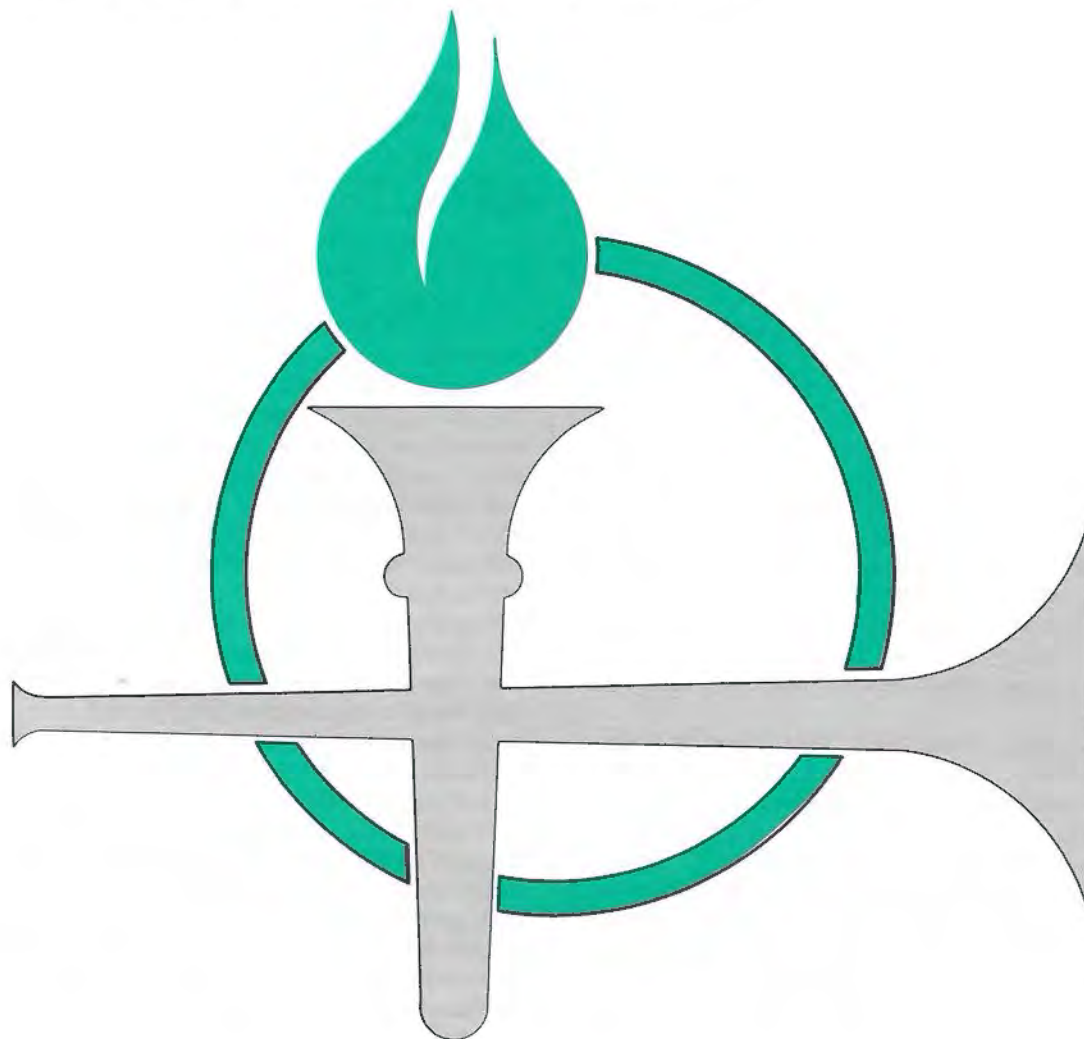


THE OUTLOOK

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

NOVEMBER 1985



TALE OF TWO PREACHERS
WHAT IS REFORMED
SOUTH AFRICAN CRISIS

Bridges to Islam

BRIDGES TO ISLAM: A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON FOLK ISLAM by Phil Parshall, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1983, 163 pp. Review by Frederick W. Evans.

Building on his widely-discussed work, *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism*, Phil Parshall has offered *Bridges to Islam*. Its main contention is that "Folk Islam," especially as represented by Sufism, presents evangelical Christianity with a signal opportunity for successful evangelism—if only missionaries and national workers in Islamic lands will change their methodology, adapting it to Muslim thought-patterns and worship-practices. Throughout there is the disavowing of any attempt to be syncretistic in matters of essential doctrine.

Much that Parshall has to say in *Bridges*, as earlier in *New Paths*, is well-taken. The "compound mentality," which dominated missionary activity in certain lands of the Orient, often worked against effective cross-cultural communication. The paternalism of much missionary work and its linkage with colonialism did not always reflect accurately either the integrity of the Gospel or the universality of the Christian Church. (In candor, it should be pointed out that liberal missionaries were, as a group, more committed to Westernization than were their evangelical counterparts.) Nor can it be denied that some missionaries, consciously or unconsciously, did not have a proper appreciation of the people to whom they had gone. It is one thing, however, to develop a high regard for Muslims as human beings, bearing, albeit defaced, the image of God and quite another thing to give large approval to certain aspects of the religion of Islam, even in its more tolerant Sufi form. This, it would seem is the error that Parshall is courting. He is so eager to build bridges of understanding and witness that he obscures the witness, based on a true understanding of Gospel issues, that needs to be given. He is so taken with some of his Sufi friends that he appears reluctant to recognize the demonic elements which are to be found in the Sufi experience and, indeed, in orthodox Islam as well.

This is not to say that Parshall gives blanket approval to Sufi belief—with its pan-entheism and goal of absorption into Allah—or to Sufi practice—with its veneration of saints (pirs), its chanting of the names of Allah (dhikr), its mystical ecstasies, etc. However, in his zeal to find something 'bridgeable' in virtually everything Sufi, he tends to ignore the very real chasms which cannot be bridged. (Could this be why Christ never used the bridge-figure, although the Gospel records abound in other similes?) Thus he finds "parallels" of the Sufi "mystical experience and that of the Christian who is also seeking illumination and closeness to God" (p. 63). Thus he speaks of "dhikr" or Sufi chanting as something that "can be used as a vehicle to come to know God" (p. 82). Thus he suggests that Sufi "saints" may "intercede in much the same manner that Christ does for the believer" (p. 128).

In short, Parshall's personal openness to Muslims, which is commendable, leads him to turn a blind eye to the Sufi brand of Islam in particular and 'Folk Islam' in general. For example, he tells of joining a Muslim friend at prayer time, putting down mats and kneeling beside him as the friend prayed the prescribed prayers, which he followed up with his own prayer in Jesus' Name, adding, "My friend is deeply impressed that I will pray with him. . . . There is an appreciation that I too sincerely want to know and follow God" (pp. 127, 8). Again, he writes of going up to a bearded Muslim sitting by the roadside and purchasing an amulet from him. Seemingly without qualification he goes on to say of the man, "He gave a beautiful prayer for my health and told me to always wear the amulet close to my body" (p. 137).

