some professing Christians!) in clinging to their theory despite the mass of evidence against it.

The article of Professor Aaldert Mennega in this OUTLOOK deals with this development.

Making Sense in Biology

Aaldert Mennega

Theodosius Dobzhansky, a well-known biologist, has made the claim that nothing in Biology makes sense except in the light of evolution. This statement has become well known in biological circles, is often quoted, and has the acceptance of most biologists. But we do well to consider why a biologist would make such an all-encompassing claim.

We know that when we do science, we always begin at some starting point. We never come with a blank mind, or a completely objective approach. We cannot do science in a vacuum. When a secular evolutionist does his science in the field of Biology, he makes a basic assumption that we must not invoke any supernatural power to account for the origin of living things. It is an assumption, of course, but that is not always understood. If that assumption has been made, there are certain consequences that follow.

If the origin of all living things is to be explained without the help of a supernatural being (which is impossible, of course), it is argued that they must have come into being according to the laws of nature which we observe today. On the basis of what we can observe today evolutionists try to explain every aspect of the living world, whether this be the original coming into being of organisms or their continued progress through history.

But when overarching questions are being asked about the meaning of life, and about what holds it all together, people are not easily led to believe that everything just happens. There has to be something that accounts for the order which we all observe. And it is here that the concept of evolution plays a great role.

Whether secular biologists deal with classification, heredity, structure, function, development, or any other aspect of living things, they invoke the concept of evolution as the integrating principle. This is what, to them, holds all aspects of living things together.

I can understand why they do this, not because I agree with them, but because I see no way they could construct another principle which would give them the security they are looking for.

Problems of the Evolution Theory

That there are a number of problems with the theory of evolution is a well known fact. This in itself, of course, does not mean that the theory could not be correct. Many theories have flaws which are slowly worked out, so that in the end they turn out to be valid. But the theory of evolution has some basic problems which, it seems to me, put that theory beyond repair.

In that regard I am thinking of Stephen Gould, for example, a leading contemporary evolutionist, who holds that the process of evolution has not progressed gradually through many small accumulated steps, as believed by gradualists,

but has come in rather abrupt jumps between long periods of constancy. This is what the data of the fossil record tell him. And when we look at what systematists say about that area, we see that there are indeed systematic gaps in the fossil record. That means that the transition forms, which you would expect to find between major groups of animals, are not to be found. And no amount of maneuvering of the data of Genetics is going to change that. One taxonomist, Blackwelder, who is also an evolutionist, says that if you want to construct a phylogenetic tree (one that shows the evolutionary history of the development of a large group of animals), you have to know the evolution of each individual species to be included in that tree. The unfortunate thing, he says, is that we do not know the evolution of even one species.

I am also thinking of the theory of recapitulation which for many years has been claimed as one of the major supports for the theory of evolution. The recapitulation theory holds that when you look at the embryonic development of an individual organism, such as a cat or chicken, that you can see the development of the major groups of animals repeated from the time they originated way back in the history of the evolution of the animals, from the simplest to the most complex. Although today most biologists still pay lip service to this idea, there is now the clear recognition of the impossibility to apply this theory to anything more than the broadest outlines of resemblance. This, of course, should not surprise us, since we should expect extensive resemblances in the development of backboneed animals which structurally and functionally are so similar.

Comparative anatomy, another field which has been claimed as a strong support for the theory of evolution, has similar problems, seeing parallels which are real, but which are being misinterpreted, and which are not being recognized for what they really are. The evolution of the horse is usually pictured as one of the best documented instances of evolutionary development, going from *Hyracotherium*, a dog-like animal, through various stages, to the modern day horse, *Equus*. Although many textbooks cite such trends as gradual increase in body size, gradual change in foot mechanism, and gradual increase in tooth crown height, some evolutionist authors, such as G. G. Simpson, point out the difficulties with this story and the lack of evidence for these trends. One author indicates that for all practical purposes the probability of the horse evolving is zero. Yet he believes that the horse did evolve, because, he says, after all, the horse is here.

The Needed Christian Perspective

We can understand to some extent why evolutionists cling to the theory of evolution in their attempt to keep some resemblance of integrity in their science, and to keep super-

natural powers and events out of the picture. But that a number of Christians in science also want to jump on that band wagon is rather puzzling. On the one hand, I can see why they want to be accepted by the scientific community in which they do their work. But on the other hand, I wonder why they do not ask more questions which deal with basic assumptions, and bring their world-and-life view to bear directly and incisively on these matters. Why not build on the basic confession that Jehcvah is God, that His Word is our guide for life, and that it gives direction for how we approach our science? Does that not make a difference in our scientific activities? One fellow Christian, also a scientist, told me that he feels sorry for biologists, because, he said, they have nothing to tie things together in Biology, whereas evolutionists have their theory of evolution. This, of course, I could not accept.

So what do we, as Bible-believing Christians, do when we face the claim that nothing makes sense in Biology except in the light of evolution? As a biologist, I regularly work with these matters dealing with living things, and naturally have to come to grips with that question and deal with it daily in a practical way.

My first reaction is that I see no validity in Dobzhansky's claim at all. Obviously, lots of things do make sense outside the concept of evolution. Even secular humanists, when they write about living things within the framework of the evolutionary theory, indicate that there is something which ties things together. You will, for example, see in their writings references to the fact that they recognize a common plan in the structure, function, or process of embryonic development of groups of animals. And this recognition is factual. You can demonstrate that there are those similarities which indicate that common plan. They are there for anyone to see. But when we come to interpreting these facts, our basic perspective and commitment will determine how much sense they make, and what significance they have.

In my courses I emphasize that the common plan in the world of living things is there because of the hand of the Creator. He made them according to a basic design, a common plan, which is appropriate for all these different organisms. This common plan has many variations, some of which are expected and some of which are rather surprising. And when we look at the structure, function, and embryonic development of many organisms, we recognize that common plan, and know this to be a confirmation of what we already know from God's Word, namely that He is the Creator, that He called them into being at the beginning of time, and sustains them continuously. This, of course, does not prove the existence of God, or that He created. But it does confirm the faith knowledge which we already have. It goes without saying that we cannot and do not have to prove that God created. You can not prove it to someone who does not want to believe.

Coming from the perspective which we as Christians have, we can make much sense of all the biologic data which we accumulate. In more than two decades of college Biology teaching I have not yet encountered data which could be understood only in the light of evolution. In fact, I find it most satisfying and rewarding to see that everything in Biology does make sense in the light of the knowledge that God created all living things according to a basic plan, with numerous variations, which He determined is good for His creatures. The plethora of different species daily declare the glory of God.

And in our scientific work we, too, must bring praise to our Maker. We may not go along with the false pretext that nothing would make sense if not seen in the light of evolutionary theory. When we are firmly anchored in the Word of God, we know that that Word gives us the right perspective. And therefore everything does make good sense in Biology when seen in the light of God's creative, supernatural acts and His daily upholding power. *Soli deo gloria.* ●

Dr. Aaldert Mennega is Professor of Biology at Dordt College at Sioux Center, Iowa.

Who Am I?

Glenn P. Palmer

My name is not familiar to most of you and you may have to study your Bible to find me, but I will give you enough clues so that you will be able to discover who I am.

I have the great privilege of being one of the ancestors of Christ as these are listed in Matthew 1 and Luke 3, but I did not enter the land of Canaan because of my unbelief. Therefore I am not listed among the men of faith in Hebrews 13.

I am, however, the leader of the people of Judah, and my division numbered 74,600 men-at-arms. At the dedication of the tabernacle, as the representative of my tribe, I brought one silver plate weighing one hundred and thirty shekels (3-1/4 lbs.), and one silver sprinkling bowl weighing seventy shekels (1-3/4 lbs.), one gold ladle weighing ten shekels (4 ounces) filled with incense, one young bull, etc. Who am I?

Who am I?

Clue 1: Home town: Moresheth.

Clue 2: Prophesied at the same time as Isaiah.

Clue 3: Prophesied at the same time as Hosea.

Clue 4: Quoted by Matthew.

a man against his father,

a daughter against her mother,

a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law,

a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.

Clue 5: A minor prophet

Clue 6: The use of puns is my trade-mark, especially in the first chapter.

THE THREE PILLARS of Christian Education

John Engbers

It is my firm conviction that if we are to remain strong as a denomination, and even as a nation, it is essential that we redouble our efforts in regard to the Christian, covenantal training of our sons and daughters. Christian education is the crying need of the hour. And when I use the term Christian education I do not mean education which is limited only to the field of religion. That idea is held by many people who seem to think that God is connected only with the salvation of people's souls and has nothing to do with the world and with life as a whole. Such an idea, of course, is too narrow, for it fails to glorify God in all of life and knowledge.

Nor does Christian education mean secular education with some religious features externally added. This is a very common misconception of Christian education even among earnest Christian people. The common idea of a Christian school, for example, is that it is just like any other school as far as subjects are concerned, but that in addition to the regular curriculum it includes Bible study, daily chapel exercises, seasons of evangelism, a religious-emphasis week, prayer groups and so forth. Those specifically religious features are certainly of great value and importance, but they do not of themselves make an educational institution truly Christian any more than merely attending church and carrying a pocket Testament makes an individual a Christian.

By Christian education, we do not mean secular education with Christian features added on externally. Christian education means education that is Christian in its essence or inner character and consistently Christian all along the line, not only in the chapel and Bible classroom, but in every classroom, as well as in the life and thinking of every teacher. God must be the major premise of every textbook. God must be the great assumption in every classroom. God must be the One whose handiwork is investigated in every laboratory. This means, of course, not some vague and distorted idea of God, but the living and true God, the God of the Bible. In textbook, classroom, and laboratory, the student will learn to think God's thoughts after Him. He will learn that human thought is never really creative in the strict sense but always derived from the prior thought of God. What is new to the mind of man is as old as eternity to the mind of God.

