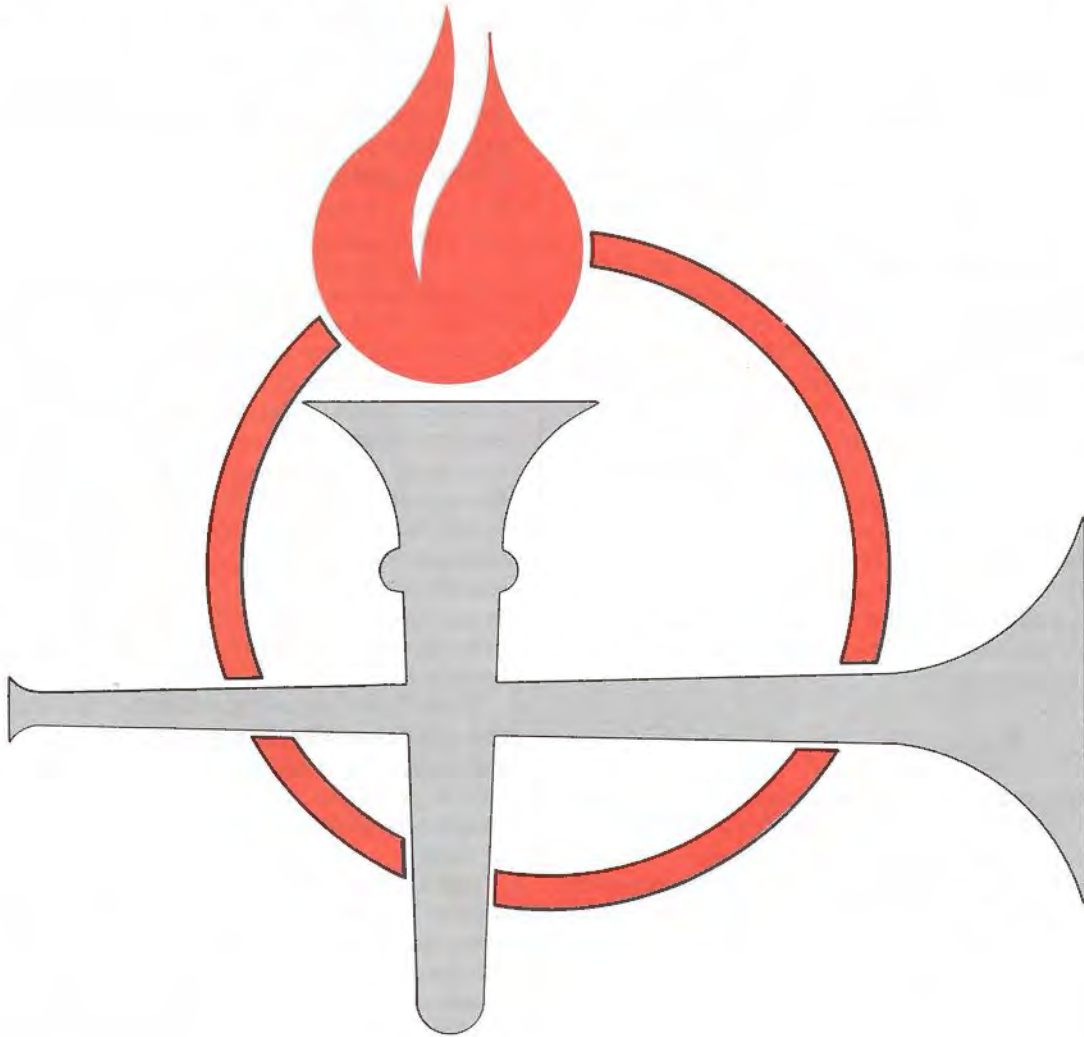


THE OUTLOOK

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

OCTOBER 1985



WHO ARE THE SHIITES?
EARLY HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
BIBLE BATTLE IN FOREIGN MISSIONS

Forgiveness Unto Fear

John Blankespoor

"But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared"
(Ps. 130:4).

In the month of October we recall especially the great event of the Reformation in western Europe. It is important that we remember this great work of the Lord. Some people may wonder why we should do this. Of what interest or benefit is that for us today, more than 450 years later? Don't we live in an entirely different age, and in a constantly changing world? The truth is that certain things and needs do not change. The nature of man does not change; nor do many weaknesses of the church. Many failures and sins that were found in Israel in the days of Christ, were also prevalent in the church in the days preceding the Reformation, and are still with us today. Perhaps one big difference is that today the devil is more deceptive; we now find the weaknesses of the old church in church members who call themselves children of the Reformation. The Roman Catholic Church at the time of the the Reformation and throughout the Middle Ages was steeped in formalism, and mere liturgical worship of God. The Bible was hardly known to the masses of lay people. The church's ignorance of the Scriptures was appalling. Mere external membership of the church and the "magic" use of the sacraments was all that mattered. Don't we find similar conditions in the church today? And often also in our own lives? Without any question, we must say that today the greatest faults of the church are lethargy, formal church membership, lack of interest in God's Word and lack of true spirituality.

At God's time and in His way the great Reformation was brought about. The Lord did not forget His church. The Lord raised up great men at His time to bring about this great change in the church. There were also many forerunners of the Reformation. We know the names of some, such as Hus and Savonarola. No doubt there were hundreds of whom we have never heard, but who were used in some way by the Lord to prepare the church for this great event. Luther, Calvin and Zwingli would never have been able to be as "successful" as they were without the work of these forerunners. Luther and Calvin are best known to us. Both set forth and left with us great principles taught in the Scriptures. In this meditation we want to notice briefly just two of them, one which Luther gave us from the Word and one which Calvin emphasized as the teaching of the Word.

These two thoughts we also find in Ps. 130. The psalmist evidently finds himself in spiritual and emotional depths. God seems far away. Why, we don't know. He deeply feels the need of the Lord. Out of these depths He cries to the Lord for mercy, the mercy of forgiving grace. He knows that God is righteous. If the Lord would keep a record of wrongs done, no one could stand before Him. But God is also merciful;

He forgives sins. For that forgiving mercy, the psalmist pleads. And the result of this marvelous forgiveness is the fear of the Lord, a love expressed in Christian living and service. These two truths we often find in the Scriptures. They are basic. The teaching is that our faithful covenant God graciously forgives our sins again and again, and that, as a result, the Christian is called upon to show his gratitude in serving and glorifying this great God. The Heidelberg Catechism teaches the same thing. The result of our gracious redemption from our lost condition of sin must be a life of Christian gratitude.

We find these two teachings of Ps. 130:4 in the careers of Luther and Calvin. For Luther the big question was, "How can I be or become right with God?" Realizing that he was a sinner, he tried all the remedies taught by the Roman Catholic Church of that day, such as meritorious good works, deeds of penance, and self-denial, even inflicting pain on his own body. But all were of no avail. None of these brought him any assurance of being right with God. The answer he finally found in the Scriptures. "The just shall live by faith" (Romans 5 and Gal. 2). Faith in the payment of Jesus Christ was the only way to God. Not faith and works, but faith alone in the complete atonement of Jesus Christ is the only way of becoming right with the Judge of heaven and earth. This became for him one of the great truths of the Reformation.

It may seem somewhat foolish to say, that we still need this emphasis today. But it is necessary in our complacent and satisfied way of living. Sin has become even to many church people an ugly and unused word. Mere external church membership and formal worship seem to satisfy many of them.

Don't the Scriptures teach clearly and emphatically the need of personal knowledge of sin and our confession of it every day? The Lord Jesus teaches us the parable of the Pharisee and Publican. Which Christian who is at all acquainted with the Bible, does not repeat again and again with Paul in Romans 7, "What I would I do not, but what I hate I do"? And what Christian doesn't know that Jesus Christ's forgiveness and deliverance is the only remedy? It is the reality of sin, of personal sins that our young people must learn, already as younger boys and girls. They must be taught to pray daily for the forgiveness of their sins, and that their only hope is the forgiving grace of God in Jesus Christ. God's mercies are "new every morning" (Lam. 3:23). These beautiful words take on added meaning for people who daily are aware of their short-comings and sins and of their need of forgiving grace. And the Scriptures teach again and again the faithful love of our great covenant God!

These are basic truths of the Reformation. They are still essential because they are taught in the inerrant Scriptures.

If we and our children are going to be true children of the Reformation we have to be people who feel and confess the need of this great forgiving mercy in Jesus Christ our Savior.

The result of the experience of being forgiven by the mercy of God in Christ is that people will and should serve Him. In Ps. 130 as well as in many other places in Scripture this service is called "the fear of God." This is the subject taught in the third part of the Heidelberg Catechism. It is the "fear" of love. The Bible also speaks of "the fear of God" in another sense, the fear of God's wrath and judgment. "Fear" as it is used here has an entirely different meaning. This is the "fear" of adoration, of serving God in the consciousness of His great glory and majesty, of thankfulness because of his great redemption from our sins through the Lord Jesus Christ. This kind of fear glorifies God.

John Calvin emphasized the glory of our sovereign God. With him this was not a doctrine to be merely confessed with the lips, and held by the church in creeds kept in the back of a hymnal. He taught it as something that motivates and guides our daily living in a life of godliness. Coupled with it, as also necessary for true Christian living, was his teaching of self-denial. Of this we also see much in his own life, a life of self-denial, despite a weak body, serving the Lord with all his capacities until his dying day.

It is this kind of living that glorifies God. It was necessary to teach this in the days of the Reformation. It is necessary today. We see that also church people are swept along by the spirit of secularism, (the spirit of the world) worshipping the gods of materialism, and pleasure. May these truths of the Reformation be taught and lived, also in our day. And may the Lord give us grace to hold them high, in our confessions, but also in our living. ○

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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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A Reformer's Tough Assignment

Peter De Jong

"Then the LORD reached out His hand and touched my mouth and said to me, Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jeremiah 1:9, 10).

Among men who were called to the service of God's Word, Jeremiah was assigned an unusually difficult role. A very sensitive man, he was ordered to bring an especially urgent call to reform to people who had long shown hostility to any such course. (The burdensomeness of bringing such a message in such surroundings is evident throughout his book and it "spills over" into its appendix, his Lamentations). This character of Jeremiah's assignment makes its message especially applicable also in other times when there is urgent need of reform. The sixteenth century was such a time in Europe. Our own time is not less so, as the traces of the Reformation of four centuries ago are vanishing even among people who still keep the old "Reformed" name. We ought to take a fresh look at the introductory account of Jeremiah's call to the role of Reformer prophet.

God's Call and Word

The first fact that catches our attention as we open the book is that the prophet's role and message were not in any way his own choice: "The word of the LORD came to me, saying, . . . before you were born . . . I appointed you as a prophet . . ." That divine appointment overrode all of his objections and excuses, determining what he would say and to whom he would say it: "You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you." In our time it has become the fad of theologians to announce as a new discovery that everything in the Bible is much more "time-conditioned" and "time-determined" than we used to realize, we especially need the Bible's often reiterated reminder that "time-conditioning" and "time-determination" really characterize only false prophets. The true prophet's harshest condemnations had to fall on the "time-serving" politicians who had the effrontery to announce "The LORD says . . ." when the LORD had said the opposite: "The prophets are prophesying lies in my name . . . the delusions of their own minds . . . those same prophets will perish" (14:14, 15; cf. 23:25-40).

It is significant that John Calvin in commenting on verse 9, quoted above, observes that the true teacher in the Church is to be recognized "when he brings nothing of his own, according to what Peter says . . . 'Let him who speaks, speak as the oracles of God' (1 Pet. 4:11)." "Let us . . . know, that whatever proceeds from the wit of man, ought to be disregarded . . . none ought to be acknowledged as God's servants . . . no prophets or teachers ought to be counted true and faithful, except those through whom God speaks, who invent nothing themselves, who teach not according to their own fancies, but faithfully deliver what God has committed

to them . . . A rule is prescribed to all God's servants, that they bring not their own inventions, but simply deliver, as from hand to hand, what they have received from God . . . so that they may not mix any of their own fictions with his pure doctrine."

As Jeremiah must know that the message he brings is not his own opinion but God's word, he must speak with authority—not his own but God's. In that role as speaking God's word, God said to the prophet, "I appoint you over nations and kingdoms." At this point again, Calvin's comment is illuminating. Alluding to the pressures on the preacher or teacher to defer to the power, dignity or wealth of the people to whom he must speak, and modify his message accordingly, Calvin remarks that, "In such cases there is no remedy, except teachers set God before their eyes, and regard him to be himself the speaker. They may thus with courageous and elevated minds look down on whatever height and pre-eminence there may be among mortals." God here "shows that there is so much authority in his word, that whatever is high and exalted on earth is made subject to it; even kings are not excepted."