What shall we say of a missionary who protests his devotion to Christ and his loyalty to an inerrant Bible and yet who announces, "Recently I attended a three-hour meeting (of Sufis) that contained little that I could criticize" (p. 101)? What shall we think of an avowed Christian who responds positively to "beautiful chanting in a language most of the people attending could not understand," to the first speaker of the evening who "gave a sermonette on the offering of

Abraham's son... with pungency" (pp. 101, 2), Abraham's son for the Muslim being Ishmael and not Isaac? What shall be our response to Parshall when he justifies "the frequent references (in the meeting) to the prophets and their teaching" and "other religious men" by likening it to an "average Christian meeting in the West" where "Paul and John... are mentioned as men who are authorities on religious issues" (p. 102)? For a committed Christian to mention the inerrant Scriptures in the same breath with all manner of Muslim writings is to have taken leave of his senses. Discernment is abandoned in the name of love.

True, Parshall continues, "I am forced to disagree with important areas of substance" (p. 103). He admits earlier that "folk Islam is an erroneous system" (p. 19). Yet he cannot "fault these men for their methodology or overall aims" because "they want to know God" (pp. 102, 3). Here, perhaps, is the 'Achilles heel' in Parshall's whole approach. Throughout he assumes that Sufi Muslims are sincere seekers after God. Of the Sufi he writes, "The mystic, above all, wants to know his Beloved" (p. 118). While we would not dispute the incurable religiosity of fallen men, we must question, on Scriptural grounds, any innate seeking of the living God of the Bible whether by earnest Muslims or nominal Christians (Ps. 14:2, Rom. 3:11). Failure to see that the complete initiative in illumination and conversion is from God's side has become a characteristic flaw of modern-day evangelicalism.

If it be true that salvation is altogether of the Lord, then both substance and method must be of Him. The Scriptural teaching regarding Jehovah must not be confused with the Quranic teaching regarding Allah, which Parshall seems prone to do in his bridge-building proposal that Allah's ninety-nine names are worthy of meditation. Nor must the mediatorial work of Christ be likened to the role of Muhammad in "Folk Islam" (p. 128). Nor must those professing faith in the Lord Jesus of the New Testament be described as "followers of Isa," the merely human prophet of Muslim belief. Granting that peculiarly Western ways of evangelizing and worshipping are not incumbent on other parts of the world, still evangelism and worship in the East dare not do violence to Biblical principles nor give the impression that there really is no great difference between the Christian and non-Christian ways of viewing and doing things.

As Phil Parshall attributes worthy aims to his Sufi friends, so let us freely acknowledge his worthy goal of desiring to reach Muslims for Christ. Regrettably he skirts the precipice of syncretism and sometimes falls over the brink. His focusing on "Folk Islam" as his target group is no doubt considered good missionary strategy. But what if his methodology did achieve a major breakthrough among the seventy percent of the Muslim population he estimates to be heavily influenced by Muslim animism and mysticism? There would still remain the thirty percent who are committed to Islamic orthodoxy. Our commission is to these highly resistant people as well. We should not suppose that they will be attracted by, much less cross over, syncretistic bridges. Strong in their misplaced trust, they can only be won by forthright—and loving—proclamation, not by equivocating—and sentimental—dialogue. In Peter Berger's words, "Ages of faith are marked, not by dialogue, but by proclamation." ●

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THE OUTLOOK

(USPS 633-980)



Published Monthly

July-August Issue Combined

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

JOURNAL OF REFORMED FELLOWSHIP, INC.

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

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

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

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

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

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THE OUTLOOK

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The Secret of Contentment

John Blankespoor

"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want" (Phil. 4:12).

Paul had learned a secret. And what a blessed secret it was—contentment! Secrets are usually things that are hidden from the general public, or are beyond our comprehension. Generally we learn to know them when somebody tells us about them, often in confidence. But Paul had *learned* his secret. We can be sure that he didn't learn this secret overnight. Likely it was learned over a period of time, through godly living guided by God's Word and prayer.

The apostle wrote this about himself when he was in prison, likely in Rome. It is commonly thought that the epistles of Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon were written during this imprisonment. They are sometimes called the Prison Epistles.

He speaks of having been in want, to the point of being hungry for some periods of time. Probably this refers primarily to the time of this imprisonment. He thanks the Philippians for having remembered him while in this great need, by sending gifts of food and perhaps other physical necessities. It was in this context that he speaks of having learned to know what it means to be in want. This may also refer to other experiences in his life. II Cor. 11:23-27 sheds light on several experiences of need.

Five times I received from the Jews forty lashes minus one. Three times I have been beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea; I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own country-men, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea, and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

Paul knew what it meant to be "in want." But, the apostle continues, he also knew what it meant to have plenty. He doesn't elaborate on this. "Enough" for Paul likely meant

clothing, the necessary foods, perhaps less than three meals per day, a simple shelter, sometimes a tent—no automobiles, electricity, running water or inside bathrooms.

It is almost impossible for us to imagine how those people lived, and what their daily "needs" were. When Paul says that at times he had plenty it can only mean that he had more, perhaps much more of these things than were considered necessary. Normal living standards in those days were far below ours. Having plenty of those primitive necessities surely would not make us feel that we were "rich."



In this season we celebrate Thanksgiving Days in both the U.S. and Canada. We should be grateful that, even though our countries are not what they should be in many ways, their governments still set aside such days. In the United States this was begun by the Pilgrim Fathers. Abraham Lincoln was the first President to make Thanksgiving Day a national holiday.

The Day is set aside to thank the Lord for material gifts, originally for the crops received in the past season. Paul speaks first of all of being in want. While many of our people don't know what that means, others, such as those who lived in Europe during the last World War, do. Many of our ancestors knew what it meant to be in want even when there was no war. Many farmers today are in desperate financial need. Perhaps there has never been as big a contrast as there is today between many needy people living in farming communities and others living in prosperous industrial areas. Thanksgiving Day is on the calendar for all of us. How can the needy be thankful for things they have not received? In view of the big contrast between those in need and those who have much, this text of Paul is very appropriate. He speaks exactly of these two opposites.

In considering such opposites, we must, however, be careful. We must not have what has been called "the two pile concept." According to this way of thinking, there is a pile of bad things in life and one of good things. The pile

of bad things consists of all the things that were or are against us, a poor crop for the farmer, low prices, high interest rates, no work, sickness, unusual expenses and other adversities. The pile of good things consists of the "more than we need" things, good crops, good prices, plenty of work, good business returns and ever so many more that are in the category of prosperity. Christians often assume that if the pile of good things is bigger than the one of bad things we really have reasons to be thankful. But what must those Christian people who have a small pile of good things think? Hasn't the Lord blessed them? Or has He blessed them less than those who have received much? Remember there have been and still are many Christians in that class of the "less fortunate." Job was there, David knew what it meant to be there, as did millions of other people of God in history. Doesn't the Lord often try and chastise His people, also with a lack of material things?

The Heidelberg Catechism addresses both classes or conditions of people, those in adversity and in prosperity. We must practice patience in adversity and be thankful in prosperity. Paul also speaks of both conditions in this passage, "being in want" and "having plenty." *He had learned to be contented even in dire need.*

It is very important that when we are in need and difficulties, we see that these conditions are from the Lord. He controls all things and very commonly tries His people with adverse experiences. Christians often fail to see "behind all their problems" the hand of their heavenly Father. And that's where we must begin if we are going to deal with our problems by the grace of God. Today the hard-pressed farmer must learn to do this. Believing that our Father is in control of the adversities, we realize that they really are for our good. Being patient or contented means that we submit ourselves to His all-wise and loving providence and wait for His time for improvement. This demands that we persist in faith and godly living. We must cling to the promise of Romans 8:28 that all must work together for good to those that love God. This Paul remembered. Thus he could say from the heart that in all circumstances he had learned the Christian art of contentment.