With those remarks as a background, let me elaborate on what I consider to be "The Three Pillars of Christian Education." It is my judgment that in Christian education there are three basic principles; three fundamental pillars upon which Christian education stands. If they aren't present, you may have a religious school, you may have a school attended by Christians, you may have a school in which some of the

faculty members are Christians—but it won't be a Christian school.

I. The Infallibility and Verbal Inspiration of the Bible

The first of these three pillars is the infallibility and verbal inspiration of Scripture. This is the principle without which there simply can be no such thing as a Christian School.

The Bible, of course, claims this infallible, verbal inspiration for itself. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," and it is for exactly that reason that it is "also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness" (II Tim. 3:16). Peter tells us that "holy men of old spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). What we have in *The Bible* are the very words of God written by men whom God used to put His words on paper. And we dare not budge for a moment from the proposition that the Bible is as much, word for word, the very Word of God as if the Lord had run it off on a heavenly mimeograph and sent the pages down to earth in a tidy little package. We have the very words of God. And every word of God, says the Scripture, is pure (Ps. 12:6; 119:140).

If there is no infallible Bible, there is no such thing as the Christian school, for the first principle of the Christian school is that it teaches all knowledge from the standpoint of the normative authority of the Scripture. And if you try to teach without the authority of the Word of God you discover, in fact, that you have no authority at all. This, of course, is the tragic situation of public education in our day. The fact is that it's against the law for the teacher to tell the children in her classroom that she believes on the basis of the Bible that the universe operates as it does because the Living God made it that way. And so when a youngster who has a little perception comes to the teacher and begins to ask "Why?" the best that the teacher can say is: "That's just the way it is." And if that's all the teacher can say, and hasn't any authority from the Word of God, not only is the youngster left unanswered and dissatisfied but the God of creation is, in that school, robbed of His glory. And those who seek to glorify Him within such a system are trying to do so by disobeying the law, and one simply can't do that to His honor and glory either.

In the Christian school, it is absolutely essential that in every area of learning the authority of the Word of God shines clearly and plainly before the minds of the youngsters. If it were not for the fact that there is a Creator God who

is responsible for all reality, including the human mind, we would find ourselves intellectual aliens in the earth. And the only way one can really educate a child so that he or she serves and glorifies God is to teach him, or her, to know *that* reality.

We are living in a day when virtually no one any longer knows anything about the nature of government. The public schools have virtually abandoned all reference to God and the Bible as being authoritative for anything but religion. When they teach the nature of government they can, at best, say that government exists for the good of the people. And if one begins with that supposition its no wonder that schools teach socialism. Its no wonder that schools are day after day grinding out a product that's indoctrinated with Marxist humanism. And when youngsters have been taught that government exists for the greatest good for the greatest number of people, then its only a hop, skip, and a jump from there to the idea: "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need;" and that's full-fledged Marxist, socialistic, humanism.

In the Christian school we can say, that government exists because men are sinners, and God has appointed government to restrain evil. People who know Jesus as their Savior must take the leadership in all of society in giving honor and respect to civil government because it is "the minister of God for righteousness" (Romans 13:4). And we respect government because we love Jesus. You can only teach that in the Christian school.

In the area of economics, public schools may teach that prosperity is the result of proper governmental manipulation of currency and of production. Praise God that we can have at least one school where youngsters are taught that prosperity is the result of the blessing of God upon obedience to His precepts.

Observe that when we compare Christian education with public education, we're not talking about two parallel institutions, in one of which there is a little peppering of religion; we're talking about two institutions that are on diametrically opposed paths, with two radically distinct objectives. They operate on two entirely different bases. It is no wonder, then, that the secular school with its present neutral strait-jacket isn't educating. Every attack, then, on the infallibility of Scripture; every person that advocates the idea that the Bible is *only* infallible "in what it intends to teach;" every person that attacks the idea that the Bible tells us *normatively* what we are to think about government and economics and all the rest; all such persons are attacking the Christian school. The Christian school stands on the infallibility and verbal inspiration of the Scripture—that's its first *pillar*. Without that kind of a Bible there is no such thing as real education at all.

II. The Absolute Ethical Antithesis

The Christian school stands on the pillar of the absolute ethical antithesis. You have undoubtedly heard that expression before, but let's remind ourselves that it means that *every human being is either for God or against Him*. There is no neutrality with respect to God, absolutely none. Jesus says in Matt. 12:30: "He that is not for me is against me. And he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." Let's be very frank about it; much of what goes on during the week in many classrooms is not gathering for Jesus! Need we wonder why in so many churches we seem to knock ourselves out futilely trying to capture the minds of young people in a few hours that we have on Sunday or in a catechism class,

when those youngsters are being trained five days a week to adopt the cultural mind-set of our times? To effectively withstand this anti-Christianity of our times, every subject must be taught under the authority of the Word of God and in obedience to Jesus Christ and acknowledging Him as Lord. And this is vitally important because we live under tremendous pressure to compromise. We need young people growing to adulthood who think God's thoughts after Him, if they are not to be swept away with the tide of unbelief. I am grieved to see how many people do not see the need to train their children to think on God's side of the antithesis before they face the worldly pressures that would break down all Christian faith and morals like a rock crushes tissue paper. We recognize the absolute ethical antithesis. Therefore we believe that there is only one way that we can properly educate, and that's under the authority of the lordship of Christ by His written Word, and with the determination that we will obey God. Decidedly, the Christian school must stand on the absolute ethical antithesis.

III. The Covenant of Grace

The last of the three pillars of the Christian school is the covenant of grace. And this is the most beautiful and the most glorious of them all. The Scriptures clearly teach that Christians have promises from God with respect to their children. This glorious truth finds expression in the oft repeated words: "I will be their God, and they shall be my people." "I will be a God unto you *and* to your children."

The promises of the covenant are exceedingly comprehensive. There are promises for the present and for the future; promises for days of prosperity and for seasons of adversity; promises for the living and for the dying. There are promises of renewed strength for those whose strength seems to fail; promises of courage for the fainthearted and of rest for the weary. There are promises of guidance through life and of deliverance out of temptations; promises of good cheer for the afflicted and discouraged; promises of security for storm-tossed souls; promises, too, of an everlasting home for weary pilgrims. And the promises, all the promises, are for us *and for our children*. That is the glad assurance we have in the covenant of grace. And for this reason Christian parents who take their baptismal vows seriously, may always plead these promises for their offspring. The Form for baptism clearly implies that there is a close connection between the two.

At the time of baptism three questions are put to the parents. The first question asks recognition of the fact that although our children are born in sin and therefore subject to condemnation, they are nevertheless sanctified in Christ and as such are entitled to baptism. The second question requires a renewed confession of the parents that the doctrine contained in Scripture and taught in the church is the true and complete doctrine of salvation. The third question extracts from the parents the promise that they will be faithful and diligent in teaching their children that glorious saving truth.

We ought to note that the duty which parents publicly assume is very comprehensive. They assume the responsibility of instructing their children not only in the doctrine of the covenant, but the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testament; the whole realm of Christian truth, touching every realm, every sphere, and every relation of the Christian life. In this we have a clear commitment that directs and controls the instruction of covenant children. Can we at all doubt whether this calls for Christian education?

Can we seriously suggest that in a world such as ours Christian education limited to the home, the church, and the Sunday School is quite adequate? Ought we not rather to ask: Is the best religious education we can give our children, no matter how comprehensive and how thorough, really commensurate with the high dignity to which our children are called? Should we not bend all our efforts to make that education richer and fuller, and to bring it more into harmony with their high calling and their exalted duties? The king's children must have a royal education.

If the promises of God are to promote the real happiness and blessedness of their recipients, they must learn to understand the wide implications of these promises and to know what treasures they include. Many children of God are living in spiritual poverty, although they are rich in Christ and heirs of the world, because they have not been taught to see the extent and the splendor of their spiritual heritage. If we do not want our children to live as paupers in spiritual poverty while untold riches of grace and mercy are at their disposal, we must employ all the means at our command to acquaint them with the treasures of divine grace to which they are heirs in Christ Jesus.

The money you put down for Christian education is far and away the best investment that you will ever make. It's

an investment in your child, in your home, in the integrity and the Christian church, and in the building of the Kingdom of God. For that, you and I should be ready to turn over every dollar that comes into our possession into the coin of the realm of God's kingdom.

Consider the three "pillars" of Christian education. The Christian school exists because there is such a thing as the infallible Word of God, and we must teach our children to think God's thoughts after Him. The Christian school is necessary because of the absolute ethical antithesis. And the Christian school is glorious, because it is one of the means by which His covenant promise that He will give us a godly seed that will stand for Jesus and worship Him until He comes again, becomes a living reality.

You and I are called to engage in an enterprise that is glorious beyond the ability of human language to describe. Let's give ourselves to the building of God's great kingdom by providing Christian education in our Christian schools. Then God will receive all the honor; and we, together with our children, will sing unending praises to His glorious name. ●

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OUR IMPRESSIONS OF THE NETHERLANDS

Cecil Tuininga

For the first time in seventy years my wife and I visited the land of our fathers. What we found there was decidedly different from what we had pictured in our minds. The Netherlands is a beautiful country. That is more apparent in its historic buildings, arts, etc., than in its natural features. And we found the people very friendly. Relatives whom we had never seen or even heard of gave us a royal welcome. We went to see as much of the country as we could, and, thanks to them, saw much more of it than we would have considered possible in our three and a half-week stay.

The Plight of the Churches

In that short time we made some acquaintance with the church life. We attended five different churches in our four Sundays there and heard eight different ministers in the Gereformeerde Kerken in Overijssel and Friesland. We also had occasion to speak with a number of people, most of them relatives. What we heard and saw surprised us. We had heard much about conditions in the Gereformeerde Kerken, but had not realized the extent to which apostasy had worked itself out in the churches. Because three and a half weeks was hardly long enough to become thoroughly acquainted with the church life, we can only speak of our impressions of it.