At this point Calvin adds an important and necessary caution: God had said, "Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth"; so that whosoever claims such a power, must necessarily bring forth the word of God and really prove that he is a prophet, and that he introduces no fictions of his own." The need of this warning was especially apparent in the false assertion of the pope and Roman clergy who claimed, "We are above both kings and nations." "Now let the Pope show that he is furnished with the word of God . . . that he introduces nothing of his own devices, and we shall willingly allow that he is pre-eminent . . . men are not here so much extolled, though they be true ministers of celestial truth, as the truth itself; for God here ascribes the highest authority to his own word, though its ministers were men of no repute . . ."

Necessary Demolition

When many abuses have been long entrenched and become deepseated, the role of the one who must bring God's word may become especially difficult because it has to begin with a negative emphasis. That was true for Jeremiah. It was a problem to Luther and Calvin. It is also a special problem to anyone concerned about Reformation in our time when it has become an axiom of society that one must "never be negative."

Jeremiah was commissioned "to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow." The unpopularity of having to do that often threatened his safety and even life. Again Calvin's comment is intriguing—" . . . impiety, perverseness, and hardened iniquity had for so long a time prevailed, that it was necessary to begin with ruin and eradication; for Jeremiah could not have planted or have built the temple of

God, except he had first destroyed, pulled down Because the devil had erected there his palace How, then, could he have built there a temple for God, in which he might be purely worshipped, except ruin and destruction had preceded?" In the Reformation, it soon became apparent that seeking real church reform and renewal by a return to God's word brought inevitable conflict with the false doctrines and practices of the papacy.

The present troubled history of our own churches, as those of others, are multiplying examples of this same inevitable conflict. When unbiblical doctrines are taught, or, perhaps more commonly, our Biblical and confessional doctrines are not being taught, when our educational institutions and publications are undercutting them, when the Biblical and confessional organization of our churches is being in principle denied, and in practice contradicted, when there is no longer the required responsible accounting to the churches for even what is being done with their gifts, it becomes increasingly obvious that if there is to be any responsible building, the abuses God hates will have to be uprooted and torn out. In such demolition God's word is "like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces" (Jer. 23:29)—think of today's jack-hammers!

The Constructive Goal

Although this inevitable tearing down of abuses may have to take place before there is substantial building, we, like God's prophet, must be aware that our aim and end must not be to destroy, but to "build and to plant."

In the New Testament both the Second letter of Peter and that of Jude alert the churches to the need for drastic action when godless men are destroying the faith and life of the gospel among them. They must then "contend for the faith which was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3). In these pleas for militant action against error, it is also significant that both the first chapter of 2 Peter and the concluding verses of Jude are positive and constructive: "If you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." "To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen."

A Word for Today

Some questions may be raised about whether we may and should take Jeremiah's calling and message as our guide to church reformation in our time. There are some important differences between his surroundings and role and ours. Look at some of the differences.

1. Jeremiah was dealing with government as well as church. There is a difference between our responsibilities to a government and to a church. For example, God's word requires us to pay taxes to government (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17); it nowhere assigns church leaders any such authority to tax. * Its instructions for Christian giving (2 Cor. 8, 9) are quite the opposite of taxation. We must, as a rule, submit to government even when we may not agree with its use of authority; we are not obliged to submit to church bureaucrats who usurp the authority which the Lord entrusted to church elders (3 John 9ff.).
2. A greater difference between Jeremiah's situation and ours is that Jeremiah's role as a prophet speaking for God

was an extraordinary one. Since Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was given to all believers so that, as Peter explained, all of them, young and old, men and women (Acts 2:17ff.) were now called to prophesy in the sense of speaking for God to the world. This does not, of course, deny the unique roles and qualifications which the New Testament even after Pentecost requires for special offices in the church. It does mean that the New Testament Christian has a responsible and active role very different from the passive one to which the Roman Catholic and later Protestant hierarchies might try to limit him. In that respect the New Testament believer's assignment is actually more like that of the prophet than was that of the ordinary Old Testament believer.

We may recall that when Luther found that church officials stubbornly resisted any efforts toward reform, he wrote his "address to the German nobility" urging them on the authority of their office as Christians to initiate steps to reform the church. That appeal began to be abused in the Peasant Revolt to justify anarchy, much as the appeal to the believers' office is being misused among us to deny authority to all special offices. Such misinterpretations must not be permitted to tear down the Biblical order of the church, but they should drive us the more to return to the Word of God for direction in seeking the reform of Christ's church. God alone can revive and restore His church. That fact appears throughout the prophecy of Jeremiah. But He calls men by His Word and Spirit to experience and to become His servants in such restoration. The Reformed Fellowship has for a third of a century envisioned such a Reformation. May we faithfully pray, work—and fight for it, as uncompromisingly as Jeremiah had to do so.

A visitor watching a substantial part of our last synod's activity often received the impression of being present at two different meetings. In one of them the appeals of elder and minister delegates clearly tried to follow the direction of the Bible and the creeds. In the other the speakers were so preoccupied with trying to adjust themselves to our times that they seemed impervious to any consideration of the Bible or creeds. The synod went through the frustrating annual performance of trying to combine these incompatibles and followed it with an inane "pastoral letter" to the churches admonishing all to trust and peace.

When the ineffectiveness of their Biblical and confessional appeals to our synods has been so plainly demonstrated, the time seems to have come for the many consistories and members who have been trying to maintain a Biblical and confessional course to consult with one another about what they must do next to achieve it.

It becomes steadily more obvious that there is today more real unity of mind and heart between many in a variety of church fellowships who want to be faithful to the Bible and our Reformed creeds than there is within our own increasingly diverse denomination. Perhaps the time has come when we should be working for a genuine ecumenical union with those who share the common biblical faith at the same time as we seek to separate from those who don't.

**The last synod, perhaps understandably in the light of the growing tendency to set aside biblical directions as "time-conditioned" whenever they interfere with our practice, acted to reverse also this teaching. It expressed sympathy for the objections of one couple to paying taxes to the government, but rejected the appeal of another who had conscientious scruples against paying a synodically levied quota.*

Who Are the Shiites?

Bassam M. Madany

The rise of Shiite Islam in the modern world has surprised many people today. This is due to the average American's unfamiliarity with the whole subject of Islam. Furthermore, the problem is complicated by our secular culture's refusal to seriously consider the religious emphasis of Islam. Christians have also been so preoccupied with many other issues that they have not given adequate attention to the resurgence of Islam. Since the end of the Second World War, most of our attention has been focused on the challenge of Communism. It is important that we do not minimize the dangers of Marxist ideology especially as we consider its impact on the minds of many people in Latin America and the rise and spread of Liberation Theology. But Marxism is not the only challenge facing the free world.

Our Political Involvement with Islam

Islam is another serious challenge today. We must not forget its growing role in our world ever since the birth of the State of Israel in May 1948. Most Americans, including Christians did not seem to notice the rise of Islamic power until late in 1973 during the Arab oil embargo against the USA. But Shiite Islam came to the fore only in the last days of the Shah when the people of Tehran revolted against him and brought about the end of his autocratic rule. The name of Khomeini became familiar in the American homes as people watched on their televisions the followers of this charismatic leader hurl themselves against the tanks of the Shah's army. Then came the seizure of the U.S. embassy. For the next 444 days, the radicals of Tehran known as the Islamic guards held captive not only the staff of the U.S. embassy, but millions of Americans as well, thanks to the excessive television coverage given to that tragic event.

No sooner had the problem of the U.S. embassy in Tehran been solved than the U.S. got directly involved in another area of the world where Shiites live—Lebanon. The civil/international war had been raging for almost seven years when Israel invaded southern Lebanon and attempted to crush the fighters of the PLO. The summer of 1982 was filled with chaotic events. The attempts to save the PLO in Beirut (besieged by the Israeli Army), the election of a new president of Lebanon, Beshir Gemayyel, his assassination before he could take the oath of office, and the resultant massacre

of around 300 Palestinians in the camps of Sabra and Shatila near Beirut brought the U.S. Marines into the conflict. The United States entered into peace-keeping arrangements with France, the United Kingdom and Italy in order to guarantee the safety of the Palestinians of Beirut.

For various reasons, the U.S. forces were confined to the Beirut International Airport area, a location which could hardly be justified from a military point of view. The Americans became an easy target to the various Muslim militias which were in the mountains just to the east of the airport. Then came the tragedy of the car-bombing of the Marines' compound which killed hundreds of our men on a Sunday morning in October 1983 and the eventual evacuation of the area by the U.S. forces.

It should not be forgotten that Khomeini sent some of his revolutionary guards to eastern Lebanon where they set up a camp for the radicalization of the Shiite population of Lebanon. He hoped that this move would eventually radicalize not only his followers, but bring about a revolutionary change in the Arab lands of the Middle East.

Furthermore, Syria, under the Assad regime, had developed close ties with Iran for two reasons. Both Assad and Khomeini are non-orthodox Muslims. And then, Assad had become a powerful and bitter foe of Saddam Hussein, the president of Iraq whose forces had invaded Iran in the early years of the Khomeini regime. So it became advantageous for the rulers of Iran and Syria to drive out the Americans from Lebanon. The U.S. was perceived by them as friendly to the Iraqi regime. Finally, the radical Islamic guards in the Beqaa valley of eastern Lebanon succeeded in teaching their fellow Shiites in southern Lebanon the "art" of martyrdom as they sacrificed themselves in car-bombing the Israelis and driving them out of their land.

It is needless to remind ourselves of the recent trauma which we all underwent during the hijacking of the TWA plane on its regular flight from Athens to Rome on the 14th of June, 1985. It was as if the whole episode of the embassy in Tehran was being re-run on some giant television screen. A new name came to the forefront: Nabih Berri, the Shiite leader of a militia named Amal. His role in the whole affair puzzled Americans and others as well. Many people are still confused. Just what do the Shiites want and why are they so mad at the world?

Shiite Origins

Here we must be ready to learn a bit of Islamic history. Muhammad, the founder of Islam, died in 632 A.D. He did not make any arrangements for a successor. The word for successor in Arabic is *khalifa*. In English, the word has been transliterated *caliph*. The elite, among his followers in the city of Medina in Arabia chose a *caliph*, Abu Bakr. Two years later, he died a natural death. The second *caliph*, Omar, was assassinated ten years later. Uthman, the third *caliph*, ruled for 12 years and was also killed by a renegade. The fourth *caliph*, Ali, had the distinction of being both the cousin and the son-in-law of Muhammad. Unfortunately for him, his election to the office of *caliph* was not unanimous. One of the wives of the prophet withheld her blessing, as did also Muawiya, the powerful governor of the newly conquered land of Syria.

Ali came to his position during times of excitement and confusion. The governor of Syria, Muawiya, claimed that Ali was implicated in the death of Uthman. War broke out between the two factions of Islam and, even though Ali's forces were prevailing, he accepted an arbitration of the conflict and lost out. He was murdered by some of his followers who had not accepted his resort to the arbitration. Islam, as a result, split into three parties: those who followed Ali were called in Arabic: *Shiite Ali*, i.e., the followers of the partisans of Ali. The followers of Muawiya, came to be known as the *Sunni Muslims*. The third party were called the *Khawarij*. They were the ones who went out of the camp of Ali. They became the ultra-radicals and committed horrible crimes against other Muslims for years to come.

These early divisions within the household of Islam played a big role in the violent changes which occurred at various periods of Islamic history. But no matter who seemed to be the *caliph*, the followers of Ali, i.e., the *Shiites*, remained in the opposition camp. They functioned underground and attracted especially the Persians within the Islamic empire. Most likely, it was not so much the beliefs of the *Shiites* which attracted the Persians, as their strong feeling that the Arabs had not given them their full rights when they embraced Islam. This is why they chose to support the opposition party within the household of Islam.

It is not my intention to get into the details of *Shiite* history, but the regular party among them believes in 12 successors to the Prophet Muhammad, beginning with the first lawful *caliph*, Ali. Most of his successors like his son Hussein, died as martyrs for their faith. When the 12th *caliph* or *imam* (This word became more accepted among *Shiites* than *caliph*) was put to death by the *Sunni caliph* in Baghdad, his followers refused to believe that their *imam* had died. They propounded the theory that he had simply disappeared only to return at the end of time and restore the world to a purified form of Islam. In the meantime, the powers of this hidden *imam* are delegated to a lesser *imam* on earth. In Persia, the word *ayatollah* is substituted for the Arabic word *imam*. This explains the name of the present-day spiritual guide and leader of Iran: *Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini*.