Paul also knew what it meant for a Christian to have plenty. This, too, took faith. In some of the older Bible versions we read that he knew "how to abound." For this, also, one must live close to God!

What does it mean to be contented when we have plenty and are prosperous? First of all, it means that our *primary goal* in life is not to have an abundance of these earthly goods. Naturally we must work and assume our normal responsibilities. But money and riches are not our *primary goals*. The temptation of many rich is to make materialism their god. To many of them the old adage applies, "the more they have the more they want." Well-to-do people are often not contented people. Money does not bring happiness!

To be contented like the apostle means that we do not complain about conditions that we do not like or that are adverse. We try to be satisfied and guard ourselves against being complainers. A farmer commonly complained that his crops were not big enough. One year when he had a "bumper" crop he was reminded that now he should be thankful. His reply was, "Ja, but this big crop surely is hard on the land."

Being contented also means that we thank the Lord for His bountiful gifts. We need to thank Him with our lips, with our hearts and with our gifts of money. This must be something we practice throughout our lives—not just on Thanksgiving Day with a sizeable gift. David knew how necessary this is for a believer when in Ps. 103 he spoke to his own soul, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits."

Practicing contentment means that we use our monies properly and do not misuse them, or use them only for ourselves. The Bible speaks of the rich fool, who said to himself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years, take life easy, eat, drink and be merry." That's how he used his money; that was his goal. In words of today it would likely read: "Soul, be happy and contented, you have enough money to retire, spend the whole winter in Florida and in the summer, take a trip or enjoy your summer cottage." That was the goal of his life.

It is important for us as God's people to practice Christian stewardship. There are many good Christian causes "crying" for more financial support. And there are multitudes of poor in the world. Most or nearly all of our homes are "flooded" with requests for money. Don't we get tired of seeing them in the mail? I recall a conversation in a consistory room before the church service. One of the members complained about all of those envelopes. A wise, godly elder (who practiced what he said) replied, "Why don't you use them. Then there won't be so many lying around."

The Lord wants us to make these words of Paul our own. Try to repeat with him these words, "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want." And pray for much grace to say them from the heart. Remember, "Godliness with contentment is great gain."

Paul learned this as a secret, a spiritual secret. The world does not have it and cannot learn it. It's acquired in the school of life through the faithful use of God's Word and prayer, applied by the Holy Spirit. Such secrets are not learned overnight. It takes time to practice self-discipline and self-denial needed to enjoy this kind of contentment.

Among the basic truths we have to learn is that we are in ourselves great sinners. God doesn't even owe us a living. Also that by grace alone in Christ we may be His children. And we must realize that our Father, in His wisdom and love, knows what is good for us and will make all things work together for good to those who love Him.

It takes a very steady hand to carry a cup filled to the brim.

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A Tale of Two Preachers

Richard E. Knodel

A Memorable Encounter

It was the best of times. It was the worst of times. Remember? Except in the present case, the tale concerns two preachers on a sultry Southern night in Lynchburg, Virginia. Jesse's come to town. In national terms, this is Jerry's town. But because Jerry went to Pretoria and concluded that Bishop Tutu was a phony, Jesse's come to Lynchburg. Jesse is of course, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, and Jerry is the Rev. Jerry Falwell.

To this clergyman, there is something wonderfully right about this promised confrontation. For those suckled on secularism, religion is an extraneous commodity. But in the history of thought, theology has been understood to be foundational. It was once known as the "Queen of the Sciences." Drawing an errant conclusion from the data of that science was thought to spell doom for all the others.

And so Jesse had come to town. He'd come to pick up the challenge Dr. Falwell had thrown down just a few days earlier. Even while some commentators saw these two as buffoons, Jesse and Jerry realized that the hearts and minds of America were the stakes of such combat. Indeed, one would not be overstating the case to say that the ramifications of their contest would also affect the world!

America, despite her secular confusion is still "a city upon a hill." Opinion recognizes that as goes this city, with its Puritan forebears, so goes the world. That's why the Marxists spend so much time playing out their sad little passion play here. That's why the UN's charade is not staged so much for the world, but for America. And that's why conservatives have been so incensed at the uneven bent of our national media.

But now it's Saturday evening* and Jesse's hour has arrived. Young socialists, abundantly supplied with their propaganda sheets, try to shake down the multi-racial crowd that gathers to hear Jesse speak. Aids hawk "Rainbow Coalition" pins and color portraits of Jesse. The marches that were scheduled have taken place, and the NAACP has readied their big gun.

Anticipation fills the air. Lynchburg is a small city and is unaccustomed, despite Dr. Falwell's fame, to the movements of the famous. But tonight Jesse's to speak at

the historic Court Street Baptist Church, so the quiet is broken by the bustle of the arriving audience.

As the church begins to heat up, foreboding almost unbearable temperatures later on, Pastor Donald Johnson drops the bomb. He tells the audience that he has just received a request to let Falwell speak, and that he has acceded to the request. A "hush" rises from the congregation, and he reminds them who it is that makes the decisions in Court Street. The Rev. Donald Johnson. Then he makes the first of several admonitions that the audience behave cordially. He tells them that while Court Street Baptist is not the oldest church in Lynchburg, it is the oldest where *everyone* has *always* been welcome. The locals know what that means.

After some jazz instrumentals and Black Gospel, the Jackson entourage arrives a bit more than an hour late. But Jesse's disciples cared not. They arose as one to enjoy both their hero and a certain sense that history was being made.

Of course, Jerry was there too. But this was a night for those whose hearts pulsed to the beat of the third world. As Pat Buchanan, the syndicated columnist once characterized him, Jesse Jackson represents that mentality better than any other American speaker. Yet ironically, much of Black America is *not* of this mind.

I had passed by part of this America on my way to the church. We live in one of Lynchburg's inter-racial areas, and I had walked the eight blocks to the church. As I walked, I was surprised that the vast majority of the area's Blacks seemed so untouched by Jesse's anticipated arrival. Even half an hour before starting, it was still easy to get a seat. I wondered, "Didn't these people know that *their* national leader was soon to appear? If they did, how could they not care? Didn't they feel just a little oppressed and in need of a Moses?"

But there were also plenty who sympathized with Jackson. His part of Black America stretched the church to its seams. These were the people who *knew* that racism and oppression continued. Many made their living pointing such things out.

As such, their appetite was only whetted by the Falwell announcement. While remaining somewhat subdued, according to their earlier injunction, one got the distinct feeling that

for these folks, Falwell was "The Great Racist." As such, he was the perfect foil for the Evening.

Pastor Johnson, displaying the powers of "home rule," began the preparatory speeches. We received an immediate foretaste of things to come when he declared that the South African government was "Out of Order!" And, he continued, "Unless Dr. Falwell says its out of order, *he's* out of order!"

Then Garnell Stamps, a local teacher and Black politico, really warmed the audience. "Steve Biko," he said, was arrested by the Africaner government, "Just because he disagreed." Botha's reign was "brutal." Nelson Mandela was imprisoned "for the same things Jefferson said." Then, with Falwell sitting just behind him, he shouted that "Bishop Tutu *Is Not A Phony!*" And, "Half an apology from Mr. Falwell will *Not* suffice!" By now the crowd was ripping and roaring. This is what they had come to hear!