What we saw and heard was alarming. Of the eight sermons we heard, only two met somewhat the requirements of preaching. Most were what one visitor aptly described as "essay type lectures" that dealt more with social issues than with the clear call of God's Word to repentance and holy living. And one got the impression that most of those attending did not much care what was brought from the pulpit. Church attendants were mostly older people, a few families with children, and very few young people. That young people attended so poorly has the attention of the Gereformeerde Synod, which is asked to make an in-depth study of why only two out of five young people still come to church. There are still people who are concerned about conditions in the churches, but there seems to be nothing that they can do to correct it. We were told that it was a commonly accepted practice in the congregations for young couples to live together in "common law" before marriage. Consistories are afraid to exercise any form of discipline for fear of losing members. In one of the churches which has a membership of 1200, attendance is considered good if 400 appear at a worship service. In such conditions the extremely weak sermons are the more tragic for the life of the congregations. This, we suspect, points to the heart of the churches' prob-

lem. God's Word has, for them, lost its power and its meaning. Then the question asked is no longer, "How must we serve God and keep His commandments?" but, "How can we please men in order to keep them on the church membership list?" Where the first consideration is missing, the second loses its meaning. This, we judge, is the heart of the Dutch churches' problem.

How Did This Begin?

How does such a condition originate in a denomination? It begins with the ignoring of God's Word. We were informed that one rarely heard a sermon on the epistles of Paul. That was understandable. If what the apostle wrote concerning the role of women in the church and concerning the required qualifications of elders and deacons are not valid today because what he wrote was culturally conditioned to his time, everything else that he wrote becomes similarly suspect. Thus God's Word spoken through the apostle is annulled. One sees clearly where this tampering with God's Word has brought the churches in the Netherlands. And we will experience exactly the same results in the United States and Canada. The decisions of our last synods to open the office of deacon to qualified women are extremely serious, because those decisions are based on exactly the same kind of grounds as those that were used to justify the Dutch churches' course. In both cases, ignoring God's Word leads eventually to completely annulling it.

Church Admonitions

This severe judgment is right, although colleagues, in the Netherlands as well as here, are angered by it. In *Kerk Informatie*, the official publication of the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (#160, April, 1985), we find an answer to the charges of the Consistories (Verontruste Kerkeraden) against the synods' deviations from God's Word. That answer, printed in its entirety, expresses anger at the charges. De Generale Synod of Dokkum pleads with the concerned churches to be careful with their judgments, since we as church members need one another in our search for the Truth. It argues that we must avoid distrust and must realize that the promise of Christ to His Church, that He would give the Holy Spirit to lead it into the Truth, is a promise that we can trust. This means that when fellow members of the same church discover that Scripture allows different roles to women in the church today than what was allowed to them in the past, we must listen to one another. We must together listen with due reverence to the Word of God and our confession ("Samen eerbiedig luisteren naar Schrift en belijden," p. 5).

That sounds appealing. Who in a true brotherly spirit doesn't want to do that? But when God's Word is being annulled, may we refuse to judge that action completely wrong? Where must we draw the line? When we hear such pleas as this, we wonder how Dr. Arminius would fare if he were living today! Was he not concerned to present what he saw God's Word to be teaching concerning our salvation? On the synod's basis, would there ever be or have been in the past, any heretics in the church? The synod warned against judging one another's motives (saying, "Binnen de gemeente mogen wij elkaars goede bedoelingen niet in twijfel trekken"). Although we must not judge one another's motives, we must have the courage to call that unbiblical which conflicts with the clear teachings of God's Word. When fellow members introduce and push erroneous teaching and prac-

tice, should we not say a word about it, lest we cast doubts and distrust on others' good intentions? We can and must judge and reject another's wrong views as wrong without judging motives.

Who's "Polarizing?"

In discussions with our Dutch relatives a familiar word surfaced, the accusing word "polariseren" (polarizing). That prejudicial word points a finger straight at you and says, in effect, "You are a troublemaker! Shame on you!" How do you become such a troublemaker? By taking a stand. If you don't like the direction your denomination is going, you may indeed talk about it, but, please, don't take a stand, for then you polarize. Taking a stand is drawing a battle front and causing a division. And who wants to do that? We are called to peace, are we not? Don't take a positive stand!

That word "polarize" irritates me not a little at times. Who is doing the polarizing? Does the one who contends for the truth and upholds it at all costs? Or do they who are introducing teachings and practices that conflict with the clear teachings of Scripture? Just who is judging whom, and just who is driving a wedge between church members? The answer should be crystal-clear. When someone accuses us of polarizing, that amounts to saying, "Be a nobody! Just run with the crowd and trust your leaders." We may not be such characterless people in God's Kingdom. We must contend for His truth, cost what it will. We must do that if we would save the church from apostasy.

Time for Action!

To such contention we are being called today in the Christian Reformed Church. We must not only speak; we must also act. In the Netherlands the Concerned ("Verontrusten") have done much talking and writing, and they still do so today. But they have lost the battle. In the time when they tried to correct things by talking and writing, more members were slowly getting accustomed to inaction and to going along with what they knew was completely wrong. We must learn from that tragic Netherlands experience. We have done the necessary talking and writing and more. Now we must act, and that, immediately. Those who see the unbiblical actions and trends in our denomination must stand up and be counted. They must return to and uphold the historic Christian faith in teaching and practice. If that means a parting of the ways, which we think that it does, then we must be ready to pay that price. If we are not ready to do so, I submit that, like members of the Dutch churches, we will lose everything.

Our trip to the Netherlands further opened our eyes to see what is going on among us. We were previously in a measure aware of it, but now we see how we as a denomination are literally "running to catch up." Apostasy always runs fast. Do we panic in the face of this evidence of crisis? Up to a point, we do. That is because so many among us do not see the urgency of the present situation, and many of those who do are leaving to join other denominations, especially the Canadian Reformed Church. We are called to support all our other concerned members and to help lead them in the way of Truth as we have always understood and confessed it. We have reached the time for vigorous action. For the sake of fellow members and for the Lord's kingdom on earth, let us not dilly-dally, but take action. It is urgent! Very urgent! ©

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Rethinking Congregationalism

Gregg V. Martin

"Shall Two walk together, except they have agreed?" (Amos 3:3 ASV).

"No church shall in any way lord it over another church, and no office-bearer shall lord it over another office-bearer" (Art. 95 Church Order).

Varieties of Church Polity

In his excellent *Systematic Theology*, Prof. L. Berkhof reviewed a number of systems of church government in the section entitled "The Doctrine of the Church." The variety of these systems is amazing, especially to those of us who in practice have experienced only the presbyterian (or synodical) system current among the Reformed denominations in North America and the Netherlands. It is easy for us to assume that the system to which we are accustomed is the only possible way to establish and govern the church, but history shows that Christians have regulated the churches by a number of strikingly different polities:

Quakers and other such introspective and mystical groups reject all forms of church government. In their system there are no distinct offices and no ordination; rather everyone can do what is right in his own eyes.

The episcopal system, on the other hand, puts the power of church government into the hands of bishops, who are regarded as successors of the apostles. The Roman Catholic denomination is an extreme example of this system in which the local congregation and the individual member have no voice, representation, or power. It is a rule from the top down. Because such "absolute power corrupts absolutely," the episcopal system has been the cause of much abuse of power throughout church history.

The congregational system holds that each church, or congregation, is complete and inherently independent. If a number of congregations desire to band together for fellowship or to engage in joint tasks, such as missions or education, such councils or conferences as they might form for these purposes are strictly advisory, and have no binding power whatsoever. In its extreme form, congregationalism turns officers into mere appointees to carry out the wishes of the congregation's members.

The Presbyterian System

Most all of the Reformed Churches in North America today hold to the presbyterian system. In this system the power of church government is committed to the officers who are selected to direct the life of the local congregations. "The power of the church resides primarily in the governing body of the local church" (L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 584). The Church Order seems to recognize this point when it declares: "the authority of consistories (is) original, that of the major assemblies being delegated" (Art. 27). There are major assemblies in a presbyterian system. Power is delegated to these assemblies in certain areas, such as church order, confessions, appeals in matters of discipline, liturgy, missions, and education. The decisions of major assemblies have authority and are binding, in theory at least, upon all the local churches. Prof. Berkhof makes this observation: "They cease to be binding only when they are shown to be contrary to the Word of God" (Ibid., p. 592).

Its Past Functioning

In times past the presbyterian system has served the Reformed Churches well, although there have been certain lapses in our adherence to this system for good and ill. The greatest of our Reformed Synods, the National Synod of Dordrecht 1618-1619 was not a truly presbyterian synod. It was a National Synod called together by the power of the civil government, the Staten Generaal of the Netherlands. Even though such governmental influence in the life of the church is contrary to the presbyterian system, the Synod of Dort has been a great and lasting blessing to the Reformed Churches in establishing our confessions. We must also admit that before modern meddling, begun in 1905 by the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (who else?) and followed eventually by our synod (what else is new?), our Belgic Confession originally read:

Their office (the civil government) is not only to have regard unto and watch for the welfare of the civil state, but also that they protect the sacred ministry, and thus may remove and prevent all idolatry and false worship, that the kingdom of anti-christ may be thus destroyed and the kingdom of Christ promoted (Art. 36).

So historically, we must state that even confessionally the Reformed Churches have never held to all aspects of a presbyterian system.

Through the presbyterian system, however, as a denomination, the C.R.C. has been able to establish and support a fine program of missions and world relief, an equitable pension plan for our retired clergy, and an academically excellent educational institution in Calvin College and Seminary. No congregation acting alone could ever have accomplished such things. We must give credit where credit is due.