In the 17th century, *Shiite* Islam became the "state" religion of Persia. The lower clergy known as *mullahs*, work under the guidance of an *ayatollah*. Using their privileged position, they began to wield great power over the people. They often clashed with the Shah and forced him to bow to their demands. Here one must add that early in this century, the rulers of Persia began to use the word Iran as the name

for their country and their people came to be known as *Iranians*.

Shiites in Lebanon

Lebanon became a safe haven for many *Shiites* throughout history. Both the regular brand of *Shiism* and some ultra types such as the *Druze*, took to the strongholds of Mount Lebanon. Here they tried to maintain their independence from the Ottoman Turkish authorities which began to rule the Middle East since the early years of the 16th century. Being part of the opposition party, the *Shiites* of Lebanon were among the disadvantaged. When the French took over Lebanon in 1918, the plight of the *Shiites* did not improve. Most of the power and the wealth among the Muslims of Lebanon remained in the hands of the *Sunnis* in such centers as Beirut, Tripoli, Tyre and Sidon.

There are many people who fault the Lebanese Christians for not doing much to help the poor *Shiites* of the Beqaa valley and the south. After all, the argument goes, the president of Lebanon had been a Christian since independence in the forties. Why did the Christians do very little to help the poor and disadvantaged *Shiites*? It is easy to level such charges against the successive governments of Lebanon, but one must realize that in a free society with a free economy, changes cannot be brought about in a hurry. One must remember that the Christians in Lebanon had to deal with the *Sunnis* (Orthodox Muslims) who had inherited their privileged position from the past, a past which had always been dominated by *Sunni* powers. In 1958, when these Orthodox Muslims came under the spell of president Nasser of Egypt, they revolted against the president of Lebanon, Camille Chamoun. It took the landing of the U.S. Marines during the Eisenhower era to bring about the equilibrium in Lebanon. That lasted until April 1975.

Certainly, both the Christians and the *Sunnis* of Lebanon did not always act wisely between 1946 and 1975. But the explosion of the *Shiite* community in Lebanon could not have happened without the following factors:

1. The rise of Khomeini in Iran.
2. The interference of Syria in the affairs of Lebanon.
3. The PLO presence in Lebanon.
4. The Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon.

All these external factors have contributed to the disintegration of what used to be "the Switzerland of the Middle East!" What should the Christians of the West do about all these things? Their first point is to stress the religious nature of the Middle East problem. A secularized worldview such as we have in our Western world does not give us the tool to properly understand the Muslim world and its many problems. For example, the refusal of the Arabs to accept Israel is grounded in the conviction that the birth of this Jewish state in the heartland of Islam negates the very finality and superiority of this religion. This is the deep conviction of the Arabs and their 600,000,000 neighbors in the household of Islam. The resurgence of militant *Shiism* in Iran and in Lebanon is not due merely to economic reasons. (If we adopt this economic view, we act as Marxists who see economics as the only important aspect in the life of human beings.) When we examine the situation from within the world of Islam, we must conclude that Muslims in general, and *Shiite* Muslims in particular, are not going to settle for the materialistic worldviews which have been exported by the West and the East. Even though Muslims may not be aware of the biblical text that "man does not live by bread alone,"

they are unconsciously dramatizing the truth of this biblical teaching. Important as bread is, man needs more than material things. Man truly lives by the Word of God. The oil rich Arab countries have recently learned the bitter lesson that they cannot rely on the uncertainties of the world oil markets.

Christians in the West should be heralding the biblical truths about the true needs of man and the initiative which God took in the sending of Jesus Christ to be the Savior of the world. We must lovingly and boldly spread the Good

News which alone is adequate to reconcile the warring factions of the Middle East. We must testify to our representative governments that it is their duty to act justly and fairly with all the nations of the world. This also includes the nations of the Muslim world. ●

Rev. Bassam M. Madany is the minister of Arabic Broadcasting of The Christian Reformed Churches' Back to God Hour. As a native of Lebanon he is unusually familiar with the Middle East.

Careful, Careful!

Joel Nederhoed

I am embarrassed, I am angry, and I am afraid, and I want to tell you why. I want to talk about a very delicate subject. I know it is, and I hesitate to get involved in it. I was watching a television program the other night. To be perfectly frank, I do not watch a lot of television. I should probably watch more, but I have all I can do to do the work involved in Faith 20 and in some of the other things I have to do.

I saw a religious television program and I could not believe what I was seeing. The pitch for money on that program was absolutely unbelievable. I watched it with amazement. I am not going to tell you exactly what the evangelist, so-called, was saying on that program because I do not want it to be identified. I am talking about something that is of a general nature, which is happening today in connection with religious television and it is sick and it is going to destroy people. That is why I have called this program today, "Careful, Careful!" You have to be careful if you watch television. If you receive your religious inspiration from television, you have to be careful, because something is happening on television today in connection with the raising of money that has nothing whatsoever to do with Christianity. As I watched that program I was just appalled by what I saw.

I want it understood at the outset that I am not necessarily against people on television finding ways to support their program. Obviously this has to be done in one way or another. But what is happening today is that religious leaders, evangelists, preachers of the gospel, are using television in a totally commercial way, in order to further their own enterprises, in order to accomplish their dreams. They have all kinds of dreams and they will, if you don't mind, just use your money in order to accomplish them. This is happening. As I said a few moments ago, I am embarrassed, I am angry, and I am afraid.

First of all, I am embarrassed because, to tell you the truth, it is embarrassing to be part of this scene. It is a bad scene

when religion is used to raise money, when religion is used to further the dreams of an individual. Who knows where he gets the dreams (See Jeremiah 23:16, 25, 26)? He says he gets them from God, he says he gets them from the Bible. This is happening all the time. When I look at this I can understand why some people think of everyone involved in television religion in the same way. They think everyone is alike. They see this happening over and over again, and they come with the conclusion that this is the way it is and this is the way these people are.

Then I say, "It is embarrassing to be a part of that particular group of people who are using television in order to promote their own empires." Now there are a number of us, and I believe this most sincerely, who are bringing the gospel over television today, who are doing so at great cost, not for self-aggrandizement, not for the building of an empire, but because of an earnest conviction that it is absolutely necessary to use television in order to tell people the glorious gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Unfortunately there are also many who are using television in order to raise money for their own pet projects. I hope that you will be able to tell the difference. But it is embarrassing to be part of this scene and to observe what is happening today in connection with the television presentation of the gospel.

I also said that I am angry. The reason I am angry is that I believe sincerely that what is happening today amounts to a total corruption of the most beautiful thing in the world. The most beautiful thing in the world is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than that. People are changed by the power of God's great Spirit, when He comes into their heart and makes them into new creatures. When a person has been living in darkness for years and years and suddenly is transformed through the power of God's great grace—this is beautiful. And this is happening.

It is happening also through the television and radio proclamation of the gospel. I know it is, because I am part of

a broadcast enterprise that is sponsored and carefully supervised by a denomination. This is a broadcast outreach that is bringing the gospel to the world today in nine different languages. As responses come to us we know that God can use the broadcast proclamation of His Word in order to do great and beautiful things.

But it is horrible when something so beautiful is corrupted as it is being corrupted today. There is a very instructive passage of Scripture in the book of Acts the 8th chapter and this will explain to you why I am angry. We read there: "Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, 'This man is the divine power known as the Great Power.' They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic. But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

"When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

"When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, 'Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.'

"Peter answered him, 'May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin'" (Acts 8:9-23).

There you see that right at the beginning of the Christian era there were those who saw that it was possible to use the gospel for commercial gain. Simon the Sorcerer, a pagan, had great power among the people. Then all of a sudden he saw that there were greater opportunities. He believed in Jesus. The Bible tells us that when the gospel came to Samaria and Phillip the evangelist preached there, this man also believed and was baptized. Then when Peter and John came down and Simon saw the Holy Spirit come upon these people, his eyes widened and he thought: "I have to have that too. I am willing to pay in order to get it, because if I can have that power, I will be able to be a man of great influence in this area."

Peter said to him, "May your money perish with you." Those are some of the sternest words of rebuke that you find on the pages of the Bible. Some people translate even much more harshly than they are translated here in the New International Version. This man was confused about the nature of the relationship between religion and money.

We have a right to be angry. We can look at television and see all sorts of commercial things going on. I do not want to talk about that now. Television is a highly commercial presence in our society and within our culture. All kinds of products are being sold all the time. If you want to sell

your product on television, it is going to cost you thousands and thousands of dollars if you want to have it on prime time programs. But it is effective. You will be able to move shelf products if you use television properly to advertise your product. That is fine if you want to sell soap, if you want to sell cars, if you want to sell a whole host of things. I say nothing against it. But when people take television and use religion to manipulate people in order to get their money, something horrible is happening.

We have every reason in the world to become incensed when we see something as precious as the holy gospel of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ used in order to bring enrichment to those who proclaim the gospel.

This is a horrible thing and I hope that when you see it, it will make you angry too and you do not fall for it, you do not go along with it, you are not sucked into it. When people play games with other people's souls in order to enrich themselves, there is every reason to be indignant.

I also wanted to say that I am afraid. This is really the main reason why I am even justified in using this television program to talk about this subject. I suppose that someone could say, "Why do you have to talk about a subject like that on television when there are so many other things to talk about? If you have some kind of an argument with these people who you claim are not handling the gospel properly, why don't you deal with them on a person-to-person basis?" The main reason I am dealing with it here is because I am afraid of what is going to happen to people like you if what you see on television in connection with the way religion and money are brought together turns you off from the gospel.

I was in Los Angeles a few weeks ago and I was talking to someone who works in the inner city there. He told me that one of the things he discovered when he talked with people in Los Angeles about the Lord Jesus Christ is that they are turned off by the Lord Jesus Christ because what they see on television is so phony and so completely related to money that they do not want anything to do with Jesus. That can happen. People can turn away from Christ because of what they see in religion. This has been happening for so many years. There is nothing new about this.

The apostle Paul dealt with the same thing. In the sixth chapter of the book of I Timothy he says: "If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and arguments that result in envy, quarrelling, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain" (I Timothy 6:3-6).

There you have it. People already in those days thought that godliness was a means of financial gain, and they were turning people away from Christ because that's what they believed. Then Paul says, "But godliness with contentment is great gain." He turns people away from the kind of religion that is mixed up with money. He says the kind of religion that will do you some good is true godliness that we find on the pages of Scripture. The reason I am mentioning this today is because I am concerned about you, about your relationship to Christ, and I know that when an evangelist on the airwaves spends ten minutes talking about one of his favorite projects, trying to get people to send in hundreds of dollars to it, he cannot be telling them about Christ. In

fact, he can be giving them the wrong impression about Christ. And that is what frightens me.

How sad it would be if a person like you—and you and I are both on our way to an eternal destiny—what a tragic thing it would be if a person like you were so turned off by what you see in television religion that you would turn away from Jesus. If television religion is doing that to you, turn it off and do not look at it again. Do not even look at this program. Go to your nearest church. Find a church where God is worshiped and where Jesus Christ is exalted. Do not ever look at another television program. Find your faith right within your local church.

The local church is important. That is where we can meet Christ, where we can have fellowship with the people of God. That is where we can experience the discipline and the care that we receive from one another among the people of God. If you are going to look at religious television, make sure that you look at programs where Jesus Christ is exalted, where the cross of Jesus is the center, because that is what you need. You need Jesus. You need the crucified Jesus. You need the blood of Jesus. You need to be brought to the

point in your life where you confess your sins, where you confess that Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God, and you turn over your life to Him and expect Him to save you.

That is what you need. We here on Faith 20 are praying that you who watch this program, as humble as it is, and with its flaws, will believe in Jesus. I am so afraid that people may get the wrong impression and they won't understand that Jesus is so important.

Do you know Him? That is the kind of godliness that you need, a godliness that really has nothing to do with money, nothing to do with riches, nothing to do with some great project someone is trying to accomplish within this world. You need the godliness that comes from recognizing that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has died on Calvary's cross in order that your sins might be taken away. You need the godliness that comes from believing in Jesus, by saying, "My Jesus, I love you, I know you are mine." ●

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I Attended a CAUSA Seminar

Norman L. Jones

A strange organization is presently taking root in the land. It is called CAUSA. Almost every minister and priest in the country has been or probably shall be contacted in some way by CAUSA, usually by a representative of the movement. (Many of these CAUSA representatives are young people from foreign countries, such as Germany, France, Japan and Korea. They are dubbed "Moonies," as they are also members of the so-called Unification Church of the Rev. Moon).

What is CAUSA?

What is CAUSA? From the cover of the *Manual* used at the CAUSA seminars and conferences we get this information:

CAUSA is the Latin word for cause. This word was adopted as the name of CAUSA International when we began our work in 1980. CAUSA stands for the First Cause of the universe, God, and the primary work of CAUSA is to teach Godism, a God-centered world view. Furthermore, CAUSA stands for the common cause of all men and women in striving for a moral world of

freedom and brotherhood under God. CAUSA is working to unite religious and conscientious persons, and we feel that there is no better name we could have than CAUSA.