Dr. Emmett Burns, the Regional NAACP Director from Baltimore, then turned up the heat. Speaking obliquely to Falwell he told him, "I'm *glad* you are here tonight. . . We've been *praying* for you." After an appropriate pause for his audience's joyous endorsement he added, "We prayed for Nixon Too!" "Dr. Falwell," he continued, "You are on the wrong side of a mighty moral revolution." Later he condescendingly remarked, "I forgive you. . . *but I will continue to keep my eye on you!*" He thanked Falwell for inviting Jesse to the Thomas Road Baptist Church the next morning, but then added, "If you're *really* sincere, you'll invite Bishop Tutu (to speak in your church)."

Falwell was being caricatured as "Mr. Racist," and it was obvious that the artists who were doing the drawing loved their work. But through all the pomp and innuendo, it was difficult to justify the moral superiority necessary for such remarks. As an old Klan rally might have been characterized, these folks had their "boy," and they were making sport of him.

Falwell

For his part, the Rev. Falwell was courteous and certainly courageous. The naive don't willingly climb into the arena, and undoubtedly Falwell knew the evening would be difficult. Jerry is a Lynchburg native, having lived here for fifty-two years. And he has a sincere love for the city, and all of its people. His appearance at Court Street Baptist was not so much for the media as for those people. He was speaking with his feet, declaring that the time for racism was long since past. If getting that message across meant that he would have to take his lumps, then he was ready for them.

Given a chance to speak, Dr. Falwell spoke of growing up in a Virginia that believed, "Not so much by word as deed, in white superiority." He mentioned becoming aware of this after his conversion, and repenting of it before his church. He told how he had baptized the first Black family into the Thomas Road Church. Later he spoke more aggressively, noting that 900 of his 21,000 members were Black. Hissing and slurs of "tokenism" were heard. But Falwell forged ahead, questioning whether any Black church in Virginia, with the exception of one in Roanoke, had a better proportion of integration than that.

He was not received warmly. But again, this audience was more national and liberal than local and conservative. Much as he had been received by liberal Harvard University, he was received on this night. At a number of points it appeared that Emmett Burns needed to be restrained from charging Falwell, both when he had originally entered, and as he

spoke. But Falwell kept his poise and completed his course. A number of the Black pastors present helped in this by actively working to restrain the grosser outbursts.

Jackson

Then the church thundered with applause as Jesse took the pulpit. We were no longer on the level of the local. The church was catapulted back into the national debate over apartheid and the possible American sanctions.

On the positive side, Jackson noted that perhaps "the cross is the only thing that can bring us together." He characterized Falwell's visit as a positive "challenge" to the Black community. Both he and Falwell seemed willing to accept each other's faith, if not their respective politics.

But inasmuch as Jesse had come to Lynchburg to do battle on the national level, he quickly entered that arena. He characterized his message as the "Christian alternative to Disaster." He said that knowingly or not, when Falwell went to South Africa, he gave the Botha government and the Black majority, "The wrong message." His presence, said Jackson, supported apartheid and spoke louder than any public words of explanation might.

Jackson self-consciously made a number of references to his own anti-communism. I suppose this was because of past charges. He said that, "Communism is a godless-materialistic ideology" to which he "had no affinity." The only problem with this denial was the oversimplification and misrepresentation which followed in Jackson's speech. If Jackson's efforts substantially aided and abetted the Marxist worldview, his few words of demurral gave little consolation to the conservative.

Significance

But Jackson was not alone. The Black message that was communicated on that Saturday night oversimplified so much of present world politics. If one followed them in such simplification, if only out of past sympathy for the Black man's difficulty, one played into the hands of those who would surrender the birthright of the West.

For instance, just as Marx reduced all of life to economic injustice, so Jackson and Co. reduced all to racial injustice. To them it was *clear* that the basic motive behind apartheid lay at the door of racism and Aryan superiority. To them apartheid smacked of their individually experienced incidents of racial prejudice, raised to their "nth" degree. They suspected white society of harboring such ill will toward them, and in apartheid they found that suspicion institutionalized!

But was this really the issue? Or was it an oversimplification? Put another way, let us hypothesize that the White South Africans had total confidence in South Africa's Blacks to govern fairly. Let us suppose that rampant tribalism were not a problem, and that Black Africa had not showed a naive vulnerability to Marxist intrigue and domination. It would further be presumed that not only would Blacks resist coveting the White's property, but rather would actively defend white property rights. They would not accept the Marxist lie that prosperity only comes at the expense of others.

Given such a scenario, would apartheid not be much more costly than full citizenship? If such were the case, there would be no reason to continue the burden of apartheid—*unless* pure racial hatred was its generating cause.

As such, I find it difficult to accept Jackson's premise. Tribalism is rampant. Marxism *has caught* the naive imagina-

tions of many. Covetousness and envy reign, justified by the Marxist myth of exploitation.

In South Africa, racial hatred has been more incidental than central to apartheid. A comparison could be made with present-day America. I have not been in favor of any of the Blacks who have been nominated for political office in Virginia because they are of a liberal-democratic stripe. But if a conservative Black like Thomas Sowell or Walter Williams were nominated, I would be euphoric. They would be more consistent than even the Republicans who have been nominated. My possible racial bias against present-day Black politicians is certainly more incidental than substantial. And the *substance* involves the *other* issues!

After the sum of all of Jesse's Saturday homiletics, I was left with a hunger for things unsaid. Why did Jackson so easily accept the racist thesis, and at the same time fail to answer the nagging questions relating to tribalism and Marxism? Why, when he excoriated the conservatism of Ronald Reagan, and its effects on poverty, did he fail to deal with the fact that illegitimacy and divorce are the main causes of Black poverty today?

But Jackson never rose above the simplistic. While the national media are content with this posture, conservative Americans no longer are. And it just so happens that the Rev. Jerry Falwell has given voice to this American skepticism.

Why *should* the Blacks of South Africa receive the status of majority rule? Is it merely because they exist? Are there no correlative responsibilities to citizenship like objectivity, wisdom, and moral maturity? Have the African Blacks in general, or South African Blacks in particular, demonstrated such abilities in the past? To make a short study of modern African history is to answer the question in the negative.

According to Jesse's political theology, citizenship is all or nothing. And all possible rights must be given yesterday. Whether or not the child knows how to drive the car, he must immediately be given the keys. To even consider the case or hesitate becomes a manifest sign of racial malevolence. To suggest that rights are somehow relative to responsibility and maturity automatically reveals an incipient racism.

The Real Heresy

To men like Jackson, civilization is easy. Myopically, without historical insight, he pretends that the world's people have been born with democracy and fairness in their breasts. He rejects the theological notion of original sin, and blindly denies any of its effects—except in those places he detects racism. It is there and only there that the thunder of the prophet is heard. Otherwise, all is "love" and one-worldism. "God is the Father of us all," he says. "We are all brothers." And this is why Jackson is radical in the worst sense of the word. He is heretical and plans to build a society upon his heresy. As such he joins a long list of utopian social thinkers who have smudged the pages of history.