Emerging Objections

Recent synodical decisions have also demonstrated convincingly the ills and weaknesses of our present system. The decision to abandon our stand against the worldliness of films and dancing affects adversely the discipline of those local churches and many Christian homes who do not want to compromise with this world's standards. The decisions to allow women "deacons," regardless of how clearly so many classes and congregations in their protests and appeals showed this to be contrary to Scripture, will affect the life of the church in a negative way for years to come.

A presbyterian system tends to concentrate power at the top. When the whole church is doctrinally sound and committed to the faith of our fathers without exception, this concentration of power may not show itself as a problem. Trouble begins when a politically astute minority in the church can maneuver themselves into positions of power and trust. With authority top-heavy in our present system, this minority, once in control, can begin to undermine the doctrine and life of the church. At least they can, if we remain blindly committed to the presbyterian system. If we view every decision of a major assembly as our marching orders, no questions asked, we soon shall find ourselves marching down the broad road that leads to destruction.

A pertinent question, then, is: Need we be so committed to the presbyterian (or synodical) system of church government? Another question follows: If we answer "No" to question number one, would the church collapse in ruins around us?

A Time to Consider Alternatives

As to the first question, we have already seen that historically the great Synod of Dort was contrary to the pure understanding of the presbyterian system, since it was called by and its decisions enforced by the civil government. Prof. L. Berkhof, although he defended the presbyterian system, nevertheless had to admit:

Scripture does not contain an explicit command to the effect that the local churches of a district must form an organic union. Neither does it furnish us with an example of such a union. In fact, it represents the local churches as individual entities without any external bond of union (*Op. cit.*, p. 590).

Perhaps the time has come to rethink this issue. We need not shrink from such a step. Certainly our form of church government is very important. We must change it only with great care, but cautious change can be helpful. Calvin notes: "We know that church organization admits, nay requires, according to the varying conditions of the time, various changes (*Institutes*, IV, vii, 15). Our present system needs unanimity and conformity in order to function well. The prophet asked: "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" The fact is that within the C.R.C., and in a number of other Reformed denominations too, there is no longer unanimity. There are those who do not want to conform to the faith of our fathers, who gladly throw the confessions out and dance

their way into the open arms of worldliness. There are others who have no intention of conforming to recent decisions of major assemblies which they believe are contrary to Scripture and the confessions. What can be done?

We could not, of course, accept the episcopal system. It is unwarranted Biblically and concentrates power far too much. We could not accept the Quaker non-system. That is ecclesiastical anarchy. We could not accept an extreme congregational system that takes authority away from the elders and deacons in Consistory and vests it instead in the congregational meeting.

A Modified Congregationalism

We need to rethink a modified congregational system. It has to be modified, because we know that authority in the church rests not with the members, nor in a hierarchy, nor in a synod, but in the elders and deacons who are called by the Lord through their lawful election by the congregation. We cannot emasculate the offices of elder and deacon. Then, too, it would be a shame and a sin to abandon the work of missions and world relief, education, and other activities that can only be done together, since they are far beyond the scope of a local congregation's ability.

A congregational system would provide a way for a local church to honorably disassociate itself from unacceptable moral pronouncements, compromises with worldliness, doctrinal revisions, and lax discipline on the part of others beyond their range of influence. Congregationalism would allow a local church to preserve the marks of the true church and a distinctive Christian way of life without interference from any major assembly, in which vital issues are so frequently decided by the barest of majorities in a manner that does not inspire confidence in such decisions.

The fact is that the C.R.C. has been moving more and more towards congregationalism in the past few years. In Classis Toronto, for example, one local congregation has allowed women to hold office for years; they want no minister, and allow unordained persons to "administer the sacraments." So far they have utterly ignored any and all classical admonitions to set their house in proper order. For years already the synod has allowed local congregations to set different policies on the issue of the baptism of adopted children, and more recently on the issue of women "deacons." There is a wide variety of supplementary hymnals and song sheets in many pew racks, which shows that congregational policy on songs at worship varies considerably. These moves toward congregationalism, though, have been haphazard and have occurred more by default than by anything else.

It might well be worth a substantial investment of time and effort to rethink congregationalism. This system has been used for generations by churches holding to the Reformed faith in England. With certain modifications it could be used in complete harmony with Scripture's teachings on church government. It could be a useful tool in avoiding yet another schism in the Reformed family.

Consider the following virtues of a modified congregational system:

1. It promotes the original authority of the Consistory of the local church. This is in complete accord with historic Reformed thought. Christ has given His authority and the care of His church to elders and deacons, not to boards, commissions, interim committees, and bureaucracies. We already recognize that the authority of major assemblies is merely delegated. Those who first delegated it can take it back again.

2. It allows cooperation between local churches. This is necessary if our denominational programs of missions, relief, etc. are to continue. These joint efforts are certainly worth continuing. Yet, we want to avoid all notions that support of denominational programs can be coerced. Quotas are not taxes. Individual congregations must be good and careful stewards of their resources. Congregationalism recognizes this. It encourages local churches to cooperate and participate, but it forces no one's conscience.

3. It could break the oligarchical power of boards, committees, and the church bureaucracy. Without a passive multitude to manipulate, these presently entrenched powers would find themselves as generals without an army. The day the money fountain dries up will be the day they finally listen humbly and attentively to Consistories and members, who under the present system have in reality no voice.

4. It ensures that the marks of the true church will be the responsibility of the local Consistory. Decisions made by others beyond our power to influence will not automatically become policy of local congregations, contrary to local wishes. Mistakes made by others will not discredit or besmirch the good name of local churches who stand fast on the Word of God.

It is high time that our system of church government was investigated. We may well find that our present system is more of a hindrance than a help, and we may find that the time has come to rethink congregationalism as an appropriate response to the ecclesiastical situation in the Reformed Churches in these closing years of the twentieth century. ●

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ANOTHER YEAR IS DAWNING in Day School Education

John H. Piersma

There was a time in the history of the parent-controlled Christian School movement (which was seen as a *Christian cause* meriting sacrificial support!) when ministers annually preached, usually in August, a "Christian School sermon." This was in congregations which took seriously the Church Order of Dordt (the law in such denominations as the Christian Reformed Church, the Protestant Reformed Churches, the Netherlands Reformed Congregations, etc.).

In the Christian Reformed Church this rule now reads:

The consistory shall diligently encourage the members of the congregation to establish and maintain good Christian schools and shall urge parents to have their children instructed in these schools according to the demands of the covenant (Art. 71, Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church).

The Christian School sermon was an awesome thing in some churches. In the church of my youth this sermon was never identified as a "school sermon" by even so much as a suggestion in the announced "theme" (sermons were not on topics but on "themes" because they were not expositions of an idea chosen by the preacher but "sermons" on biblical texts). The reference to school came as an application, a hortatory deduction from the text in question.

But it came with power. It lined up the faithful against the faint-hearted and disobedient. It compelled decision, and that in a day when unemployment was high and money was scarce. That was a day when the word *sacrifice* was not reserved for special kinds of people under very special circumstances. To lay on the people added costs for Christian education was serious business.

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Apparently our spiritual fathers thought Christian day school education was not a luxury but a necessity. Why?

The seventy-first article of the Christian Reformed Church Order says that it is one of "the demands of the covenant."

Covenant is a precious term for our people of Reformed persuasion, and its value is not diminished by the lack of attention it suffers in our anti-doctrinal age. When the chips are down, when the crisis is sharpest and the pain almost unbearable, many of us still find in the biblical teaching of covenant mercy their greatest comfort.

As we enter a new school year we might well reconsider what this means for all who feel that Christian education is a divine calling and therefore a solemn obligation.

The best way to do that might be to recall the time-honored Form for the Baptism of Infants found in the Christian Reformed Psalter Hymnal (pp. 123-125). We will appeal to just two things in that formulary to indicate the high character of Christ-centered, covenantal Christian education.

The first is found in this sentence:

For when we are baptized into the Name of the Father, God the Father witnesses and seals unto us that He makes an eternal covenant of grace with us and adopts us for His children and heirs, and therefore will provide us with every good thing and avert all evil or turn it to our profit.

This both distinguishes us and encourages us!

It distinguishes us from all who are not in vital relationship with God. It distinguishes us from all who do not recognize Him as the One from Whom, through Whom and to Whom are all things. It sets us free from all man-centered understanding or interpretation of history, science, the arts, culture. We see and teach these things Christianly, in the light of the sacred Scriptures, from a different perspective, with a different sense of calling and responsibility, because we believe that we are the beneficiaries of that incredibly wonderful sovereign grace which binds us to God in everlasting covenant.

This also encourages us because God's covenant with us is eternal. Calling it "eternal" refers not so much to the fact that it was decided or arranged in eternity (it was established with Abraham) but to the truth of God's absolutely reliable integrity. God breaks no covenants! And if it costs Him the suffering and death of His Son by way of Jesus' birth into our world, He pays the price so that we may be adopted legally as His own children and heirs. And if this requires divine governance over all things (Fit that idea on for size!), He is willing to take the trouble to do it, providing us with every good thing, averting all evil or turning it to our profit.

Consistently with this kind of faith, consistories may indeed "diligently encourage the members of the congregation to establish and maintain good Christian schools."



The second excerpt from the Form for the Baptism of Infants reads as follows:

Whereas in all covenants there are contained two parts, therefore are we by God, through baptism, admonished of and obliged unto new obedience, namely, that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; that we trust in Him, and love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a godly life.

This is a magnificent statement of covenantal evangelicalism!

Let it be said no more that covenantal religion and education ignore the necessity of conversion. Every Christian parent and every Christian school teacher among us ought to print this sentence in large letters and stick it on a most conspicuous place so that its message is unavoidable and unforgettable!

Covenant does not mean easy-going religion, non-experiential religion, uncommitted religion, undedicated, un-consecrated religion.

In the home, in the church *and in the school*, consistently and urgently, this demand of the "second part" of the Covenant of Grace must be sounded!