More specifically, we are informed elsewhere that CAUSA originally was the acronym for "Confederation of Associations for the Unity of the Societies of the Americas," but this title is no longer used as the meaning of the name.

CAUSA is undoubtedly the most prominent and active of the many organizations founded by Sun Myung Moon, the founder of The Unification Church. No doubt about it, this man has vision, determination and organizational and financial abilities of a unique order.

The CAUSA organization is the American outgrowth of Moon's anti-communist organization in Asia called International Federation for Victory Over Communism which he organized in the early 1960s, which has grown to over 14 million members in Korea and Japan. CAUSA International was begun in 1980 "to provide Latin Americans with an ideological framework in their struggle against communism. CAUSA chapters have now been initiated in more than 21

nations throughout South and Central America. . . . CAUSA has now expanded and become global in scope, being active in the U.S.A. Europe and Africa" (from the Preface of the *Lecture Manual*). CAUSA USA is headquartered in Washington, D.C. and has chapters in all 50 states. The president is Phillip Sanchez, a former U.S. Ambassador to Honduras and Columbia.

Why should we bother investigating CAUSA with its origins in its cultic founder, Sun Myung Moon? How significant is this organization to Reformed Christianity?

The Objectives of CAUSA

First of all, it should be noted that we are not dealing here with just another run-of-the-mill cultic organization. CAUSA represents a finely-tuned anti-communist movement backed by literally millions of dollars and promoted by prestigious anti-communist leaders of great influence.

The ostensible purpose of CAUSA is to unite all God-fearing peoples of the world in the ideological struggle with Marxist-Leninist philosophy. This is no small task, but CAUSA has undertaken it with a determined cultic zeal.

The purpose and plan of CAUSA is clearly stated in the *Manual*: [Rev. Moon] "came to see clearly that there is no way we can eliminate communism if we do not confront it with a superior ideology or worldview. This worldview must begin with the idea of God. An affirmation of God's existence is the one way we can overcome communism (p. iii). The strategy of CAUSA, accordingly, is to; 1) carefully examine the ideology of communism and expose its lies and deception; and 2) to present a positive counterproposal to communism by a powerful and logical philosophical affirmation of the existence of God, appropriate for the modern day human intellectual and spiritual development. . . . Godism enlightens, inspires and motivates any man or woman of conscience. Godism represents a solution to communism from the roots" (*Ibid*).

How is CAUSA doing in achieving these lofty objectives?

There is no question but that the financial resources behind CAUSA give it the potential of being the most influential anti-communist movement in the world today. When CAUSA puts on a seminar, for example, as it does about every week somewhere in the nation, things are done in an impressive style.

Two-hundred to four-hundred ministers and priests are invited to these seminars *with all expenses paid*, including air fare. Big name speakers are featured to challenge the audiences with the horrors of international Communism. There is the converted Elridge Cleaver (a founder of the Black Panthers in the 1960s); or Dr. Cleon Skousen, the famous FBI Counter-Intelligence officer and author (a Mormon); or the well-known John Nobel, an evangelical who has traveled the land the past two decades speaking of his experiences as a slave in Siberia for nine years. Other speakers include retired generals E. D. Woellner, Daniel Graham, John Singlaub, and many others. The Rev. Richard Wurmbbrand (Lutheran) and Dr. Fred Schwarz (Baptist) have also been featured on CAUSA programs. Dr. Schwarz, himself the founder of the highly respected Christian Anti-Communist Crusade, said of CAUSA: "I can't find words to express the joy, the delight that I have felt that at long last an intelligent, articulate discussion of dialectical materialism is taking place in the United States."

The seminar that I attended at the plush Pheasant Run Resort near Chicago, was attended by almost 400 clergy (of

every type and description). We were told that the cost to CAUSA for that three-day meeting was approximately \$250,000. And remember such conferences are being held almost every week somewhere in the United States! The goal of CAUSA is to have 300,000 clergymen attend such seminars in the next two years in order to mobilize an effective counter-communist movement in the United States. A worthy objective indeed!

Impressions of the Seminar

The CAUSA lectures are presented by articulate (Unification Church) speakers who utilize the latest in visual slide presentation technology. (I peeked behind the huge screen and someone told me that the synchronized battery of 27 slide projectors cost a half million dollars, and that it costs \$10,000 just to transport this equipment from one seminar to the next one).

Each participant receives a handsome 260 page *Manual* with which to follow the illustrated lectures. The first six lectures deal with Communist ideology and history, focusing on the Red advance in the West. It is accurate and informative and, in my opinion, worth the time and effort to attend. I have not seen or heard anything better. In addition, the opportunity for personal witness and discussion with other attendees was worthwhile. The clergy, which included many women, ranged from conservative to liberal, from an Orthodox Priest to Black Pentacostalists. My first impression of CAUSA, then, is that here is a well-healed organization superbly organized.

Perhaps a word about Unification Church financing would be of interest to the reader. It seems to be cloaked in mystery. One "Moony" official told some of us privately that the Unification Church works closely with foreign banks and corporations, especially in Korea and Japan, and that plans are being made to traverse the world with a highway to facilitate automobile travel and the shipping of goods! (Honestly, that's what we were told!) Apparently the link between Japan and Korea is already under construction, including an elaborate undersea tunnel. This highway is envisioned to connect Korea to China to Moscow to Western Europe, and even Africa. Apparently there are enormous financial resources behind these big "Moony" plans to unite the world philosophically and even with a highway! We ought to ask ourselves in the face of these vain dreams, Are we as serious about the conquest of the nations by the Gospel and their unification under the Kingship of Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:18-20; Rev. 11:15)?

My second impression is that many of the CAUSA educational materials are excellent, produced by recognized experts in the various geo-political and military disciplines. CAUSA has held international seminars on nuclear warfare, and an offshoot organization, The International Security Council, has produced excellent documents on Soviet strategy and countermeasures for stopping the Red advance. (Incidentally, the new *Washington Times* is certainly one of the best conservative newspapers in the United States today—another Moon-financed project. He only lost \$112 million on that operation this past year, but never mind that!) I am forced to concede that the anti-communist efforts of CAUSA are truly outstanding and perhaps the most notable in the world today. We should be profoundly grateful to God that these millions are being used to fight Communism and not to promote it. Obviously, Mr. Moon's experience in a Communist prison camp in North Korea for two and a half years has made him, if anything, a dedicated foe of Communism!

The CAUSA Worldview

The last four formal lectures given at the seminar dealt with the CAUSA Worldview in which an inclusivistic philosophy was developed which embraces all religions and philosophies which appeal to a "god." CAUSA terms this "Godism." Here the orthodox Christian has to part company with CAUSA and the Moony religion if he would be faithful to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot agree with CAUSA's philosophy that "All mankind should be united, for we are all the children of God. Beyond religious, cultural and national differences, we are one family under one parent—God" (*Ibid*, p. iii). We cannot subscribe to the statement that "he (Moon) began to outline a system of thought of the highest dimension which would . . . stimulate the God-affirming world to put an end to hypocrisy and live according to the truths taught by the world's great religions" (*Ibid*).

The CAUSA Manual says that the philosophy of Godism "comes on the foundation of the Judeo-Christian tradition, which teaches that man is reconciled to God through the saving work of Christ, but at the same time, Godism is not incompatible with the other great faiths of the world, each of which stresses the need for the union of man with God" (*Ibid*, p. ii). Again, "God is a powerful unifying adhesive, able to bring God-loving people together. It is not based on doctrine, but rather on *common sense*. It therefore is able to bring together God-affirming and conscientious people beyond color and creed" (*Ibid* p. iii).

Such a naive, uncritical position fails miserably to analyze the fundamental differences between the competing religions and in particular between Christianity, the only true religion, and all other non-Christian religions which are based on Satanic lies. The *Manual* states on page 170:

The CAUSA Worldview is based on universal principles that are in conflict with no religion. The CAUSA Worldview is respected in Buddhist countries as well as in Christian nations. It can also be taught very effectively in the Islamic and Hindu cultures. In countries such as Japan and Korea, which are primarily Buddhist, the CAUSA Worldview is flourishing.

These and other similar statements demonstrate that the religious basis of CAUSA and the Unification Church is

manifestly anti-Christian. It is in essence humanistic and liberal—the very philosophy from which Marxism and Leninism have sprung in the first place. The challenge by CAUSA to liberal pro-socialist preachers may indeed open their eyes to the brutal effects of communism these past 70 years, with its slaughter of 150 million persons, but the CAUSA Worldview will not challenge their humanistic theology which denies the one true, living, triune, sovereign God who has revealed Himself exclusively as Savior in His Word and in His Son, Jesus Christ.

CAUSA is a *lost* Cause because it denies the basic Christian truth that Jesus is the unique Son of God, the eternal Son of the eternal Father. True "Godism" confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (I John 4:2). "Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also" (I John 2:23). The denial by CAUSA that Jesus Christ is the exclusive way to the Father makes this movement of the spirit of anti-Christ. Despite all its "Godism" it is in reality anti-GOD!

Conclusion

The destruction of atheistic Communism is a certainty according to the Word of God. God is using His own Providential methods to accomplish that end, including such anti-Communist organizations as CAUSA. And for this we should be fervently thankful. But the Worldview and Counterproposal offered by CAUSA is no solution to Communism, as far as orthodox Christianity is concerned. The religion of CAUSA shall also crumble under the powerful Word of God, because it, too, is an enemy of Christ's Kingdom.

CAUSA is a significant movement on the world scene today, and I believe that we should thank God for its attack, howbeit superficial, against Red Communism. But for the replacement of Communism we must look not to CAUSA but to the religion of the Holy Scriptures—to the Reformed faith. This faith, and this faith alone, can and shall conquer the world (I John 5:4), according to the sure promise of God to His Anointed One (Psalm 2).

Note: Rev. Norman L. Jones is a minister of the Reformed Church in the U.S. (Eureka Classis) at Pierre, South Dakota.

WHO AM I?

Glenn Palmer

I am the commander of the Roman troops of Jerusalem. My primary job is to keep law and order among the troublesome Jews. Suddenly, one day there was a commotion as people came running from all directions. The city was aroused, in an uproar—a riot.

As a man of action, I took some officers and soldiers and ran into the center of the disturbance. Seeing us coming, the people stopped their merciless beating of a man they had caught. Quickly I had him bound with two chains to ensure that he wouldn't escape, and escorted him out of the raving mob of Jews who would have killed him. I must have caught the Egyptian who revolted against Rome with 4,000 terrorists. That should be worth a bit of gold. My prisoner asked

me a question in Greek. He must not be the Egyptian troublemaker, after all. Who am I? And who is the man I captured?

My name means "Zeus reared" or "nursling of Zeus." Thus my ancestry is something to boast about, for this name is used only in noble and ancient families.

Because I am good, I love to be first. Because I love to be first, I will have nothing to do with that fisherman's son or "elder" as he styles himself. What is worst is that he accuses me, a blue-blooded Greek, of gossiping—even "maliciously." That is a quote "from the horse's mouth," so to speak. The boor! Who am I?

Battle for the Bible

IN FOREIGN MISSIONS

Peter De Jong

CURRENT ISSUES IN FOREIGN MISSIONS, by Richard L. Heldenbrand, **MINISTRY: TO MUSLIMS PROJECT**, Rt. 6, Box 227, Warsaw, Indiana 46580, 1985, 56pp. paper, \$1.75.

This little booklet is a survey of missionary thinking in the last 40 years. Although it obviously entailed a great deal of study, it is clearly written and a masterpiece of condensation, covering and relating a wide variety of developments in a mere 53 pages. Although its material is undoubtedly controversial, it shows a commendable fairness and appreciation in dealing with diverging views. Dick Heldenbrand is a civil engineer with 20 years of service in Morocco running his own engineering company, and a missionary, who has gone back to studies in theology, specifically to study "the gathering storm" in the mission field.

He introduces this study by observing the "call for change" that has been characterizing foreign missions for three or four decades, and has been coming from many, diverse sources. It resembles, but also differs from an earlier such call by avowed Liberals in 1932 in the publication of the book *Re-thinking Missions* by a laymen's committee chaired by William Ernest Hocking. The current call for change comes from a variety of materials "in the technical language of the social sciences, or the diplomatic language of the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church." The writer observes that the people calling for change are sincere and that many of them, academic specialists, have made important contributions to missionary training.