Falwell, on the other hand, approaches life much more Biblically. He has noted that peace and prosperity are the frail commodities of those who have come to grips with the rage of the human heart. He is mature enough to have even removed himself from errant regional assumptions of his youth. And he understands that if America's rulers govern with the simplicity of "Mr. Rogers and His Neighborhood," that they will be sinfully negligent in their high duty.

Jerry understands that despite the inequities of Mr. Botha's government, that the hundreds who have fallen there, pale into insignificance besides the tens of thousands that have

fallen in lands where Black Africans already hold power. And he wonders why it is that capitalism and apparent white supremacy are the only "sins" in this ethical system? "Selectivism" sounds strangely like collectivism!

According to this farce, one can practice practically any cruelty or corruption and be acceptable. Only do not let one's transactions be associated with the Black race. For then charges of exploitation and racism will be forthcoming. Of course, if one adds the magical ingredient of hypocrisy to one's racism, as the Soviets do, then that's acceptable too! Only do not promote such ideas without clothing them in the vocabulary of the "people's revolution," or you will face frantic condemnation.

At one point in Jesse's speech, he quoted the Declaration of Independence in order to deny that government was "just for the common defense." Rather, Jackson said, "Government was for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

I doubt that very many in the audience understood the disjunction that Jackson made. Or that he had plainly staked out the land of socialism as his own with this statement. In one breath he rejected the idea of limited government, and endorsed a statism that dominates life according to some master plan.

The Issue Is Not Racism but Socialism

Instead of free men having the *opportunity* for Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness, Jackson's scheme calls for the government to *provide* these benefits! They become government guaranteed, just like our bi-yearly bankrupt Social Security System! The government must define what happiness is, and then deliver it! Historically this usually leads to tyranny, because people's definitions tend to vary, and the government's can only be imposed by force. It is an aphorism that humanistically conceived Utopias become hard-wrought hells.

As Jesse continued, jumping from one liberal program to another, one could tell that his cause was not really racism at all. Jesse is a promoter of a growing socialism, and the charge of racism is but his main tool in the promotion. America's present socialism fails to satisfy him. Even as he moans about Reagan's deficit, he propounds social schemes which make current deficit spending seem penny-ante. Jesse represents that part of the Democratic party which "hates America," and is ready to blame her before all others for the wrongs of the world. Like the leaders of NOW and the NEA, Jesse cloaks his social agenda within a limited stated purpose. But racism is not really Jesse's game. He's much more concerned about the larger project.

So, as the debate between Jesse and Jerry continues, all men should sit up and take notice. Jesse may have come to town to attract the cameras, but his goal concerns the hearts and minds of America. Jerry too has broad concerns. In this thought-crucible, South Africa provides only the latest context for an ongoing debate.

If Americans buy Jackson's trinkets because of his racial jingo, they will be much the poorer. If, on the other hand, they understand and follow Falwell, "it is a far, far better place they go to than they have been before." In this tale of two preachers, the stakes are as high as the sky. ●

*8-31-85

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Reflections on the 1985 Synod

Thomas Spriensma

I was an elder delegate at the 1985 Synod. Some of the important questions that came to my mind were: Why is there division in our denomination? What is the cause? Why so much confusion? Is there perhaps a lack of knowledge of God's Word? Is God's Word too difficult or unclear? Are we not able to comprehend it? At the Synod I came to the conclusion that the problem is much deeper. Many in the C.R.C. do not want to be in subjection to the Word of God. They are reasoning without regard to God's revealed will. Knowing God's Word and yet putting our own reasoning above it is "higher criticism."

The decision was made to change our confession, but there was no mention made of God's inspired phrase, "husband of one wife" which is found in Timothy. Our only rulebook was neglected, or silently set aside. During the debate on women in the office of deacon I made the remark that higher criticism was used. After the session a (well meaning?) pastor wanted to take me verbally to the woodshed. Could it be that some ministers have education but not much spiritual wisdom? Some have the wisdom of the new hermeneutics (which is not new at all). The serpent in the garden used a similar approach to God's Word, and through the ages it has kept coming back. Karl Barth gave some of this "wisdom" to the Reformed Churches.

At Synod we were often reminded to work in the Spirit of unity. This is wonderful, but our unity must be the result of Christian love in obedience to God's Word. "If you love me, keep my commandments!" Even the demons have unity, but their unity is not to God's glory. We must know and believe that God is sovereign. This is the only way back for our Christian Reformed Church, the only way to true Christian unity. For a long time I had a struggle with the doctrine of dual predestination. This lasted until I was convinced of the absolute sovereignty of God. As a denomination we must also be convinced of the absolute sovereignty of God, whose Word is sure and unchangeable.

In my committee we had to study the liturgical dance. Why? Are our people so happy about their salvation that they are not able to sit still in church for one hour? Or do we want entertainment? Should we replace a part of the formal worship service with the dance? Israel had the dance in the worship service on one occasion, but on that occasion they worshipped not God but the golden calf. And God was not pleased. Perhaps it would be more glorifying of God's

kingdom if we started to teach the antithesis again. We should be a people separated unto God. Psalm 1 begins, "Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of God, and on this law doth he meditate day and night." We may not drift along with the world and the spirit of the time. Often Christian liberty is interpreted wrongly in our circles. The Biblical liberty is to be set free from the condemnation of sin, to be free to serve our Saviour. By grace we are able to fight against the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh. Parents, please remember the covenant vow that you have given.

After the overtures against women deacons were voted down, a concerned pastor asked the question, "What now? What can we do?" One delegate said later, "I am sick of it and I give up!" No, brother, we are in the militant church and the battle must go on until we are in the church triumphant. Our first responsibility is to our family and our local church. The promise of the King of the church is, "be faithful and you shall receive the crown of life."

At the end of our Synod the President of Synod spoke about growing pains in the C.R.C. Is it possible that the pain is more like that of the hardening of the arteries? Not only the issue of women in church office, but the reasoning that culture and time limit the authority of God's Word; this is the basic cause of our sickness. The only remedy is the sovereign Word of God which is able to bring us back to health and unity.

I do not want to be only negative. There are also good things to report. Many wonderful Christians were at Synod, men who are faithful. We can be thankful for them. I met some of the candidates, young men with biblical convictions. This is also a reason to be thankful. We must pray for them and support them. Pray also for the editor of the *Banner*, that the Lord may give him wisdom and understanding. He has a great responsibility in our Christian Reformed Church.

Brothers, let us not be thoughtless slaves of narrow tradition; but let us neither be slaves to the opinions of men, who do not know God or love His Word. Let us be neither narrow minded nor broad minded as the world counts these things. Let us, rather, be biblically minded and subject to Christ Who is the King of His church. ●

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The Sad Story of an Overture

Edward Heerema

Classis Florida sent to Synod 1985 an overture requesting under the terms of the Form of Subscription that the Synod ask the editor of *The Banner* to give "further explanation" of some of his published views. The overture received rough treatment, and many questions remain regarding that treatment. In the interest of opening up this matter for those who are concerned about the way the church does its business and for future reference, I wish to explore some aspects of the handling of this very timely overture.