Since God's covenant is at once promise and demand, endowment and obligation, Christian education is blessedly serious.

I say *blessedly serious* because anything less would make this task either impossible or uninteresting. If we must do what covenant with Jehovah God demands on our own we might as well give up. And if all we are doing in education is to instruct and train children and young people, for

whatever good reason, for its own sake, one can hardly assume this vocation with much hope for personal gratification and joy.

People are desperately worried about the state of education in our nation in our time. Especially our larger cities are finding it next to impossible to educate even in the narrower sense of the word in conditions of parental unconcern, and financial, cultural and moral deprivation. Horror stories appear in many local newspapers regularly describing drop-out rates, inability of high school graduates (!) to read or write or calculate with anything like a satisfactory degree of competence.

What is the solution? More money for teachers, better facilities, especially in computer science, more "enrichment projects" (after all, the children of the poor should have almost every benefit enjoyed by the children of the rich)?

There is a better answer.

It is the answer of the Reformed Christian school. That answer sees the value of education not first of all as a matter of advantage for the individual as he/she makes way through this life. It sees education as a covenantal response to God, Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier (the One who made us, saved us from our sins, and blesses us with every good thing through His Spirit).

This is a response worthy of every effort for our parents, our teachers, our students. It gives our young people the highest, most stimulating, most demanding and most satisfying motivation.

If the question in education for God's people is a matter of covenantal fidelity, responsibility, obedience, then the struggle is worthwhile. If we are training recruits for service in God's Kingdom, now and forever, then the weariness, the frustrations and the disappointments (real education is almost unbearably hard work, especially for the teacher!) are not useless. If the issue for all believers is always "covenant keeping vs. covenant breaking," then we had better keep reminding ourselves of the eternal consequences involved.



This is old stuff, to be sure. It isn't hard to find people of whom one might expect better things who have long rejected such talk as old-fashioned, outmoded, obsolete. Who needs to talk about covenant when he could be absorbed in such problems as world poverty, war, social justice, pornography, divorce, and so on.

Let me remind you of something. I re-read Sietze Buning's *Style and Class* (Middleburg Press, Orange City, Iowa) just this morning. In the Glossary the author says the following under the heading **Kuyper, Abraham**:

Founder of the Free University of Amsterdam in 1880. Prime minister of the Netherlands from 1901 until 1905. Queen Wilhelmina's first Prime Minister. Developed the theory of "sphere sovereignty," that God is to be acknowledged as sovereign not only in the Church but in every sphere of human activity. Implicit in this theory is the distinction between Christ's Church and Christ's Kingdom: the Church preaches the Gospel and administers the sacraments, but the Kingdom brings society progressively under the sovereignty of God. Preoccupied with the need for social change, *Kuyper stressed the parent-controlled Christian school as the best instrument for effecting such change*... (p. 125).

"Covenant children" in Reformed, covenantal Christian schools—on every level—need to hear that! ●

the Acts

Henry VanderKam

THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

Lesson 1

Acts 1

To cover the entire book of Acts in 16 lessons is, of course, an impossibility. One will have to choose certain parts rather than others and this choice may not always agree with the choice of the reader. However, this book is extremely important to the life of the individual believer and to the life of the church, making it very valuable for study by groups and by societies. Acts is the bridge between the gospels and the epistles. Acts gives us the earliest history of the church. It gives us the principles and early practices of Missions. It shows us how the church developed in the earliest time. The doctrine of the church, so eloquently developed in Ephesians and Colossians, finds its beginning here.

The Lord Acts

In the second century it was already commonly believed that Luke was the author of Acts and this has not since then been disputed by many. The book spans a period of time of approximately 30 years. The name "Acts" or "Acts of the Apostles" is also of early origin. We do not know who was responsible for this name but it does not satisfy. In the first four verses of Luke's gospel we read that the writer is addressing that book to a certain "most excellent Theophilus." In that prologue he mentions the fact that he is writing to him about the things which have been fulfilled among us. He now refers to that first "treatise" as the one wherein he has made plain the things which Jesus "began" both to *do* and to *teach*, so that this is the second treatise in which he will now make known the things which Jesus *continued to do and teach*. The name of the book ought to be: "*The Acts of the exalted Lord through His Apostles*". In his gospel Luke taught all the things concerning Jesus Christ from the time before His birth until the time of the ascension. However, the ascension is just mentioned—he has more to say about this in this book.

After He had risen from the dead, Jesus stayed with His disciples another 40 days. During this period of almost six weeks He continued to teach them. . . . He gave them commandment through the Holy Spirit. He taught His chosen ones. His appearances to them after the resurrection were very important because they had to be *witnesses of the risen Christ* in order to be *Apostles* (vv. 21, 22). No act of His is better attested in Scripture than His resurrection! No doubt may exist on this score. He spoke to them concerning the kingdom of God. He had preached the gospel of the kingdom and His Apostles must do the same in the days to come.

The Lord's Instructions

Even though there is so much to be done now that there is a risen Savior, He informs them that they are to wait a while before they begin the work to which they have been called. They are not yet equipped for that task. They must wait in Jerusalem for the fulfillment of the promise which they had received of the gift of the Holy Spirit. John baptized with water. They themselves, at least some of them, had been baptized by John. This water baptism will not depart, but something even greater will happen to them; they shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit. They did not understand what that would do but they will experience it and then they will be qualified to carry out their given task.

This teaching of the Lord causes questions to arise in the hearts of these disciples. Will Jesus at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? They know that it is His kingdom which is to come. They believe that it is a question of *time*. That Jesus is not free to tell them. That will have to wait. But, there is also another element which they have not understood — the kingdom will not be restored to the Israel after the flesh! His kingdom is much broader. Indeed, His kingdom will come and no one will be able to stop it, but that kingdom will be far greater than they have ever imagined. When the Spirit comes they shall become His witnesses not only locally but to the uttermost parts of the earth! By witnesses He means those who bear testimony to the truth as they have seen and been taught it and not a testimony to some experience of their own.

The Ascension

When He had said these things He ascended! The event, stated so calmly, is one of the greatest revelations to us in the history of our redemption. The disciples had so many more questions. They wanted to keep Him with them. Even though He had said that it would be profitable for them that He would go away, they would have wished to keep Him with them (Jn. 16:6ff.) because they didn't know the significance of the Spirit's coming or indwelling. Jesus defies the laws of gravity and of space when He ascends. They keep staring into the sky for one last glimpse of Him but a cloud comes and removes Him from their sight.

The true significance of the ascension of our Lord has not been recognized till the present day. If there is one worship service which His people will skip it is the ascension day service. Why? For one thing, the world doesn't celebrate it. We may talk and write a great deal about the world's

wrong conception of Christmas and of Easter, but seeing the world calls our attention to them, we too celebrate even though we don't celebrate as the world does. Another reason for the neglect of this day seems to be the fact that it is so little understood. We are able, in a measure, to understand the coming of Christ in the flesh as a babe, even though it is a miracle. We are even able to understand the fact that He rose from the dead. But, ascension? However, if the ascension is not given its due, we do not have a complete gospel and an incomplete gospel is no gospel. He ascended to the right hand of God from where He rules over all things; from there He sends the Spirit; and from there He will pray for and guide His people into all truth.

The Angels Explain

The disciples, not understanding what has taken place before their eyes, receive a clear commentary on the ascension. Two men, angels, stood by them. They are not wearing mourning clothes but white apparel. They tell them that they should not continue to stare into the sky, for that is of no value. Jesus has gone into the heavens. But, He will also return in the same way as they have seen Him leave. The second coming of Jesus Christ is immediately connected to His ascension. He went up bodily; so He will also return. Then the various events associated with the redemption of His people will be complete. Christ comes, suffers, dies, is buried, rises, ascends, sends the Spirit and returns! Then the work is complete and the joy of His people will be complete.

The Wait

The Lord's followers return to Jerusalem without Him. The eleven and some women and the brothers of our Lord meet in an upper chamber. Their work must still wait a while, but they are able to pray. This they do.

Replacing an Apostle

Soon after this, the disciples are again together with various other followers of Jesus, a crowd numbering 120, and Peter takes the lead. He has understood from his study of the Scriptures that certain things must be done by them now. Judas is no longer among the twelve. He had been with them and had also received a mandate of the Lord. He had also gone over the cities of Israel proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom. He had also told of the miracles which they were able to do in the name of Jesus. But, his place must be taken by another. There are various problems in this section which we will only mention. Matthew says that Judas hung himself. Peter now says that he was dashed to pieces. He obtained a field—the acre of blood. The gospels tell us that he cast the 30 pieces of silver into the temple and that the leaders bought this field. I only mention these details in passing because they are not the kind of “problems” which disturb a child of God.

Peter refers to Psalms 69 and 109. It is amazing that he so well understands the import of the words in these Psalms even before Pentecost. Judas' office must be taken by another. Some have suggested that the disciples made an error in choosing someone to replace Judas, because the Lord had Paul in mind for this vacant spot. I do not agree. God seems to put His stamp of approval on this action of the early church. It is true that we never hear of Matthias again, but neither do we hear about most of the other members of the “twelve.”

The way in which someone was chosen to take the place of Judas is significant. There are certain qualifications which

must be met. Those who are to be considered for this office must have been with Jesus from the time of John the Baptist until His ascension. Not only the twelve but also various others had been very faithful followers of Jesus. Candidates must certainly have seen the risen Lord, because an Apostle must be a witness of the resurrection. Only two men are “nominated.” The one is Matthias, of whom we know nothing, and the other is Joseph, of whom we also know nothing. After prayer they cast lots and Matthias is chosen. The Old Testament had also spoken of the casting of lots as perfectly legitimate, but we must not deduce from this episode that this is the only way or the only approved way of choosing someone for office.