Karl Barth

Treating the subject chronologically, the author begins with a chapter on Karl Barth's view of "the vulnerability of the Bible." "Barth's epistemology (study of how we know), simply stated, is that anything which involves man, who is finite and limited, must of necessity be limited and hence relative." Therefore the Bible must be subject to error. Not it, but only Christ can be properly called the Word of God. The church had based its views of the Bible's inspiration on texts such as 1 Tim. 3:6 and 2 Pet. 1:20, 21. Although Barth appealed to such scripture passages as 2 Cor. 3:4-18 and 1 Cor. 2:6-18 to defend his views, he was really "testing the basic biblical passages by which we understand the nature of the Bible by his presupposition, rather than testing his

presupposition by the biblical passages." "In this way he destroyed the true authority of the Bible."

Nida's Relativism

The next chapter deals with the "Relative Relativism" of Eugene Nida, Secretary of Translations of the American Bible Society. This leading Bible translator in his 1954 book, *Customs and Culture*, sought to apply helpful insights from linguistics and anthropology to foreign missions. He proposed adopting a "biblical relativism" both in foreign missions and in generally interpreting the Bible. This relativism meant that "actions in different societies have different values depending upon the mores of the people. Certainly to kill one's father in our society would be morally much more reprehensible than for an Eskimo to do the same thing in his society. Similarly, wife exchange among the Eskimos is not to be regarded in the same light as in our culture." Although he would "not justify our doing what the Eskimos do," his stated position implies also that "there is no universal ethical system," attempting to support this view by appeal to 1 Cor. 9:20, 21.

His relativism in morals is accompanied by a similar relativism in matters of faith. There, "the only absolute in Christianity is the triune God. Anything which involves man, who is finite and limited, must of necessity be limited, and hence relative." Proceeding from this principle, reminiscent of Barth, the author shows how Nida called for a turn from old views of the Bible "thought to be written in a kind of Holy Ghost language" and needing to be interpreted "in accord with accepted doctrine," to viewing these matters with the linguist's understanding of the "dynamic functioning of language." "His central concept seems to be that language by its very nature is incapable of conveying the essence of things. All that language can do, according to Nida, is describe actions."

Roman Catholic Vatican II and Liberation Theology

A third chapter deals with the changes revealed as well as proposed by the Roman Catholic Church in its 1962-65 "Ecumenical council" commonly known as Vatican II. There "for the first time, the Roman Catholic Church took the position that God reveals Himself in all faiths." It affirmed

that "Each branch of the human family possesses in itself and in its worthier traditions some part of the spiritual treasure entrusted by God to humanity, even though many do not know the source of this treasure." It called for a synthesis of the theories of science, notably psychology and sociology, and Christianity. The church should "adapt the gospel to the grasp of all as well as to the needs of the learned," as "the law of all evangelization." Thus the culture of those receiving the gospel decides how the gospel is to be adapted, and "the Bible is made subservient to the current theories of the social sciences," thereby stripping it of all authority. This movement toward universalism not only becomes a guide in missions, but also a "worldwide political principle," which in turn, lends itself to supporting revolution to achieve human rights. This trend in Vatican II pronouncements was picked up by Liberationist revolutionaries such as Gutierrez to support their programs. Thus Rosemary Ruether could write that "the key Christian symbols of Incarnation, Revelation, and Resurrection cease to point backward to some once-and-for-all event in the past, which has been reified as mysterious salvific power in the institutional church, and become instead paradigms of the liberation which takes place here and now." "The mission of the church, in their eyes, is anthropocentric rather than theocentric; it is essentially political."

The Church Growth Movement

A fourth chapter introduces one of the pioneers of the church growth movement, J. Wascom Pickett. Taking his point of departure from the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19) order about "discipling the nations," this discipling, he really defined as "group conversion without individual regeneration." A follower of Pickett, Donald A. McGavran, who became more famous than he, though he "scales down Pickett's vision of 'Christian nations'... still interprets Matthew 28:19 in terms of society rather than individual disciples of Jesus." Although McGavran stresses winning men to Christ, rather than doing good, he "echoes Pickett's call for conversion without regeneration." Thus "the 'decision for Christ' is in reality a decision for Christianity, not for Christ." Thus "conversion" is explained socially and psychologically, no longer involving "a faith response to the Word of God."

World Council—"Contextualization"

Chapter V shows how the World Council of Churches adopted many of the calls for change already observed, coining the catchy title "contextualization," embodying its views in a 1972 book, *Ministry in Context*. Now the point of departure for systematic theological thinking becomes "the contemporary historical scene" instead of "the biblical tradition." Heldenbrand's survey shows how the WCC's "Contextualization" movement takes its starting point in the historical-critical treatment of the Bible and supports revolutionary movements for "the liberation of man." "The WCC was calling for Christian foreign missions to become a political movement, and to teach Third World churches that the Bible is nothing but a human book."

Kraft's "Ethnotheology"

The Sixth Chapter shows how among the leaders in the call for change in Christian foreign missions, Dr. Charles H. Kraft, Professor of Anthropology and Intercultural Communication at Fuller Theological Seminary, School of World

Mission, has more directly influenced missionary boards that consider themselves conservative evangelicals. Summarizing his views in a 1973 book, *Towards a Christian Ethnotheology*, he advocated "a synthesis of anthropology and theology with relativism as its presupposition," attributing this view to Eugene Nida and others. The author shows how he attributes the qualification for elders in Titus and Timothy to "Greco-Roman Culture," the doctrine of original sin to the thinking of western Christians, and the doctrine of individual guilt to "the individualism of our culture" and teaches that in order to be saved a person "doesn't have to be convinced of the death of Christ." The author shows how in Kraft's treatment, "no New Testament doctrine would be immune from being reduced to the level of human opinion."

Present Threat to Evangelical Missions

The final chapter calls attention to the way in which this "Ethnotheology" of Kraft is spreading among missions which consider themselves conservative and evangelical, noting particularly its initial influence through the American Society of Missiology which began in 1972. The author sees in it the various trends already mentioned, calling attention especially to writings of Kraft. Kraft "suggests that the church in a Muslim country should resemble the Old Testament rather than the Epistles," and "attacks the doctrine of the uniqueness of the Christian faith as chauvinistic, and attributes it to a western competitive spirit." In the effort to meet the Muslims, Kraft would have missionaries "try to fulfill Islam, rather than... call converts out of Islam as a system."

Although Heldenbrand appreciates the work of anthropologists and linguists in the service of missions, he points out the grave dangers to the missionary program in present efforts to accommodate the distortion of Scripture, and the confusion of God's kingdom with socialistic programs. He sees "bending the Bible to accommodate" the world's ethical and moral systems, and "the doctrines and practices of non-Christian religions." He sees anthropology replacing the Scriptures, the gospel doctrines perverted, and the new birth being reduced to social conversion. We need "a full view of Scripture" as the proper basis for foreign missions, and sound doctrine as the pre-condition of effective evangelism.

In the New Testament, the famous confession of Peter (Matthew 16:16ff.; cf. Mark 8:29ff., Luke 9:20ff.) that Jesus is the Son of God, leading to the promise that on this "rock" the Lord will build His church, is followed almost immediately by Peter's interruption and objection to the Lord's announcement of His suffering and death. To this the Lord responds with the sharpest rebuke imaginable, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." The sternness of the Lord's warning seems shockingly harsh until we consider that what was really happening was the devil's effort to radically pervert the gospel in the testimony of one just designated to be a leading missionary! The Lord's stern warning has alerted the church throughout the centuries to the need to be always on guard against this constant tactic of the devil to pervert its testimony, especially through its missionary leaders. Mr. Heldenbrand performs an extremely valuable service in showing how the current call for change from many sources—Karl Barth, linguistic theoreticians, Roman Catholic Liberals, Latin American Liberationists, World Council "contextualizers," and now some ostensi-

ble "evangelicals," converge in an attack on the integrity of the gospel no less serious than the more forthright attack of 60 years ago.

The Outlook has from time to time noted indications of this kind of thinking in our missionary, relief, ecumenical and educational programs. In the July 29, 1985 *Banner*, Calvin College history professor, Bert De Vries, in a full-page review, highly praises the book, *Bridges to Islam* by Phil Parshall, saying, "What I admire most about the book is the respect that it shows for Islam and Muslims. Parshall does not begin with traditional notions that Muslims are mistaken and stubborn; rather he sees in their religious practices a genuine yearning for and searching for God." Although we need to be sympathetic in all our missionary

contacts, we must not contradict the gospel in order to establish a point of contact. It is evident that neither the reviewer nor the author regard these Muslims as the Bible teaches us to regard all mankind, including ourselves: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way . . ." (Isaiah 53:6); "There is none who seeks for God" (Romans 3:11). Parshall is the writer who in his earlier book, *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism* (p. 175) suggested that since baptism is offensive to Muslims, missionaries consider substituting something else for it (*Outlook*, March, 1982, p.5).

May Heldenbrand's timely alert, currently available for a mere \$1.75, get a wide reading especially by many who are concerned with or involved in our missionary efforts ■

Comment and Opinion

John H. Piersma

THE MOOD OF THE CRC—"What is the mood of the Christian Reformed Church these days?" This question came to me from a representative of a different Christian tradition recently. I answered with what must have seemed rather ambiguous vagueness. It is always hard to know just what the mood of a sizeable group of people is. And it's not made easier if that group shows signs of dissatisfaction with its own history and inheritance.

Curiously, two opposite pages in a recent *Banner* issue (pp.18, 19, July 29, 1985) reminded me of that question because both seem to indicate something of our denominational state of mind, as revealed by people in influential positions.

"Folk Islam/Point of Contact" is a review of Phil Parshall's *Bridges to Islam* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1983). In this book Parshall, a missionary to Muslims in East Asia, is reported to describe the apparently more moderate "folk Islam" in contrast with the fierce, rigid attitudes and doctrines of "orthodox Islam" (the kind we read about daily during the humiliating Iranian hostage crisis).

The review is written by Dr. Bert DeVries, chairman of the department of history at Calvin College. Not just another Ph.D. in History, he boasts a Bachelor of Divinity degree as well, meaning that he also has some expertise in theology.

Prof. DeVries writes a glowing report of Parshall's book. Why? Listen:

Can you imagine praying side by side with a Muslim, on your knees, forehead touching the ground, he in the

name of Allah, you in the name of Christ? Does this sound inappropriate, sacrilegious? After you read *Bridges to Islam*, you will not think so. This is but one of the ways in which Phil Parshall . . . broke down the religious barriers between himself and his Muslim friends.

Other significant mood indicators might be statements such as: What I admire most about the book is the respect that it shows for Islam and Muslims. Parshall does not begin with the traditional notions that Muslims are mistaken and stubborn; rather, he sees in their religious practices *a genuine yearning and searching for God* (italics inserted).

As a mood this looks to me like more of the kind of strong desire evidenced by many among us, especially people of influence, to be known as broad-minded, non-judgmental, respectful of all kinds of people, so that we might be recognized as far removed from that past era of insistence upon strict moral principle and doctrinal truth. We need bridges rather than fortresses nowadays. Not in testimony against but in sharing with others will we make ourselves useful in the Cause of the Lord.

Right over the page in the same issue of the July 29 denominational paper we find a department cleverly titled *Q/A*. Its editor is the Rev. William D. Buursma, CRC pastor in Kalamazoo. He is asked, "Do the words in Revelation 22:18, 19 refer to the entire Bible, or do they warn against adding to or subtracting from only John's Book Revelation?" Buursma's answer is simple: "There is no way that John

could have been referring to Genesis, Judges, Matthew, or other parts of the inspired record."

Why not? Editor Buursma builds his case on such considerations as the fact that "some commentators" regard John's statement in 22:18, 19 as a kind of copyright practice used in his time, and that "reputable scholars" think John was referring only to his book. Also, he reasons, John could not have known that his book would be selected as the final book of the Bible.

There is a different mood in the Belgic Confession, Article VII, I think. That article is worth quoting:

We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein. For since the whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in them at large, it is unlawful for any one, though an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures; *nay, though it were an angel from heaven*, as the apostle Paul says. For since it is forbidden to *add unto or take away anything from the Word of God*, it does thereby evidently appear that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects.

Neither may we consider any writings of men, however holy these men may have been, of equal value with those divine Scriptures, nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, since the truth is above all; *for all men are of themselves liars, and more vain than vanity itself*. Therefore we reject with all our hearts whatsoever does not agree with this infallible rule, which the apostles have taught us, saying, *Prove the spirits, whether they are of God*. Likewise: *If anyone cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into your house*. (Since the new translation of this creed is not generally available and does not differ substantially from this older version, I quote the older).