The Story In Brief

At its meeting in January of 1985 Classis Florida of the Christian Reformed Church passed the overture without dissenting vote. (For text of the overture see *The Outlook* of April 1985, pp. 10-11). The duly passed overture was promptly sent to the Stated Clerk of the denomination. The Stated Clerk had serious doubts about the propriety of the overture and drew it to the attention of the Church Polity and Program Committee, sub-committee of the denominational Synodical Interim Committee. This committee decided that the overture should not be included in the printed Agenda of Synod. This decision meant that in the judgment of the committee the overture was not a proper one and should not be dealt with by synod. Prior to the session of the Synod the full Synodical Interim Committee met and decided to leave the question of the propriety of the overture to the officers of Synod. The officers of the Synod decided that the overture met the technical requirements for an overture and therefore should be on Synod's agenda. The overture was assigned to a synodical advisory committee. This committee recommended that Synod not accede to the request of the overture, mainly on the ground that the request should be directed to the editor's calling church. Synod adopted this recommendation. The text of the overture does not appear in the *Acts of Synod 1985* even though the overture was actually placed on the agenda and was acted on by Synod.

Overture as Document and as Petition

That is in many ways a strange story, one which any serious-minded office-bearer in the church should not pass over lightly. When an overture adopted by a classis after full deliberation (also on the matter of procedure) and properly

passed on to Synod is accorded the kind of treatment the Florida overture received, the church should take notice. If the overture was rendered in abusive language or was patently irrelevant or contrary to fact, then such treatment would be understandable. But the overture could be faulted for none of these reasons.

It seems to the writer of this article that a good number of those who hand-led this overture failed to make a simple but important distinction. They failed to distinguish between the overture as *document* and the overture as *petition*. The officers of Synod 1985 saw this distinction and acted accordingly. Synod's Advisory Committee said, "The officers of Synod 1985 have declared that this overture is legally before Synod, in the formal sense that it had been duly adopted by Classis Florida and processed on time for Synod." This does not necessarily mean that the officers of Synod approved of the petition of the overture, but it does mean significantly that the overture as document was properly before Synod, and therefore an Advisory Committee processed it and Synod acted on it.

What all of this means is simply this: the Church Polity and Program Committee was in error in not placing this overture in the printed Agenda of Synod. This does not mean to suggest that those sitting on this committee acted out of malice or any other improper motive. They made what they felt was a correct judgment. But the handling of the overture by the officers of Synod and by the Synod itself clearly shows that the judgment of the Stated Clerk and of the Church Polity and Program Committee was wrong. These gentlemen said that the overture was not properly part of the agenda. Synod said that it was properly part of the agenda. In the light of these facts it is little short of astonishing to read this entry in the Index of the *Acts of Synod 1985*, "Synod sustains SIC ruling, 727-28" (p. 845). Synod did not sustain the ruling of the Synodical Interim Committee (SIC) which through its Church Polity and Program Committee judged that the overture had no place on the Synod's agenda. The Synodical Interim Committee had no authority to judge the merits of the petition of the overture, and so all talk of Synod's sustaining a SIC ruling on that score is pointless, if not misleading.

The question arising at this point is that of the extent of the authority of the Synodical Interim Committee and its

Church Polity and Program Committee in assessing the propriety of materials submitted to Synod. The history of the Florida overture seems to suggest that some clear guidelines are needed. It would seem clear that this authority is limited to judgments on the technical aspects of the documents submitted to Synod, whereas judgments on the propriety of the petitions carried by such documents must be left to the body to which the documents are addressed. Failure to observe some such rule can only bring trouble like the bureaucratic foul-up encountered by the Florida overture.

The Role of the Board of Publications

One of the more puzzling aspects of this whole scenario is the role played by the denominational Board of Publications. This Board obtained a copy of the Florida overture and made some pronouncements on it at its meeting held in February 1985, pronouncements that were publicized in *The Banner* and brought to Synod 1985 in the Board's annual report. This body declared that it "judges that Classis Florida's request for 'further explanation' contains a serious charge against Rev. Kuyvenhoven, that it should have been addressed either to his supervising consistory (Boston Square CRC, Grand Rapids) or to his supervising agency (Board of Publications), and that it is not properly addressed to synod." The Board further said that it found "no grounds for questioning his faithfulness to the Scriptures, his loyalty to the confessions, or his love for the church." (See *Acts of Synod 1985*, p. 58).

One cannot fault the Board of Publications for giving expression to its confidence in the work and views of one under its supervision. And probably the Board should have been sent a copy of the overture as a matter of information and courtesy. Any reflection on the work and views of one under their supervision and in such a significant position in the church would have to be a matter of real concern to them. But is it in their province to make and publicize official judgments on the legal status of an overture addressed to Synod? And is it not preposterous for the Board to suggest that a request for "further explanation" can and should be dealt with by them? Only a consistory, classis or synod has the authority to do this. So again one must express his wonderment at other entries in the Index of the *Acts of Synod 1985*. Here we read, "Overture requesting explanation of views considered out of order by B of P, 57-58," and "B of P view sustained by SIC." Such entries are more properly to be viewed as an index to a thoroughly muddled notion of doing the church's business.

Text of Overture Not Found in the ACTS

The officers of Synod 1985 said that the Florida overture was legally before Synod. Synod itself underscored this decision of the officers by acting on the overture (pp. 727f. of the *Acts*). So it definitely was part of the Synod's business. Yet the text of the overture is nowhere to be found in the *Acts of Synod 1985*. What will future students of the Christian Reformed Church and its history think when they read of Synod's action in the *Acts* but find no trace of what Synod acted on? Such future students may well be as amazed at this strange omission as is the author of this article.

Was Synod's Judgment Right?

Synod 1985 decided not to accede to the petition of the Florida overture. Was the Synod correct in arriving at this decision? This question is properly asked because in so deciding the Synod judged that the Synods of 1936, 1961

and 1963 were wrong, and possibly also the Synod of 1959. In a previous article in this magazine (April 1985) I pointed out that the Synods of 1936 and 1961 honored requests from consistories for "further explanation" and acted positively on them. In 1963 Classis Orange City came with a request that Synod ask the Professor of Missions at Calvin Seminary for "further explanation" of his views on the love of God for all men, a subject he had set forth in certain articles he had written. Synod 1963 did not find the overture out of order, even though the Classis had not previously consulted the professor or his supervising consistory. Synod 1963 did not accede to the overture because, in the mind of Synod, the Classis had not demonstrated the "sufficient grounds of suspicion" called for in the Form of Subscription. In all of these instances the propriety of the procedure followed by Classis Florida was acknowledged.

In 1959 Professor M. J. Wyngaarden came to Synod with an appeal from the failure of the Calvin Board of Trustees to act on his complaint against some writing by the president of the seminary on the infallibility of the Bible. In his appeal to Synod Wyngaarden declared that the president of the seminary "had taken a position on infallibility which, according to the view of this protest, is not in line with the Belgic Confession" (*Acts of Synod 1959*, p. 563). What did Synod 1959 do in the matter? Did it tell Dr. Wyngaarden that he had to go first of all to the supervising consistory with his allegations against the seminary president? Not at all. Synod dealt in detail with the professor's protest. We bear in mind that the grounds for the action of Synod 1985 appeal to these words taken from the *Acts of Synod 1976* (p. 95), "Beyond the point of ordination the procedures outlined in the Form of Subscription and the Church Order must be followed if a minister's loyalty to the confessions is called into question. (See Form of Subscription and Church Order Article 89, 90, 91 and 93)." The Synods of 1976 and 1985 interpreted this statement adopted in 1976 to mean that the Church Order plainly says that any question about a minister's views must first be addressed to the supervising consistory.