The circle which had been broken by the defection of Judas is now made complete again. These twelve will go primarily to the Jews and the Lord has someone else in mind for the tremendous task of bringing the gospel to the gentile world. He is ruling His church. His acts are clearly evident through the labors of the disciples.

Questions for discussion:

1. Do you think it makes much difference for our understanding of a book of the Bible if we know who the author is and the reason for his writing?
2. Do you think the forty days between the resurrection and the ascension was ample time for Jesus to teach His disciples or must we look for a further meaning in the figure forty?
3. Does the question of the disciples about the time of the coming of the kingdom teach us anything about the need for Pentecost?
4. Is the ascension as important as Christmas or Good Friday or Easter? Give reasons for your answer.
5. Do we hear enough sermons on Christ's session at God's right hand and His return? Is “balanced” gospel preaching quite common? Discuss.
6. Do you think it was right for the eleven to choose someone to fill the place of Judas? Give reasons for your answer.

PENTECOST

Lesson 2

Acts 2

Virtually all the members of the church of Christ realize that something very important happened at Pentecost. However, to explain what the importance of this event is, is a different matter. Although the birth of Christ was a miracle, as was His resurrection, we do have some understanding of what happened. But, Pentecost seems especially mysterious! The Spirit also operated in Old Testament times. David asks that the Holy Spirit may not be taken away from him (Ps. 51). The writer of Psalm 104 speaks of the work of the Spirit in a wider sense when he says “Thou sendest forth thy Spirit, and they are created; and thou renewest the face of the ground” (v. 30). What, then happened on the day of Pentecost?

It is difficult to use an example or an illustration to make it clear. In his book: *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, Abraham Kuyper uses this illustration: “The rain descends from heaven and man gathers it to quench his thirst. When householders collect it each in his own cistern, it comes down for every family separately; but when, as in modern city life, every house is supplied from the city reservoir, by means of mains and waterpipes, there is no more need of pumps

and private cisterns. Suppose that a city whose citizens for ages have been drinking each from his own cistern proposes to construct a reservoir that will supply every home. When the work is completed the water is allowed to run through the system of mains and pipes into every house. It might then be said that on that day the water was poured out into the city. Hitherto it fell upon every man's roof; now it streams through the organized system into every man's house" (Page 123). This illustration may be as good as any, but it still does not do justice to that which took place on this day.

This rather long chapter may easily be divided into three parts. In the first part the *event* of Pentecost is made known; in the second the discourse of Peter explains what has taken place; and in the third the reaction to this happening is reported.

The Event

Because of the wealth of material in this chapter, I will mention only a few things concerning the *event* of Pentecost. The word itself means fiftieth. It was the Thanksgiving Day of the Jews. Because this was the feast of harvest there were many people from all the then known world in Jerusalem. Regardless where they had settled, they would like to be back in the holy city at the time of the feasts. Consult a map to see where the people had come from.

Suddenly strange things happen! There was the sound as a mighty wind. There were tongues as of fire on each of them. The symbolism is clear. The Spirit is often likened to wind. The Spirit is a fire. Now the believers begin to speak other languages. The people who had come from various parts of the world heard them speaking in the languages in which they had been born. No doubt the older ones were also able to understand Hebrew or Aramaic, but their everyday language was of another kind. Their children and young people perhaps knew little Hebrew or Aramaic. In other words, they do not hear languages which are unknown or gibberish, but languages and dialects with which they are so well acquainted. Nor is the speaking of these *other* languages done for the purpose of introducing something different; they are speaking of *the mighty works of God!* That is the important thing concerning the speaking in tongues on Pentecost.

What does it all mean? Something tremendously important is taking place, but what is it? Vs. 4 makes it clear that the tongue-speaking was the result of the Spirit giving them utterance. They are all unlearned men. They have not learned these languages in which they are now speaking. The people are amazed and perplexed about what they are seeing, but there are always some who have a mocking answer. These suggest that these believers are filled with new wine!

The Bible Explanation

Now follows the discourse of Peter. He first explains what has taken place and then proclaims Jesus. Luke emphasizes the fact that Peter now speaks boldly and clearly and demands the attention of all the people within the sound of his voice. This is already a fruit of what has taken place this morning. Peter had been struck with fear before and this was one of the reasons for his terrible conduct the night Jesus had been taken.

First of all, let it be clear that these people are *not* drunk. It is only 9:00 in the morning. Besides, the pious Jews did not eat and surely did not take strong drink before the first prayer and sacrifice of the day. They had better not mock

the things which have happened because what has happened is *the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel* (Joel 2:28-32). If they have any respect for holy things they must listen to what Peter has to say. The Spirit has suddenly made him an exegete! He understands things which he has never understood before. Joel had talked about this great day of the outpouring of the Spirit of God. That Spirit will come on men and women, on old and young. That Spirit will open eyes and open hearts. The prophecy refers to "*the last days*." Let everyone know that the outpouring of the Spirit is "*the last event*" which will occur before the Lord will return. In other words, the day of Pentecost ushers in *the final dispensation!* Later the Apostles will remind us again and again that we are in the last days. By this they do not always mean that the return of Jesus will be soon, but that we are living in the last days of the gospel age! Therefore, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Salvation has been completed.

Now Peter proclaims Jesus Christ. Of course, Pentecost can never be separated from the work and Person of Jesus. He first refers to the great works which had been accomplished by the Christ while He was on earth. His hearers know them! He was approved of God—they cannot maintain the falsehood that He had done any evil. Then the Apostle speaks of something which men have usually considered to be very difficult. Christ was delivered up "*by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God!*" Don't forget that! God was in control. This was the only way salvation would come to pass. But, "*You killed Him!*" They are responsible. Do not let them hide behind the excuse that the Romans actually did the killing! You, Jews, killed Him! This is made clear to them in order that they realize their guilt. The fact that they were thereby carrying out the counsel and the will of God does not leave them blameless concerning the deed. Although they have carried out God's plan (unknowingly), they are responsible for and guilty of their action.

This Jesus whom they had crucified was the same One whom God raised from the dead. Death could not hold Him. The original points in the direction that this death had to give way to a resurrection which is looked on as being a new birth. Then the Apostle again begins to interpret the Old Testament for them. Psalm 16 now receives his attention. The whole Bible is beginning to live! He sees prophecies concerning the Christ in many places. David had rejoiced in restoration. He cannot see himself in the realm of the dead. Yet, David is not speaking of himself alone. David was buried and his grave is there for everyone to see (Nehemiah 3:16). David was held by the grave and he also saw corruption. But, the grave of Jesus is only two months old and it is *EMPTY!* God did not allow His Son to remain in the grave but raised Him up and we are all witnesses of it!

Not only has Jesus been resurrected from the dead but God has exalted Him to sit at His right hand. Being at the right hand of God (which is either a place for the accuser Zech. 3, or the place of honor) this Jesus has poured out the Spirit—that which they now see and hear. The Father had promised Him this and He always keeps His promises.

Psalm 110 is now interpreted. David did not ascend into heaven, nor did he receive the place at God's right hand. David speaks in this Psalm of those things which "*the Lord said to my Lord.*" Jesus is the fulfillment of Psalm 110. The Scriptures are really beginning to open up. Let the people remember that they crucified the One whom God made Lord and Christ!

The Reaction

This was the first post-pentecostal sermon. What power it had! The people are "pricked in their hearts" by a consciousness of sin. Jesus had said that when the Spirit came He would "convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8). No one knows himself a sinner unless the Spirit makes it clear. This is also the first thing a man must know (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 2). Then the question is: What shall we do? Spirit filled preaching has these results. I doubt that many said to Peter: "That was a nice sermon!"

There is a clear answer to the question: "What shall we do?" The Apostle tells them that they are to repent. Their sins have been unmasked. Now let them show the proper attitude to the sins they have committed. Both John the Baptist and Jesus began their ministries with the same requirement. Let them seek baptism for the remission of sins. This does not teach that baptism itself removes sins, but that the baptism is a witness to the fact that sins have been forgiven. It is noteworthy that Peter speaks of being baptized into the name of Jesus Christ. Isn't this strange? Into whose name did John the Baptist baptize? Although much has been written about this statement, I believe that it is merely a short form of the institutional form of baptism used by Jesus when He sends the apostles out into the world with the great commission. Those who respond will receive the gift of the Spirit. The promise contained in baptism is for them and their children and for all whom the Lord may add to the church. This teaching of Peter was most effective. In that one day 3,000 were added—many more than in the three and a half years of the ministry of Jesus.

The life of the early church will be described more fully later. Here the writer only mentions that a fear fell upon all, seemingly because the Apostles were wielding the power of Jesus Christ. They sought one another's company. They had all things common. They even sold their possessions to minister to the needs of others. This was no "Christian communism," as some have said. It was the opposite. Nor did it continue. Only a few years later the Apostle Paul must take up collections in all the new churches to help the poor at Jerusalem. Even Acts 6 already speaks of the material needs of many. They were together in the temple. They broke bread at home and took their food with gladness. The words do not indicate more than common eating but the emphasis on such a common thing almost makes one wonder whether it did not approach the taking of the Lord's Supper together. They had favor with the people—this is surprising. Usually His people have been mistreated. Every day new members were added to the number of believers.

Pentecost was exciting, accomplished great things, and promised more.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Was the speaking in tongues on the day of Pentecost different from the speaking in tongues we find in various places today? How? Why?
2. When the people spoke of the mighty deeds of God in various tongues, does this indicate that tongue-speaking is not something which exists for itself?
3. What gives Peter such an insight into the Old Testament Scriptures? Is he correct in his interpretation? Give reasons for your answer.