DISCLOSURE OF CHURCH FINANCES—It seems that a Florida city has adopted an ordinance requiring churches raising \$10,000 or more a year to register with that city and report how much they collect and how they'll spend it. Lawrence Velvel, representing the city, is reported in *USA Today* (Aug. 6, 1985) to say that this law "pertains to all groups that are charitable. It does not discriminate. It applies to everybody." Similar ordinances, he said, exist in hundreds of cities across the country.

Such laws are being opposed, of course. In Atlanta while the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals was hearing an appeal in this matter a motley group of protestants (Church of Scientology, the National Council of Churches, Seventh-day Adventists and the American Jewish Committee), some two hundred strong, was marching through the downtown area to draw attention to their complaint.

In this day of big-business-religion requiring financial disclosure does cause problems. Television evangelists, for example, are building huge centers for the housing, feeding and entertainment of people as well as their edification through Gospel meetings. I heard one say recently that more than 4,000,000 guests had registered in his establishment the previous year. That is *big business*!

Tax laws did not envision such projects. We can expect more litigation, I'm sure, as the ever greedy palms of govern-

ment reach out to get "its share" of the mega-millions involved.

All of which is hardly new. There is always some tension between the message of Him who "though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" and the affluence of some Christians. Christ's faithful followers tend to prosper, especially in a country such as ours. Then problems come! For example: then we take on manners and customs which make our church activities seem closed except to people of our own station and success.

PASTORAL LETTER—Under date of July 3, 1985 the officers of the 1985 synod of the CRC address a letter to all members of the church. Such letters do not appear every day, and we ought to pay attention to it. I'm going to quote the letter in its entirety. The numbers inserted indicate points at which we wish to comment.

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

The Synod of 1985 has requested its officers to address a pastoral letter(1) to all Christian Reformed consistories and congregations. The recent synod was once again faced with the fact that our denomination has been divided on many key issues(2). Synod noted with deep regret that a divisive spirit within our denomination has made its negative impact upon a united witness to the world on behalf of Christ our Savior(3).

Perhaps the sharpest polarization(4) is evident in the controversy which revolved around the role of women(5) in the life of God's family. The synodical decisions (taken only after much prayer and extensive deliberation) involve, first of all, a reaffirmation of the 1984 decision that women may serve as deacons in the capacity defined by Synod 1984(6). At the same time, synod ruled that the "headship" principle implies that women are not to serve as ministers or elders(7).

It is our fervent prayer that these decisions will be helpful in restoring trust and peace among us(8). We urge every member and congregation to use Christian restraint and moderation in stating our congregational, consistorial, and personal convictions. We particularly urge our pastors to give leadership in the healing and reconciling process so essential for true unity in our fellowship(9). We pray that all of us may be willing to acknowledge that we individually and collectively still "see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face." Now we "know in part," but some day we shall "understand fully."(10).

In our personal and communal pain, we can find comfort in knowing that the Lord Jesus is still the King of His church. His spirit has been promised to us and will overcome our misunderstandings and lead us into all truth(11).

With gratitude to God, we reflect on His blessings to us as a church in the years of our history. We praise God for the many wonderful programs and ongoing ministries carried on by our beloved denomination(12). We now look forward to the future, following the example of the apostle Paul, who said, "...One thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:13-14.

May the "Shalom" of Christ be with you all.
The Officers of Synod
Calvin Bolt, President
Peter Brouwer, Vice-president
William Buursma, First Clerk
Jack Westerhof, Second Clerk

This is the "pastoral letter" addressed to all CRC members in the interest of a restored peace and unity in the church. One can only rejoice at the concern of synod and its officers for that blessing. Disharmony, disagreement, distrust is a terrible experience for Christians to endure. We've had our share of that misery during past years, and one can only join these men in fervent prayer for its elimination.

Men who achieve such preeminence in the church as those who are elected to serve as officers of synod will surely not resent any well-intended comment and reaction to this very important document. I'm sure it will receive more thorough treatment than our limited space and ability allow, but I beg the privilege of expressing a few opinions on the awesome issues described in this letter. I follow the numbering inserted into the text.

(1) Well-intended as it is, I have serious doubts about the propriety of this kind of communication in a Reformed church. The letter is *pastoral*, which means, I suppose, something which is concerned with the souls' welfare of those addressed. My problem is that the letter was obviously not drafted at the time of synod's gathering, which means that it was written after the official authority of the signers is over. I think I recognize here a further tendency toward a kind of hierarchicalism, the kind that sees "synod" not as a temporary gathering (with temporary officers) but as something with at least a quasi-permanent character, and its authority as "higher" rather than "broader."

(2) Synod, says its officers, saw once again that our church is divided "on many key issues." This is an alarming statement! One can only wonder why any church should be marked by such division of conviction. The letter goes on to make several suggestions as to the cause and seriousness of the CRC situation.

(3) The origins of these divisions are not innocent but malicious, if this statement is to be taken seriously. A "divisive" spirit may not be tolerated in the Christian church. For decades we read to our congregations that those "who seek to raise discord, sects, and mutiny in Church" are guilty of a "gross sin" so serious that they "have no part in the kingdom of Christ." That is just about as bad as it can get, and the sheep who are now being pastored by this letter ought to realize it. Maybe the former officers of Synod 1985 will provide us with more specific information on this matter? My personal opinion is that neither side ought quickly to be accused of divisiveness with respect, say, to the matter of women's admissibility to church office. The two sides on this score have radically different viewpoints. Difference of viewpoint can be honorable. Divisiveness is not.

(4) At the risk of being repetitious—the term *polarization* is similarly frightening to any sensitive member of the Christian church. It has to mean what my dictionary calls "division into two opposites." If *polarization* is "sharp" among us we can only look forward to more trouble. I think we ought to abandon this term utterly, and recognize that it has no proper place in "God's family."

(5) I know this might sound a bit "picky," but why do we talk about the "role of women" in the church? As I understand it, this term implies that a person's behavior is determined by his/her *status* in a given social situation. I'm disgusted to notice that we are often told by certain people that the issue here is whether women are equal to men in the church. Of course they are! They enjoy a perfect equality as bondservants (slaves) of Jesus Christ. If any should achieve *office* he does not gain status, but only a heavy responsibility as Christ's anointed servant. Most often in Scripture the best of God's people shrink back from this kind of assignment rather than put themselves forward as people obviously competent, spiritually, intellectually, etc., to hold office. (Maybe we ought also in this connection to be done with the expression *ministerial status*).

(6) This means no change from the 1984 decision to permit the calling and ordination of women to the office of deacon in spite of more than fifty overtures, protests and appeals. Two observations: first, from conversations with a number of people since Synod 1985 I note that they are convinced of the futility of appeal to classis or synod in the CRC. These are good people, serious-minded, eager to be and remain "Christian Reformed," and their spirit is now one of hopelessness and despair. It seems that many regard this or these as of no importance whatsoever, but I should like to say that this does not augur well. Second, I fear that some feel that this decision isn't all that important, especially since it carries the rider, "in the capacity defined by Synod 1984" (that "capacity" is: "the work of women as deacons is to be distinguished from that of elders"). Please note that this says nothing so far as the nature of that distinction is concerned. And please note that the same specification regarding ministers, elders, evangelists applies to the office of deacon: "Only those who have been *officially called and ordained or installed* shall hold and exercise office in the church" (Art. 3, Church Order). There isn't the slightest indication of some kind of inferiority of deacons to elders, nor ought there be in view of The Church Order, Art. 2, "These offices differ from each other only in mandate and task, *not in dignity and honor*." It might not be difficult to predict just what the line of argumentation will be when those who want all offices in the church open to women make their next move.

(7) It is very heartening, of course, when synod declares the office of elder (teaching and ruling) as not open to women. However, the text of this decision is not encouraging. It states: "That synod declare that the biblical 'Headship Principle' as formulated by the Synod of 1984, namely, 'That the man should exercise primary leadership and direction setting in the home and in the church' implies that only male members of the church shall be admitted to the offices of minister and elder." Note that office is described as "leadership" and "direction setting." This is another accommodation to the idea that ministers, elders, deacons and other people in divine office are where they are because of their obvious competence, not primarily because they have appointment and calling from God. Also: this decision is looked upon as a brake on the aspirations of the "women-in-office people" among us. I doubt if they are so compliant as to take this decision as some kind of "law of the Medes and Persians!"

(8) Fervent prayer is good, indeed! But wouldn't this revelation of the passionate desire of our synodical pastors have been more impressive if some explanation as to why

it might be expected to work such a blessed effect were offered? Synod chose to reject the many pleas for elimination of the 1984 decision. All these people got for their trouble was reaffirmation of the decision they were protesting and a statement that women may not be elders. Why should that bring renewed trust and peace when there is no change whatsoever in the synodical decisions? Incidentally, the letter makes no mention of the fact that synod now removed the "conscience clause" excusing ministers so-disposed from ordaining women as deacons. All ministers **MUST** do this now, like it or not. Will that decision restore trust and peace?

(9) The letter at this point is potentially very dangerous. In my opinion anyone who says much now about the problem is going to fall quickly under the judgment that he lacks "Christian restraint and moderation." I suspect we are in for a very difficult time, if the writers of the pastoral letter are right. We need, say they, leadership so that the "healing and reconciling process" may restore "true unity in our fellowship." This indicates a grim situation. The hopeful expression here is "true unity." I'm glad that the pastoral letter signatories remind us that unity is something which must conform to the law of God, that it is a normative thing. They will not object, therefore, if someone vigorously points to that law in the effort to realize such peace.

(10) I find this reference strange as well as serious. One might say something about the exegesis of 1 Corinthians 13 suggested. My discomfort comes from an additional consideration, namely, that if everyone admits that he doesn't see very clearly, peace will be the result. I doubt seriously if harmony can be restored in the way of acknowledged ignorance. My friends on the other side of the women-in-office issue see very clearly and know very much. I wish often that

I could match their intelligence. But we disagree conscientiously on what we see.

(11) One can only say *Amen!* to the obvious intentions of the letter at this point. However, is the fact of Christ's Kingship over the church (see the description of that awesome reality in Revelation 1) much comfort to us if we are not in agreement with His royal word? And if His Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth (John 16:13), has He been misleading us for something like 2000 years on the matter of women's eligibility to hold holy office in the church? Or is that leadership of the Spirit some kind of evolutionary process by which we shall eventually reach God's truth?

(12) Again, we agree! It is a crying shame that discord and disagreement must appear to threaten the good work of the CRC for more than one hundred years. Fact is that we "conservatives" agree so strongly on this point that we prefer to bear the stigma of a dozen labels rather than disturb the welfare "of the many wonderful programs and ongoing ministries carried on by our beloved denomination" by demanding innovative changes. May the witness of a church truly Christian, that is, Reformed never disappear from the earth!

These are just a few casual comments on the letter Synod 1985 felt it ought to send to the churches. Once again, I appreciate the tone, the good intentions, the love for the CRC the letter evidences. As my remarks indicate, however, I do not feel that it will solve many problems. It seems to me that we will have to work much harder, care even more deeply, repent most sincerely, and possibly strive with one another even more vigorously if we are going to find the "true unity" we need.

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Henry VanderKam

THE EARLY RESULTS OF PENTECOST

Lesson 3

Acts 3:1-4:31

The miracle of Pentecost made itself felt immediately, but it would take some time before the recipients of the Pentecostal power really understood all the implications of this event. Such a change had been wrought that no one could estimate its influence. The change was evident in the Apostles themselves and it was also evident in the hearts of those who heard the word of the gospel.

Luke informs us of the immediate results in the earliest time of the post-Pentecostal church. Peter and John go to the temple at the usual time of prayer—3:00 o'clock in the afternoon. Notice that they do not break with all the customs and rules of the Jews now that the gospel of Jesus Christ has come. There is a period of transition. They keep these hours of prayer and also the Jewish sabbath. Slowly, but surely, the ways of the believing people in the early church turn to the custom and rule of the New Testament.

The Miracle

As they are about to go into the temple they see a man at the temple gate who has been a cripple from birth, begging. In him we have an evidence of the decay in the Jewish religion (and there were many more). There was to be no beggar in Israel! (Ex. 22:25, 23:6, etc.) They have become so bold that they not only allow begging in the land, but allow one to lie at the gate of the temple, seeking alms. Apparently that is the only way he will be able to feed himself. Luke pictures what follows dramatically. He expects alms also from Peter and John. But, he is going to get something quite different. "Look at us," says Peter. And then: "We don't have silver or gold for which you are begging, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, go!" This is about as clearly as we can translate the original. For this cripple, for whom this day began like all others, a gripping change was to take place. Peter helps him up; the bones in his feet and ankles are strengthened; and he leaps! There is no *doubt* about his cure! His leaping for joy for that which had happened to him draws the attention of the people in the temple. They recognize him as the man they have so often seen at the Beautiful Gate. This is a miracle which has many surprised witnesses. Such things are unheard of! Later we read that he was more than forty years old. His patience had been taxed, but he could now praise his God.