At this point many questions surface. Does this language, appearing in the grounds for a previous Synod's action, become the law of the church? The statement excels more in ambiguity than it does in precision. What does the statement actually mean? Does it plainly mean what the Synods of 1976 and 1985 took it to mean? Article 89 of the Church Order says, "Special discipline (that is, suspension and deposition, Article 88—E.H.) shall be applied to office-bearers if they violate the Form of Subscription, are guilty of neglect or abuse of office, or in any way seriously deviate from sound doctrine and godly conduct." Where does the "further explanation" of the Form of Subscription fit in here? The overture from Classis Florida did not charge that the editor did "seriously deviate from sound doctrine." Rather, the overture raised a question of high current urgency relative to the contemporary authority of the Bible, and the editor would be given every opportunity to put to rest the suspicions raised by his writings and reported utterances. Much clarification is called for before the church can be guided by decisions of the kind which the Synod of 1985 made in this instance. The precedents of 1936, 1961 and 1963 plainly call for such clarification, and perhaps also the precedent of 1959. ●

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Polarization and Secession

Peter De Jong

A 1974 Editorial View

In the spring of 1974 the previous *Outlook* editor, Rev. John Vander Ploeg, addressed this subject in a series of editorials. A dozen years later it may be interesting and useful for us to recall some of his observations. In the February issue he listed 16 changes in the denomination which were compelling conservatives to consider this matter. Then he proceeded to explain that polarization ("the attraction to a certain pole or center, in distinction from another, for the purpose of fellowship and action"), "in church history . . . precedes secession." He observed that this had been the sequence in our Reformed churches' history in 1834 and 1857, and in the more recent development of what is now the Presbyterian Church in America. He was convinced that the time had not yet come to advocate immediate secession. More efforts should be made to correct the errant course the denomination was taking. He wrote, "Secession is not justified until those concerned are convinced by sufficient evidence that a church has passed the point of no return. The pure preaching of the Word, the proper administration of the sacraments, and the faithful exercise of discipline are the marks of a true church. When these are abandoned, whether it be by a formal decision or in actual practice, conservatives will have no choice except to seek their church membership and fellowship elsewhere."

A month later, in pursuit of the same subject, he recalled the Biblical example of polarization found in Malachi 3:16-18. When Israel was "on a toboggan of apostasy," "they that feared Jehovah spake one with another; and Jehovah hearkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared Jehovah, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith Jehovah of hosts, even mine own possession, in the day that I make; and I will spare them; as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not."

"To polarize in the CRC or in any other denomination for no just cause would be divisive, irresponsible, contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture, and therefore completely indefensible. However, not to polarize when the time is at hand is to aid and abet the infiltration of apostasy by one's failure to take a united stand against it."

The editorial cites the exhortation of Jude 3 and 4 to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered

unto the saints." "The 'faith' of which Jude speaks is not the act of faith but rather the object of our faith—the sound doctrine or teaching of Scripture." "It is for this 'faith' that we are to contend earnestly."

The Bible Is the Point of Decision

"It cannot be said too often that it is precisely at this point—what a person believes about the Bible—that liberals and conservatives always come to a parting of the ways. And it is therefore also precisely at this point that issues disturbing the peace of the CRC give rise to serious controversy. It is the Bible as the Word of God that is at stake repeatedly as controversy arises about issues, one after another; the authority, the infallibility, the inerrancy of Scripture; creation or evolution; the historicity of the early chapters of Genesis; the extent of God's saving love; ecumenical involvements and affiliations; women in church offices; preaching of the Word; close versus open Communion; the charismatic movement or Neo-Pentecostalism; lodge members in the church; and so on . . . As these controversies arise one at a time, it may be possible to play down the seriousness of them for an unwary constituency, but let's not be fooled. The alert and informed conservative should be able to see the over-all design of the father of lies as well as the pattern in what he is doing.

"It is the Bible as the authentic, inspired, infallible and inerrant Word of God that is at stake. Satan knows only too well that, when he once succeeds in shaking our hold on Scripture, the rest is easy." We are reminded that at the beginning of the Bible we are introduced to this devil's tactic with his question, "Has God said?" and that the Bible ends with a final warning against it (Rev. 22:18 and 19).

"And so we rally around the Word — not around any man . . . That's the polarization we advocate, something that is always written large in the history of every reformation of the church. And for that no apology is needed."

"To 'contend earnestly' and to 'hold fast' we must meet together, talk together, walk together, and act together." "If God is for us who is against us?" (Romans 8:31). "The closer we draw to the Word, the closer we draw to each other."

Polarization, a Necessary Step, Not an End

The editor's writings on this subject aroused considerable response. A minister of another denomination directed at-

tention to the dangers of the polarization Vander Ploeg had advocated. He saw the possibility of such a course turning the denomination into an internally divided church, a "modaliteiten Kerk" like the larger Reformed churches in the Netherlands. If concerned people settle for that—"do not take the ultimate step of obedience: call the church back, in word AND DEED, to the Word of God in accordance with the Reformed Creeds," this might "prevent the emergence of a truly Reformed Church (with which we could then unite)." Vander Ploeg reassured his correspondent, "I do not envision polarization as a *permanent* solution to the conservative's problems in the CRC but rather as a *prelude* or *precursor* to what ought to follow. For liberals and conservatives to remain indefinitely in tension under the same denominational roof, whether the CRC or any other, will eventually become intolerable." He cited the corporate responsibility we share as members of the denomination, the constant tensions, controversy and frustrations that must characterize living in a divided house, paying of financial quotas for causes that come to forfeit our confidence, and the threat to the eternal welfare of children and grandchildren as considerations that make remaining in such a pluralistic denomination intolerable.

A final article in the April issue summarized the argument for a policy of polarization. (First the editor addressed a misunderstanding some had suggested when they mentioned that ministers might be restrained from taking a position because of fear of losing their pensions. He pointed out that such pensions are protected by law and would not be lost even if they left the denomination). The polarization must be guided by the Scripture and with a prayer for the Lord's guidance. The editorial cited Isaiah 20:8, "To the law and to the testimony! if they speak not according to this word, surely there is no morning for them." (Though some might call this appeal an "over-simplification," he warned against "over-complication.") "There will be 'no morning' for the CRC or for any other church unless we are polarized or crowded and kept very close to the living Word. Unless all our ways radiate from the living Word... the darkness will grow even deeper and the light will never dawn." Our activity will have to be positive and constructive as well as negative and destructive. And it will have to be directed toward encouraging one another as well as toward helping others who do not yet share our faith. "Polarization means that the lone voice... will be joined by others, thus making it possible to turn up the volume for the cause of Christ." Although aiming at reformation of churches that may be seriously deficient (as were some of the churches mentioned in the first chapters of Revelation, for example), this polarization may turn out to be a necessary step toward a responsible and viable secession. That "must be preceded by polarization and a lot of groundwork if it is to amount to more than a splinter movement. Without this there could be what someone has called a 'flaking off' of members here and there, but not a movement that could draw a substantial number to secede." The *Presbyterian Journal* which had on its cover "Advocating continuation of a Presbyterian Church loyal to Scripture and the Reformed faith," for many years polarized conservatives and resulted eventually in the rise of a relatively large and growing conservative denomination. Rev. Vander Ploeg urged the united study and discussion of issues that concern the gospel and church, arranging meetings that address them, organization of local chapters of the Reformed Fellowship, and the promotion and use of our periodical,

the *Outlook*, in support of this cause to which we have long been committed.