4. How can God hold the people of Israel responsible for the death of Jesus when they were only carrying out His plan? Is he anti-Semitic?
5. The manner in which Peter applies the words of Scripture to the person and work of Christ is convincing. Why was this more convincing than when Jesus announced these same truths? Why was Peter so much more "successful" in his preaching than Jesus?
6. Should we have all things common? Does anyone of the Apostles ever require this? ●

An Australian Plea for Christian Schools

Peter De Jong

In many of our circles Christian Schools have long been established and accepted. Their major problems seem to be that of getting the interest and real support of people who are supposed to believe in them and the even more difficult one of achieving or regaining a really Christian education in them.

The Christian school movement which has long been a tradition among us is a new and growing development in Australia. Professor Keith V. Warren, editor of *Trowel and Sword*, published by the Reformed Churches Publishing House at Geelong, in the March, 1985, issue of that paper, states the case for Christian schools. His aptly formulated argument deserves our attention.

In view of the "better facilities, bigger teaching staff, more experience" and "better standing" of public institutions, why should anyone favor the struggling little Christian schools?

"State education, by its very nature, is like a smorgasbord of educational, religious, philosophical, moral, social political, ethical and other points of view. For that reason state education cannot possibly give the student a firm and consistent direction upon his entry into the adult world." Although public schools may not turn all their students into "unbelievers and haters of God," they are "not designed

to help turn" them "into lovers of God either," and they have "a tremendous power to pollute young minds with *respectable godlessness*" because of their secular humanist philosophy.

God has no central place in the instruction there;
human experience is the key to all knowledge;
man's mind is the criterion of all truth;
man's improvement is the end of all learning.

"In the state system, there is no absolute standard of truth and error, right or wrong. What is true and right in 1985, may be untrue and wrong in 1986," because in it "there is no anchor point for making judgments *outside* of the human mind."

Editor Warren cites a front page article in *The Australian* entitled, "The Lies they teach Our Children," which criticizes the anti-Australian, anti-U.S., anti-capitalist, anti-European, anti-industry, and anti-Christian bias of material used in the public schools. It finds them mediocre and unscholarly. "The general thrust of curriculum reform in Australia in the past few years has been to water down traditional and academic courses in favor of more 'life-centred' and 'relevant' courses, designed to be easier and more interesting for students." "European settlement of Australia is increasingly portrayed as some kind of hideous crime against humanity..." The article criticizes "values clarification techniques" in which students are to determine by discussion what their values are. It observes that in the "discussion group inquiry methods," popular in the last 10 to 15 years, students are required "to have opinions about issues on which they are almost entirely ignorant." Applied to sex education these methods convince students of the relativity of all morals and develop in them a tolerance of homosexuality. "Having abandoned Christian morality, the Australian education system has adopted an entirely fraudulent position of moral neutrality." It sees in the schools a political bias of the teachers' unions by which "left-wing activist groups who support policies which have never been supported by a major political party are being given the right to teach those policies as dogma in schools." "In general, Australian education is a disaster."

Editor Warren finds this article the more striking because it appears on the front page of the weekend issue of a leading newspaper. It is cited as supporting his observations that secular education (1) does not educate students for sincere obedience to God's word, (2) does not teach Christ Jesus as Lord of Life, and (3) that it, during a child's most impressionable years and for half a dozen hours each day, trains him to think, believe, and live *apart* from God. In all these it is exactly opposite to Christian education which claims that God exists, and that He matters in everything we do or think.

This does not mean that secular state schools turn out only misfits, and that all products of Christian schools turn out to be capable and well-adjusted men and women. But considered on principle, the Christian school is and ought to be "way out ahead."

The editor sees dangers against which the supporters of Christian education need to be alerted, the dangers of such schools becoming ghettos, of having their "salt" become tasteless, of merely training for comfortable entry into an increasingly secular culture, of exclusive preoccupation with merely staying in operation, and of mistaking classroom piety for Christian education.

Thanks to Editor Warren for a timely reminder of Christ's calling to train His children for Christian living. ●

Symptoms and Victims of Workaholism

Hendrik Sliekers

Some of my friends work very, very, hard. They seem to live by the commandment, "Thou shalt be busy all the days of thy life." But when I inquire as diplomatically as possible, "Are you a workaholic?" the reply is usually predictable. "Of course not! Just busy!"

Personally, I am not a workaholic. I have neither the ambition nor innate mentality to fall into that category. Furthermore, my well-rehearsed skill of procrastination is incompatible with the very concept. Not me! Busy, at times, but not a workaholic.

Even so, I strongly suspect that I am surrounded by workaholics both at work and at church. To avoid even the remote possibility of becoming "one of them," I have observed them carefully to be able to recognize the symptoms and their side effects in their earliest stages.

In our brief study we will ignore the hard-core workaholic. There are those whose symptoms are all too obvious and often over-publicized—the top executive and practitioner in the business and professional world, enjoying six digit incomes generated by sixteen-hour workdays. They are way out of our league!

Instead, we will focus our attention on the people in our own immediate circle, those who are "just too busy." We submit that being "too busy" is workaholism, too. From a long list of symptoms, let us consider three of the most blatant ones.

1. Working too long.

Up and ready before any rooster even thinks about crowing, our workaholic is already on his way to the office, behind the wheel of his truck or getting the shop and tools prepared to keep the approaching work crew busy. Time to go home arrives rather late in the day.

By actual quitting time, it has been quite a day. Except for the demands of dinner and a glance at the news via paper or T.V., there is little ambition and energy left to share with the crew at home—wife, children, dog or cat.

For some, regretfully, such a way of life has become an unavoidable necessity. The obligation to meet the bills for mortgage, utilities, groceries, tuition, clothes, and a variety of other essentials leaves few other options.

For others, the rat race is often fueled by pure ambition, the obsession with work itself, a false notion of the Puritan work ethic, and dubious understanding of the fourth commandment. Strangely enough, the commandment "commands" us to rest from our work. If there is any rule of con-

duct here for our modern life it is certainly to remind us that Jesus demonstrated the need for rest and relaxation, that God has a pattern of work—rest—worship for our lives, rather than that Sunday is the day that the Lord has made for us to catch our breath.

Inability to rest and slow down sooner or later will demand its toll. Workaholism does not come without its pricetag. Some will get hurt. Symptoms and victims are inevitably related.

Its first and immediate victim is the family. There is little time to be together, to do things together, to go places together, or even to communicate with one another. When the evening meal is consumed in shifts, devotions exercised on the run, the home becomes a house which serves as an around-the-clock station to punch in for a quick transfer to another activity. Spouse and children have learned that home is not a place to which to invite friends because there is hardly a spare minute left to entertain them. The family guestbook records few entries.

Is the Christian (Reformed) home immune to that lifestyle? The family is a fragile entity. What keeps it together? Certainly, one ingredient is a healthy respect for work, its consumption of time and energy, and its ultimate purpose. We must work to make a living, to be sure, but we must also work to lead a life.

Another victim may well be the church. It, too, feels the impact of those who are "too busy." There are two sides to this particular picture.

First, the unrelenting pace of work has made our workaholic an "untouchable" for the fellowship of believers. There simply is no time to participate in congregational activities, no evening free for Bible study, no time to serve on consistory, no time for anything except to take Sunday off in order to renew the rat race on Monday.

It does not take the children very long to figure out the value of church life. It is not very important. Elders and pastors know of generations of families who have lived on the periphery of church activities. Forever on the rolls, but eternally inactive. Priority has gone to work and the daily routines of life. When there is no time for the spiritual dimension of life, there is likely just more than a symptom of workaholism. It may have become a disease.

2. Loading too much hay on the fork.

The other side of the picture is equally unhealthy. It exhibits a symptom often seen in the leaders of the church—the pastor, consistory members, committee chairmen, and key people for special projects.

It is quite true, of course, that to get something done, one must give the task to a busy person. Perhaps busy people have learned how to get assignments done in minimal time. But when too much hay is pitched with one fork, the solution is to activate another fork or two before exhausting another worker. Much work in the church needs to be done, but surely not by one or a few chosen people.

We have the notion that much of our labor in church has to be done by an elder or deacon duly installed. An ex-elder is usually not permitted to go along on family visits; an ex-deacon is no longer permitted to count the money; neither is first choice to serve as chairman of a key committee. They are "out." Perhaps, after two years, they may be "in" again. Then they will be qualified to spend three of the four Monday nights at church, teach catechism, and be chairman of a busy committee.

The assignment of being an elder or deacon becomes a period of "doing time." "How long are you still in?" "Two more years to go." "My last year."

There was a time when I congratulated the "winners" after a congregational meeting. I still do, but I am a bit more cautious. There are so few replies of "thank you." "What I need is sympathy," is a more familiar response. What do I tell my sons when they come "to the years of discretion" and catch on to our practice of church work for "interested" members only?

Do we tempt our young people to *graduate* from church when they make profession of faith rather than to *commence* a life of service? Our adult Sunday schools are often filled with captive audiences who attend because they have to bring the kids anyway. Is it a typical church where the parents drop off the kids or leave them behind for church school while they go for coffee, or am I observing the exception?

3. Inability to say "no."

This third symptom is perhaps a difficult one to avoid. One reason is that there is so much to be done and often too little time to do it. Due dates! Deadlines! Next meeting! Agendas! Lesson preparation! Committee reports!

When my children took it for granted that dad was on his way to another meeting as I put my jacket and shoes back on after dinner, it was time to cool it. Slow down. Say "no" to another committee assignment.

A recent speaker we had on campus suggested that work was not primarily given to us for our enjoyment. He tried to turn our attention to the concept of "servanthood," working in order that we might serve others.

I don't have the ability to refute that argument. But projects at work, at least mine on the job and at church, are exciting. Sure, I can handle it! But there are times when another project must be turned down.

Then, too, forever saying "yes" really robs other members of the opportunity to use their talents. Fellow believers become the victims, despite their own smugness in "letting George do it."

Our fellow church members are the losers when church workaholics take over. For many, it is so much easier to "sit and listen" than to "stand, or do, or speak or walk." We have neither the courage nor the practice to tell the workaholic to sit down and listen for a while in order to let some other talent grow and blossom.