The Word Explains the Act

Naturally the curious people now surround the two Apostles and the man who has been healed. This hour of prayer has turned into something unexpected, but also into something great—an opportunity for the Apostles to preach the gospel to them. That healing was, of course, important to the man on whom it was performed, but that was not its real importance. The man's name isn't even mentioned. All the emphasis has to fall on the preaching which accompanied

this miracle. Peter reproves the people for being amazed at this miracle and for looking at these Apostles as though they have done it. He says, "We didn't do it!" He preaches to them in a manner similar to the one he employed on the day of Pentecost. He reminds them of the God of the Patriarchs. Those were the ancestors who were held in highest honor in Israel. The people have to realize that the God of the Patriarchs is the Father of Jesus! This connection which they had not seen before, is crucial. The same God who was worshipped by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has glorified His child Jesus! That is the way in which the Old and New Testaments are related!

The Personal Application

As he had done on Pentecost Day, so now Peter accuses them of the crime of crucifying Christ. "You delivered Him up and you denied Him before Pilate when he was ready to release Him." Pilate did not know what to do with Him because he knew that Jesus was blameless of the crimes they alleged against Him. But, in that crucial moment, "you made up the mind of Pontius Pilate. You denied the Holy and Righteous One and asked for the murderer Barabbas! You were as guilty of His death as Pilate. You killed Him but God raised Him from the dead. We are witnesses of the resurrection, and, if you won't believe that, you see this man standing before you healed whose healing is proof of the living Christ. Jesus did it; we didn't. Faith was given to this man in the name of Jesus and by that name he was healed." There is nothing magical here. No, faith was required and he received it at the proper time.

Peter now softens his words somewhat. He says that he realizes that they denied and killed the Christ in ignorance "as did also your rulers." Ignorance is no defense against the law (Numbers 15:27), but it surely makes a big difference whether they sin with "the high hand" or if they do so in ignorance. "Unwittingly you fulfilled the prophecies." God had spoken through the prophets that the Messiah should suffer. This does not absolve them of blame and Peter therefore counsels them to repent and turn from the path they have walked to the right way shown them in the Scriptures. Many believe that Peter now refers to the second coming of Christ. However, I do not believe this to be the best explanation. Seasons of refreshing will come when Israel repents. Christ has come to them—they did not receive Him—He will come again through the preaching of the Apostles. They must remember that Jesus will reside in the heavens until all things are restored.

Again the Apostle draws on the teaching of the Old Testament. The Spirit has given him insight into the word of God so that he is able to apply it to the Christ and to the times in which he is living. Moses, the hero of Israel, had spoken of the Christ to come, "This is the great Prophet like me who shall come." Israel had not always obeyed Moses, but they had better obey the great Prophet coming after Moses, or they will be destroyed. All the prophets have spoken of

these days. "God didn't just give you Bible stories. He revealed Himself and His coming Son through the word. You must remember that you are the sons of the prophets and of the covenants. All the nations were to be blessed by Israel. Therefore God sent His Son to you first. You were to receive the first blessing. You must therefore turn away from your iniquity so that you may become a blessing to all the nations of the world." All the promises of God are yea and amen in Christ!

The Arrest

What will be the result of this preaching of the word? Notice, no one stumbles over the miracle which was performed, but they indeed stumble over the preaching of the gospel. The priests, the teachers of Israel and those who are in the temple at the hour of prayer, together with the captain of the temple, a priest with a special duty to guard the sacredness of this holy place, and the Sadducees fell upon them. Especially the latter are very displeased that they had preached the resurrection of the dead through Jesus because the Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection. The others are also displeased. The priests are the ones chosen for the task of instructing the people and that is a task which may not just be taken by others. In a way they are acting responsibly. They had been charged with keeping the teaching of Israel pure and they were to discipline those who did not do so (Deut. 13:13-14). There is no time this day to determine what is at stake, so they imprison them for the night and will look at the case again in the morning. But, the gospel also has a different effect. Many believed. The number now becomes about 5,000!

The Trial

The following day the council, the Sanhedrin, comes together to give judgment. A few names of these rulers are mentioned. Although we know nothing of the last two, Annas and Caiaphas are well known to us. Here is also an instance of the spiritual decline of Israel. Annas *had been* highpriest, and his *son-in-law* was now highpriest. Although in Israel the highpriest was to serve until his death and then his son was to succeed him, the office had now become a political plum. Their inquiry is interesting. They ask by what name or power they have done this. Strange questioning! But, it is important to them because wonders might only be done in the name of God!

Peter makes good use of the occasion presented him. He is filled by the Spirit. He is polite. Is the charge that we have cured a cripple? Is this the question? Is the question how this man was made whole? I will tell you. This man has received healing through the name of Jesus Christ. Again: you crucified Him and God raised Him from the dead. The Apostle again refers to a well-known passage of the Psalms and applies it to Christ. Although you, the builders, rejected this stone—it was worthless in your eyes—God has taken and used it at a very prominent place in the building of His kingdom. He made this rejected stone the corner stone. This is the only name in which there is healing and salvation. There is no other saving name!

This council is in a very difficult place. In the first place, they are not able to understand that unschooled men have such boldness. Where did they get this articulation? They realize that they have been and still are with Jesus. He is the One who has given them understanding. In the second place, they have to admit that a great miracle has taken place.

To deny this would be irrational. All the people have seen this man too. But, thirdly, if this goes any farther, what will happen to all that which we hold dear? The counsel which comes out of this kind of situation is usually not very good. They should have cried to these Apostles: "Men, brethren, what must we do?" Instead they *threaten* them, "Do not speak in this name again!" In other words, "You may heal, but you may not preach!" They are not afraid of the healing—but that word! Peter and John simply refuse this way out. These rulers surely ought to be able to judge whether a person should obey men rather than God. The answer to that question is very simple. God has told them to speak in this name!!! This is difficult for these rulers, but there can be no charges against them. So, they have to let them go. They must also live with the people!

The Prayer

When these two "pillars of the church" come to the company of the believers they unite in prayer. They have not been frightened by the rulers of the people. Instead, they see in that which has happened to them a fulfillment of Psalm 2. The rulers are raging and are imagining vain things against the Lord and against His Anointed. Right in this city, Jerusalem, the city of God, these things are being fulfilled. They now pray earnestly for boldness and faithfulness in preaching the word of God and the name of Jesus Christ. This prayer lies at the basis of every reformer's work. They also pray that signs and wonders may accompany the preaching of the gospel. These are the aids of the gospel. They open the way for the gospel to be heard.

Did the Lord hear this prayer? They don't have to wait for an answer. The place where they met shook. This is not a second Pentecost, but the author tells us specifically that they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. This Spirit enables them to speak the word with boldness. That is the need of the early church, and of the church of all ages.

Questions for discussion:

1. Should healing always accompany the preaching of the word? How would you answer faith-healers?
2. Why were the disciples able to do miracles in the early days of the church which we cannot do today? Is our inability a sign of lack of faith? What purpose did these miracles serve?
3. Where does the emphasis lie in this passage, on the healing or on the preaching?
4. How does Peter's sermon and his defense show us how the Old Testament must be used?
5. How does one obtain boldness in speaking the truth of God?
6. Why do the rulers threaten them when they know the Apostles are right? Is this typical of unbelief?

THE LIFE OF THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 4

Acts 4:32-5:16

The life of the early church was difficult but beautiful. Almost immediately the rulers of the people laid hands on the believers. Some were imprisoned. Soon some would pay for their faith with their lives. However, the life in the church was also very beautiful, and many, in later times, have longed for the type of life enjoyed by the early Christians. There was an unmarred unity for a while. The church soon took the center position in their lives. Everything was beautifully simple!

Real Unity

As the multitude of people came together they were "of one heart and soul." This fact in itself would surely impress all those who did not belong to their company. Where is this world ever able to find such unity? However, this unity is broadened out. It is not only spiritual but it also reveals itself in other ways. At the close of the second chapter we already read of the fact that the believers had all things common and this is now reiterated. Of course, not much time had elapsed between the time of the second chapter and that which is recorded here. But, they kept it up! It was not a fleeting way of life.

Right in the middle of the discussion of the community of goods, Luke now tells us that the Apostles witnessed to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the most important element in the life of the early church. It is essentially a mission church. This means that powerful preaching must characterize it. Grace was upon them all to receive the word preached and to live lives accordingly.

There was no lack in any household. It is the ideal state of the people of Israel of which Moses had spoken in Deut. 15:4. Those who had possessions simply sold them for the benefit of those who did not have enough. Lands and houses were sold. People "rob" themselves to benefit the body of believers. The proceeds from the sales is laid at the feet of the Apostles and it is left to them to distribute these monies as the need arises. They keep doing this. What a beautiful relationship! Is it too good to last?

Now the author gives us an actual example of this kind of behavior. There was this man Joseph, later known as Barnabas, who sells his property and brings it to the Apostles for the welfare of the church. A Levite might not own property in Israel (the Lord was his inheritance) except in foreign lands or in the 48 cities which had been given them together with the surrounding land (Numbers 18:20-24 and Numbers 35:1-8). It is not enough that we simply make reference to Old Testament texts, because many of the rules of the past were no longer observed. The emphasis here, however, rests on his love and generosity. He was indeed a "Son of consolation." He was "an Israelite in whom there was no guile." He is a beautiful exhibition of love in the life of the early church. How different the spirit was only a short time later in Corinth! But, here it did not last very long either. In chapter six we have quite a different picture.

Fraud Enters

One must not receive the impression that the life of the early church gives us a picture of people who are nearing perfection. Far from it. There is real evil in the hearts of some of those who belong to the early church and this is a far greater danger than the persecution from without. The desire for honor and plain human greed is found among the earliest members of the church. The names of Ananias and Sapphira will go down in infamy in the history of the church. People such as Barnabas were held in honor. All the people were grateful to such people because they alleviated the needs of others. Ananias and Sapphira also have property. "Let us sell it and give it for the welfare of the church. Yet, not all of it but only a part. Who has to know that it is only a part?" The spirit of Judas has not died with him. They bring this certain part of the sale to the Apostles. However, Peter has such a measure of the Spirit that he is able to recognize the evil which is being done. These people are acting like Achan, and this would affect the entire church.

When the money is brought to the Apostles Ananias receives neither praise nor thanks. Instead there are several probing questions. Why has Satan filled your heart to do this? Don't say: the devil made me do it! This is a trick of some sick spirituality. Peter tells his readers in his first epistle to withstand the devil (I Peter 5:19). That can be done. Ananias did not do it. He allowed Satan to influence him and to take over so that he now lies to God! In verse 3 the Apostle speaks of the lie against the Holy Spirit and in the following verse he says that they have lied to God. Here is another clear proof of the deity of the Holy Spirit.

In verse 4 the questions continue. Each question is as a hammer blow. While the property was yours you were not compelled to do anything with it. Peter does not speak of compulsory giving. Even after he sold it he could do with the proceeds whatever he pleased. He could keep all of it, he could give part of it or all of it. But, don't lie about it and say that you are bringing the whole sum to the church when this is not the case! How could you ever attempt to do such a thing?

God's Judgment and Discipline

Ananias had come to the Apostles thinking that he too would be placed in the category of those who were held in honor in the church and at the same time they would be able to enjoy part of the proceeds of the sale for themselves. No one can do this. When he heard the accusatory questions of Peter, it became evident that he was fooling no one. Instead, he falls dead at the Apostle's feet. Is the punishment too severe? Some think so. Great fear comes over all the people. They had all been witnesses to that which happened. Some of the younger men who are members of the church take up the body and bury it immediately.

About three hours later Sapphira comes to the meeting of the assembly. She doesn't know what has happened. No one was sent to inform her. She is asked by Peter whether they had indeed sold the property for the sum which had been brought to Peter. He gives her an opportunity to back out. She has the opportunity to repent. Are there no warning bells ringing in her mind and heart when she hears this question? Seemingly not. They have consented together to pull off this deceit. How is it possible that they have agreed together to "try the Spirit of the Lord?" No one can do this with impunity. The young men who have buried your husband are ready to carry you out! Again, very severe punishment. Seemingly the same young men who buried Ananias now have the second burial of the day because she falls dead at the Apostle's feet. Again we read that great fear came upon all, i.e., upon the whole church and all who heard about it. Everything had been so beautiful until now. The people must realize that they are dealing with holy things. Their own history has made it very clear what happens to those who lose sight of the holiness of the things of God. Nadab and Abihu lay false or strange fire on the Altar and die. Uzzah seeks only to steady the ark and dies. God is a consuming fire.