In some churches we see the phenomenon of "talent surveys." It is a step in the right direction. Unfortunately, too often "surveyors" fail to see that "surveyees" are not about to move unless personally invited or urged to do something.

Have we exhausted our list of symptoms and victims? I doubt it! As a post-script, it leaves me with a nagging question. Is workaholism a sin (crime) or a disease?

I have a personal dislike of casting all the known ailments of men and society in the disease category. It seems an easy way out.

If sin is "missing the mark," then our confused and twisted concept of work is off base, too. It, too, can lead directly into a work-related illness and perhaps suicide. Our big assignment is to study the nature and purpose of work. With one of God's greatest mandates to us, we can not afford to be off target. ○

Mr. Sliemers is Director of Library Services at Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, Illinois, (and presently a "retired elder" at his church.)

Prune the Bureaucracy

In a recent issue of *De Wachter* New Zealand correspondent Dick G. Vanderpyl commented on the growing bureaucracy in the government of that land. He said that "Parkinson's law" seemed to be raising its head everywhere, even in the Christian Reformed Church. He then referred to something he had read a while back to the effect that it wasn't all that long ago that the Stated Clerk of the CRC did all the work connected with that position by himself, but that today this "General Secretary" has no less than fourteen "under secretaries" in his employ. He also mentioned the fact that their churches only came together in synodical assembly once every three years. I thought to myself: We should implement that rule in the CRC too.

There is always the danger that a church becomes "top-heavy," endangering the autonomy of the local churches. And the above statistics indeed give food for thought. How many agencies and departments do we not have in Grand Rapids, all of them needing staff who are paid out of the pockets of the ordinary man in the pew (and whose salaries are largely unknown and never revealed in language that the ordinary man can readily understand)? We may be thankful that the synod of '85 disbanded the Volunteer Resource Bank, but synods should follow suit with a number of other departments also, some of which were started in order to deal with a specific, temporary problem, but whose status has a way of becoming a permanent one (think of SCORR e.g.).

I think it is time for some decentralization, and I believe a good place to begin would be to have synod meet biennially instead of annually. (Personally, I also like to see the introduction of Regional Synods, but that is another matter). Think of the enormous financial savings. But there are other reasons. The last number of years our synods have had a tendency to go from issue to issue, or perhaps from crisis to crisis. And more often than not, synods have contributed toward the crisis, largely because we are losing the confessional base and the cohesion which this provides. Eppinga once wrote that we need time to rest between synodical sessions, time to get our breath and our bearings. With annual synods this is not possible. Consistory members simply have no time nor desire to analyze the many reports, including the often lengthy and difficult study committee reports. Nor do the latter reports make much of a contribution to the welfare of the CRC.

We must also discourage the tendency among our people to look at synod as the great "problem solver" in the denomination. Many people and consistories are much too quick to run to synod with every problem that comes along. This is a sign of immaturity, not befitting a New Testament church. We all have the Holy Spirit, says John, and we all know. We don't need synod to solve all our problems. Besides, too often the "solution" becomes part of the problem. It is time that we get on with the work of the church, and stop spending so much time in board meetings and synodical sessions and reading lengthy reports. These are simply not the things that make a church strong and vibrant, and we could easily do with a huge reduction in bureaucracy. The ordinary man in the pew would not miss a thing, and consistories could spend their time on more important things.

We ought to keep in mind what Reformed writers of the past have said: consistories have to do with the essence (wezen) of the church, but major assemblies only with the welfare (welwezen) of the church. Too often we act as if it's the other way around. Let's get our priorities straight again.

J. Tuininga, Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada

Young People Enjoy Your Youth

Anthony R. Dallison

"Young people, enjoy your youth!" "Do what you like!" "Follow your heart's desire!"

We are living in a "youth-centered" culture today. The words quoted above occur in a rather unusual book which I was reading a few weeks ago, the concluding chapters of which give advice for young people. "Modern secular humanism," you may retort, "or the so-called 'new morality'". But you are in for a shock. In fact, these words were written several thousand years ago as part of the inerrant Scriptures by an old and wise man, Ecclesiastes. Did he really mean this piece of truly extraordinary advice which he gave to young people?

On reflection, it's surely the best possible advice that young people could have today for finding their way through what someone has called "the troubled years." Indeed, in the context in which it occurs (Eccles. 11:9-12:1) it is the perfect prescription for wonderful, enjoyable years of young life.

The first part of the prescription challenges one of our basic attitudes about youth. "Young people, enjoy your youth!" The scene, evidently, in Ecclesiastes' day could have been one familiar to us in our times—*young people who simply*

couldn't wait to grow up! How often, for instance, have you asked a young person his or her age, to be given the intriguing answer, "fourteen and one-half, nearly fifteen!" Our young people wish they were growing up more quickly! The mistaken assumption is that the "important" things in life are reached in adulthood. Against such an attitude, the wise man sets his face: "Don't think that way," he says, "value your youth. It is one of God's rich gifts, 'beautiful in its time' (Eccles 3:11), which will all too swiftly pass away into advancing age." Here, indeed, is biblical warrant for the familiar modern cliché that youth contains some of the best times of our whole lives. Some of us realize this, tragically, too late.

The second part of the divine prescription for vibrant, youthful days is equally challenging. "Do what you like." Usually old men give young people advice beginning with, "Don't . . ." But not Ecclesiastes. His advice is amazingly positive! He sees that God has placed young people in a world full of fascinating possibilities to be explored and enjoyed in the strength and vitality of youth. It is precisely God's purpose that they should enjoy the experience of life's amazing variety and possibility, avoiding premature care and worry! The income tax forms will arrive all too soon! (Compare the positive, biblical attitude to youth with the negative qualifications for a successful youth leader which I heard described recently—"He must know exactly what sort of things young people enjoy doing and, secondly, be able to stop them from being done!"). The biblical picture of a well-spent youth is amazingly positive—"Enjoy your youth, be happy while you're still young, do what you want to do."

We may be ready to lift our hands in horror. But wait, it is not all. Ecclesiastes, the old man who speaks so positively to young people, reminds them of the third part of his prescription. They are accountable to God for every single action, every important decision, of their youthful days. When Ecclesiastes' counsel is taken as a whole, it amounts to the beautiful and symmetrical balance expressed so succinctly by Augustine's words "love God, and do what you like." In other words, the purpose of youth is not simply to enquire, learn, enjoy and get the most out of a wonderful world, but to remember our accountability in all things to our Maker. ("But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment").

Then, while you are exploring all of life's possibilities with the "dew of your youth" upon you, "Remember your Creator." For He has rights over you. Your life is not really yours, but His. And with the gift of your life, your Maker gave you the Maker's handbook (the Bible) to show you how He meant your young life to be spent. One day He will say to you, "Give it back to Me, and tell me how you used it."

How positive, balanced and wise is Ecclesiastes' counsel for the young! And so amazingly contemporary! Value your youthful days! Enjoy them to the full! But be sure your Maker has a large place of influence! Then the result will be, as Matthew Henry, the great Puritan commentator, once said: "the flower of youth never appears more beautiful than when it bends towards the Sun of Righteousness."

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This article, supplied to us by the Rev. Mr. Dallison, appeared previously as a guest editorial in the local Timothy News of April, 1980, at Rexdale, Ontario.

Dutch Admonitions To Us

One has learned over the last number of years not to expect too much from the representatives of the Geref. Kerken in the Netherlands who attend our annual synods when it comes to an honest and frank appraisal regarding the situation in their churches. Generally the addresses given to our synod boiled down to four points: 1. We have problems. 2. We are struggling with these problems. 3. Sooner or later you too will face these problems. 4. Please have patience with us.

It appears that this predictable route was pretty much followed at the synod of '85 also. According to *The Banner*, the delegate of the GKN (also moderator of his church—president of the last two synods), Dr. H. J. Kouwenhoven, said that some in the CRC seemed to feel that the GKN had "estranged itself from the way of the Afscheiding (Secession) fathers." But, said Kouwenhoven, "I am convinced your impressions are wrong." Such talk is, of course, in line with the official synodical direction of the GKN, and might be considered "par for the course" coming from the president of the synod. But to those who are somewhat acquainted with the theological situation in the GKN such talk is not designed to allay fears and suspicions. To the contrary.

The editor of *De Wachter* reports on an interview he had with Kouwenhoven while at synod. There we find more of the same. Regarding the issue of women in ecclesiastical office, Kouwenhoven said that in our modern society the place of the woman is very different than that found in the world of the Bible. Besides, we have discovered that the Bible is much more colored by the time in which it was written than we previously thought. Ergo: It is no longer possible for one to hold that women may not serve in ecclesiastical office.

I always thought the Bible told us not to "be conformed to the world," and to "test the spirits to see whether they are of God." See what Paul says in I Cor. 1 and 2 about the "wisdom" of this world being foolishness with God. If modern society is to be our guide, one begins to understand why the GKN also declared that there must be room in the church for those who live in "homofiel" relationships. This means, according to Kouwenhoven, that we may not and do not want to give them the idea that "you are living in sin."

And still those in the CRC who think the GKN is departing from the faith of the fathers have the wrong impression! Who is trying to fool whom?

How different is the picture painted by the Rev. A.M. Lindeboom in his recent book written in commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the Afscheiding (secession), *Om de Grondslagen van het Christendom* (a book that should be read by all who can still handle the Dutch language). Lindeboom writes: "There is now also in the Geref. Kerken complete freedom of doctrine (leervrijheid)." And he supplies the documentation to back this up. As a retired minister, he is well acquainted with what is going on in his church. It is cause for gratitude that there are men such as Lindeboom who are trying to arouse the members of his church as to what is really going on. They deserve a large audience. ●

J. Tuininga, Lethbridge, Alta.

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