Separation and Growth

But, let *fear* not be the dominating trait in the life of the early church. The author goes on immediately to speak of all the signs and wonders which were done by the hands of the Apostles. The people all came together at Solomon's porch. They sought each other's company. Being the true church, they sought the communion of saints.

However, let no one mistake the true nature of the church. We now read the remarkable statement that of the rest no one dared to join the church. Where have you ever heard of such a thing? These people realize that this church is one that has to be taken seriously. It is not a club. It is a very dangerous institution. Everything is not all love and peace in that church. Its fellowship is also a very dangerous place. Fire flies out of that church! Where the true word is brought; where the Spirit of God reigns; there is the true church, the true body of Christ. The experience of Ananias and Sapphira lingers long in the minds of the people.

Although "of the rest no one dared to join the church," the church did not cease to grow. Some have thought that Luke is here speaking in contradictions when he says that believers were the more added to the Lord. This is not a contradiction; it is the natural outcome. Many do not dare join the church because they are afraid. No one may trifle with this church. This, however, does not restrict true believers from joining her. Because the church is the church, multitudes are added! Large groups of both men and women join the church which has the true preaching of the word and which exercises true discipline. This the true believer wants and must have. The church has been founded to supply precisely those needs.

The miracles which were done by the Apostles must have been without number. Such miraculous powers accompany Peter's work that people are placed in those places where

he might walk so that his shadow may pass over them. He doesn't even have to touch them. The tenor of the passage leads us to believe that these were healed. They even bring people from distances outside of Jerusalem to receive healing at the hands of the Apostles. They had prayed for this (Acts 4:30) and their prayer was answered.

What an influence went out from that early church! Soon persecution will drive them away from Jerusalem, but Jerusalem will know that mighty deeds have been done in her and that all these deeds stem from the person of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom she crucified and whom God raised from the dead!

Questions for discussion:

1. How does Luke make it clear that the community of goods was not the most important thing in the church but rather the preaching of the word?
2. In how far are we to "rob" selves for the benefit of the church?
3. Is compulsory giving ever approved in Scripture? Give reasons.
4. Why were Ananias and Sapphira punished so severely while many of those who commit similar sins later were not?
5. Is anyone afraid to join the church today? Should they be?
6. How does the present day church measure up to the early church? Are the differences important?

Early Human Development

Aaldert Mennega

On January 22, 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court made the infamous decision which made abortion-on-demand a legal national policy. On the basis of several grounds this policy has been judged to be wrong. Putting aside all other considerations, what can we say, from a biological point of view, about human life before birth that will help to understand the issues more clearly?

That babies are well-formed later in pregnancy is well known to everyone. We know that, when babies are born prematurely, all the body parts are there and function well, so that many "premies" survive and proceed to live productive lives. Obviously, neither prematurely born babies nor full term babies suddenly form the day before birth.

But what do we know about the earlier stages of human development, during the first few weeks of life? Is the embryo or fetus then only a "blob of tissue" as some have claimed? Let us take a look at the very beginning.

F.R. Lillie says in his book *Problems of Fertilization*:

"...The elements that unite [i.e., the sperm and egg-AM] are single cells, each on the point of death; but by their union a rejuvenated individual is formed which constitutes a link in the "eternal" process of life."

What a thought, that from the seemingly hopeless destinies of two cells a new entity forms, with a new, dynamic future! This is the beginning of a new individual.

Through cell division this one cell gives rise to more and more cells, not just to form a homogeneous mass, but to grow gradually into the very specialized structures which make up a new baby.

About three to four days after fertilization a number of special features are already visible, and soon definite germ layers are established from which organs are formed. For example, at 18 days, when the embryo is about 1.5 mm long, the neural plate is already present which gives rise to such organs as the brain and the eye. And at 21 days the heart is formed and is pumping blood through well-formed blood vessels, circulating it all around. And then, in the fourth week we see not only the heart beating, but the eyes and ears begin to develop; arm and leg buds appear; and the embryo grows up to 4 mm in length (which is only as long as the thickness of four dimes stacked on top of each other). This new individual is quite tiny at this time, yet it shows strikingly clear structures, even before the first month of development has been completed.

Our conclusion on the basis of these facts must be that the embryo is indeed a highly structured individual, right from the beginning.

As time goes on, more organs form. When at the end of two months all organs are present, the embryo is called the fetus. Even individual fingers and toes are present at this time. And elements of the vertebral column are beginning to form.² The only thing that still has to happen is that these organs have to grow bigger and learn to do what they are supposed to do. Muscles must be strengthened, specific nerve connections must be made, etc.

It goes without saying, therefore, that at no time can we say that the embryo or fetus is "only a blob of tissue." Anyone who would maintain this, whether a doctor or a lay person, is ignorant of the facts. We are definitely and incontrovertibly dealing with a new human individual with very definite human features.

This new human life is a precious gift from God. He is the Creator. And in God's Word we read very clearly that human life is sacred. We may not take it or disrupt its development, either before or after birth.

A question which often comes up asks, "When does human life begin?" In other words, when does this "thing" become a human life? Clearly we are dealing with human life right from the start. First of all, it is *human* because it could not possibly be a kangaroo, a robin, a frog or anything else. It could only be human. Its DNA, inherited from human parents, can spell out the development of only human offspring. All the information is present from the time of fertilization. And secondly, it is *life*, because it is living. If it were not living no one would have to worry about getting rid of it, since it would then abort spontaneously anyway.

Another question asks whether the mother has a right to her own body. And the answer is that, of course, she has the right to her body. But she does not have the right to do to the body of her baby as she pleases. The embryo or fetus is *not part* of her body, even though it grows inside her womb. Of course, she had the right to decide whether or not to conceive. But once conception has occurred she may no longer choose not to be pregnant.

However, what can a mother do when she finds that she is pregnant but really does not want to have the baby? First of all, she ought to carry the baby to full term. This is better for her own bodily and mental health. She is less likely to have health problems or to develop severe psychological scars. And it has the obvious benefit that the baby will be allowed to live.

Secondly, and very importantly, there are a number of people who are willing to help the mother, both during and after pregnancy.

For example, there is *Birtheright*, which is a group of people whose creed is that 1) every mother has the right to give birth; and 2) every baby has the right to be born. This *Birtheright* organization offers a viable alternative to abortion by encouraging the mother to bear the baby, and by helping to find financial and medical help to do so.

Anyone interested in the services of *Birtheright* can find the address and telephone number in the telephone directory. Usually collect calls are accepted by them.

This group of people is a private, independent organization of volunteers. They keep no records, and their services are strictly confidential.

The best alternative to abortion is, of course, *adoption*. There are many families who would gladly adopt a baby,

and give it a good home and lots of love. It is also reassuring that Christian adoption agencies make it a real point to place the baby into the kind of family that the mother specifies. We know that adopted children bring much happiness and joy to a home. And for the mother it is a great comfort to know that her baby is adopted into a good family. This can give her real peace, and avoid those gnawing guilt feelings which abortion often brings.

Human life is precious, not only before birth, but also after birth, all the way through old age. Whether an infant is normal, or abnormal in some way, the life of the child is precious. And when people get old and do not contribute extensively to the activities of the community any more, their life, too, is still precious. They still have a lot to give to those with whom they associate. They can be a real blessing when given a chance to share with us the wisdom they have gathered over the years. Let us, therefore, respect life, from beginning to end. ●

1. Lilly, F. R., 1919. Problems of Fertilization. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

2. Moore, K. L. 1977. The Developing Human. Saunders, Philadelphia. Dr. Aaldert Mennega is a Professor of Biology at Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa.



Dealing with Ethnic Difference

Canadian-U.S. Differences

The July 15, 1985 *Banner* featured a remarkably illuminating article by Robert S. Fortner dealing with the differences between Canadian and U.S. policies regarding television. These differences reflect, in part, a difference between the ways in which the two countries deal with their ethnic groups. Unlike the U.S. "Canada wants to provide a separate Canadian cultural identity to each large group within its diverse people." "Therefore, unlike U.S. television, CBC focuses on including the many groups who make up bilingual and multicultural Canada. And since Canada's many groups retain their individual ethnic qualities, CBC's concern to present ethnic groups authentically on television is stronger than is that concern in the United States."

These observed differences are bound to strike anyone who has lived or traveled extensively in both countries. A visitor

to Toronto is impressed by the obviously diverse ethnic neighborhoods in that metropolis. And anyone who has lived in English Canada is in for even more of a shock when he first visits Quebec. In our observation, one who is rather limited to the English language may have a much easier time traveling in the various countries of Europe than he will in Quebec. The notion of a Federal judge monitoring a school to ensure that the numbers of English and French students fall within certain percentages in the way that some judges do exercise that kind of control in seeking to achieve a certain mix of black and white in some of our city schools would be ludicrous in Canada. Canada has had to learn to live with enormous ethnic differences between its provinces, and has been doing so in a way that is markedly different from what we know south of the border. Whether or not we like that difference, we are hardly in a position to make a critical judgment of it.

Criticizing South Africa

More than ever in recent days the news has been focusing attention on South Africa. TV newsmen, ever seeking something sensational, have been highlighting police efforts to stop rioting in some parts of that country. And many congressmen and clergymen have been indulging in what has long been a Liberal hobby of maligning the South African government, or "Bashing the Boers," as a recent *Wall Street Journal* called it, in this case seeking sanctions if that government does not immediately desist from using force to stop the rioting, arson, looting and murder that some blacks are perpetrating on others.

Rather frequently mentioned in the news as an example of government repression is the prolonged imprisonment of Nelson Mandela. An article in the Dutch paper *Getrouw*, points out that he had been offered his freedom if he would promise to refrain from violence. This, Mandela refused to do. The article recalled the generally overlooked reason why he was imprisoned. In 1963 a guerilla outfit was rounded up with an arsenal of 210,000 hand grenades, 48,000 land mines, about 50 tons of explosives (enough to destroy the city of Johannesburg) and a list of 106 targets including police stations, communications offices and the homes of black policemen. Nelson Mandela, a leader of the banned African National Congress, was one of the ten who were charged in this affair. He confessed to three of the four charges of breaking the law against communism and admitted aiming at the violent overthrow of the government. His writings had been advocating revolution rather than reform. He had written, "We of the Communist Party are the most advanced revolutionaries of modern history..." After citing a number of such details from the March 1, 1985, *South African Digest*, the *Getrouw* writer remarks dryly that all this must be overlooked to describe Mandela today as merely "democratically oriented."

That the apartheid system is unjust and needs correction is being more and more widely recognized, not least in South Africa, where significant changes are being made. How to make these changes without destroying the whole country in a blood bath as one black tribe fights another for control, as such tribes have been doing in other parts of Africa (without much outside criticism), is the question which almost no U.S. critic of South Africa faces.

The August 2 *Wall Street Journal* article already mentioned pointed out, "The present crisis pretty much got under way when the leftist TransAfrica, Inc. stirred up public temper in the U.S. Only later did the conflagration spread to South Africa, where it was orchestrated in part by the African National Congress, a socialist outfit that eschews moderation for radicalism. An especially ugly part of the recent violence in South Africa is the killing of black moderates by black radicals."

Minding Our Own Business

The conclusion of the article seems appropriate: "Throwing official sanctions into this tinderbox scarcely strikes us as a prudent way to avert or at least postpone a South African ineluctable. Trying to reform apartheid is a delicate task of diplomacy, and the Congress ought to leave it to the executive branch, at least until it has dealt with the domestic problems the Constitution defines as its business."

The final remark about the U.S. Congress needing to "mind its own business" applies with even greater force to the performance of our June CR Synod regarding such matters. Our Church Order stipulates that, the "assemblies shall transact ecclesiastical matters only, and shall deal with them in an ecclesiastical manner" (Art. 28). In the light of that principle, consider that the synod devoted a reported nine hours of futile floor debate to discussing South Africa, while it dismissed in about 15 minutes the over 50 properly presented and Biblically based protests against last year's decision about women in office. It made that decision after delegate Edward Knott had pointed out that the grounds advanced for that proposed dismissal were obviously false! Recall too that a carefully prepared Biblical case against universalistic views which the Lethbridge church, upon classes' instructions, brought to the synod was brushed aside with less than two minutes of attention on the floor of the assembly!

When the church disregards our Biblical guide, even the common sense requirements that we "mind our own business" no longer seems to restrain our follies. (That requirement, it should not be forgotten, is also Biblical [Cf. Prov. 26, 17; 1 Peter 4:15]. Applied to matters such as distinguishing church from state business, it is really the principle which our fathers called "sphere sovereignty".) We, as churches, as well as individuals, badly need to get back to the Bible and to minding our own business. PDJ