A Banner Update

In the August 26, 1985, *Banner*, retired Calvin College Bible professor, Dr. John H. Bratt, considering present threatening developments in the denomination, takes up the same subject in an article entitled "Seceders or Schismatics." He observes that differences (which are always found in the church) at times "harden into granite positions, polarize the church, and approach the breaking point. We hear ominous rumblings about separation. And that is tremendously serious...."

He describes a "legitimate secession" when, because of sin, the "faithful remnant" is forced to separate from the church. When does the breaking point come? It comes when the parent body retrogresses to the point that it loses its claim to be the true church of Christ and demotes itself to the level of a false church. It happens when the church descends to that level of falsity which distorts or scuttles the biblical doctrine of salvation: vicarious atonement, redemption through the blood of Christ on the cross, and salvation by grace through faith." Then he cites the examples of John Calvin, Hendrik De Cock, Abraham Kuyper, and J. Gresham Machen, who each faced such a situation, protested against it, were disciplined by the erring church and led secession movements.

Bratt sees as "pivotal" the doctrine of "salvation by grace alone (along with the related doctrines of the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, his physical resurrection, and his second coming—doctrines which Calvin calls non-negotiable)." "If a church jeopardizes, waters down, compromises, or repudiates that doctrine, that church lapses into the category of being a false church. Unless that falsity is rectified, secession must follow in order to preserve the faith." "But, as long as the church maintains that key biblical doctrine of redemption, separation is wrong" and, in Dr. Bratt's judgment, to be denounced as a sin.

When the Church By-passes Creeds

Although Dr. Bratt's simple, straightforward introduction of the matter is clear and helpful, it slights two of the three Biblical and confessional "marks" of the true church, the sacraments, and Biblical discipline. (Belgic Confession XXIX). Furthermore, even in dealing with doctrine, it does not adequately consider what has become the outstanding characteristic of today's theology, its systematic and commonly justified doubletalk. In the days of Calvin, DeCock, Kuyper and even Machen, when one pointed out the errors of the church he was disciplined by the apostate body. In today's religious world that almost never happens, and it can hardly be expected to happen. Theologians from the Amsterdam Free University and our own who have been enlightened there or in the equally "progressive" liberal establishments here, inform us that truth itself now means something totally different from what it used to mean. Whereas it used to mean conformity to fact, it has now come to mean something purely "relational." If that means anything, it means that what used to be called a lie, if it makes for improved relations, becomes, by this new definition, "true." A January, 1971 *Outlook* article on "The Inroads of Subjectivism" and a May, 1977 article on "A New Sales Pitch for Modern Theology" called attention to this "existentialist" way of thinking that

is being promoted among us as well as around us. According to it, one can say that he still subscribes to such doctrines as "the atonement," but understand by that not an event which may or may not have happened as recorded centuries ago, but a present religious experience symbolized or illustrated by those old Bible stories. Thus Biblical events and doctrines are not so much denied as simply by-passed or "reinterpreted."

The Bible maintains that truth and falsehood exclude each other (1 John 2:21). When the devil succeeds in selling today's church the notions that such antithetical distinctions no longer exist, that one may change word meanings as he chooses and that doctrines are no longer important he has new and more effective tools to confuse the church and silence its gospel than questioning or denying individual doctrines.

In the light of this development in our own and other churches, we need to consider that while no one among us may be denying the deity of Christ or the atonement, our Inter-church Relations Committee, for example, is according to Synod reports, still firmly determined to have us join and make common cause with those who do.

This kind of uncritical joining with unbelievers is not only being promoted by some leading church executives. It is

just as evident in member thinking expressed in the public columns of our churches' official periodicals. The September 9 *Banner* includes a letter advocating greater freedom—"Are we burdened with a 'Christian Torah'?" and enjoining, evidently without any qualification, love of the Buddhist, Catholic or communist. Another on the same page deplores characterizing Eastern (non-Christian) Religions as "Designed to Deceive," saying, "I have never before felt such rage at the church of my youth. When I control or deny my 'feelings and emotions' I deny God in me. When I feel my emotions and act according to my feelings, there is only hate of evil and love of God, myself, and my fellow human beings in me." Probably more significant than such extreme letters is the common complaint that very little doctrine is being preached and taught in many churches. When official policy more and more freely promotes or publicizes such doctrinal indifference, whether the denomination officially repudiates a creed or simply ignores it, can hardly decide the question whether it is sin or a duty to leave that denomination.

At any rate, the problem of what must be done by CRC members who want to remain true to the gospel, becomes ever more pressing and calls for more attention and for our united prayer and consultation. ●

HENRY VANDER KAM

Celebrating 40-Year Ministry

Elaine R. Vander Kam

Because of World War II, Calvin Seminary students decided against the luxury of a 3-month vacation and went to class for the summer; the class graduated on March 13, 1945 at Calvin Seminary Chapel on Franklin Street, and a special committee of Synod examined the candidates. Henry Vander Kam accepted the call to the Prosper Christian Reformed Church at Falmouth, Michigan, in May and moved with his wife and son into the parsonage in June. After a special meeting of Classis Muskegon on August 1 to examine two candidates, on Friday, August 3, he was ordained as a minister at the Prosper Church. On August 5 he preached his inaugural sermon from the text Rev. 1:13, 16—"Christ's Presence in the Church."

On July 28, 1985 he returned to the Prosper Church to begin celebrating 40 years in the ministry. He used the same text as for his inaugural, saying that he thought it safe to do so, as not too many were left to recall that sermon. The elders in the present consistory were former catechumens of his and some of the deacons had not been born when he began his ministry. In the evening his sermon was from 1 Timothy 1:12—"Gratitude For The Ministry." The welcome from this congregation was overwhelming.

The following Sunday he conducted the morning service at the 12th Ave. Christian Reformed Church of Jenison, Michigan where he served as the first minister from 1955-65. Here his sermon was based on Romans 1:16—"Paul's Evaluation of the Gospel." During the time of his ministry at 12th Ave. the church grew from 100 families to 260 in five years. In 1960 The Baldwin Christian Reformed Church

was organized. During those 10 years there were 343 baptisms but only 13 funerals. Here he taught a men's society with as many as 100 men in attendance as well as 2 large women's societies.

On the evening of that same day he preached in Grace Christian Reformed Church of Kalamazoo where he served for 13 years—1965-78. Here his sermon was also from 1 Timothy 1:12—"Gratitude For the Ministry." Coffee and refreshments were also served here in his honor and was well attended.

During his ministry he served as a member and president of the Board of Home Missions; was a Synod delegate ten times, serving as an officer six times and as its president in 1976. He was also a member and served as president of the Board of Trustees of Calvin College and Seminary from 1970-73. In 1968 he was chosen by the Synod as a delegate to the Ecumenical Synod which was held in the Netherlands. He was chairman of the committee of which one issue was women in office. He has also served on several synodical committees. For 13 years he has written the Bible Outlines for *The Outlook*.

Other churches he has served are Pella II (1950-55), Lake Worth, Fla. (1978-79), and he retired from Doon Christian Reformed Church where he served for 3 years. He also taught part-time as Professor of Dogmatics at Mid-America Reformed Seminary.

This was a nostalgic pilgrimage, but also one for which we give thanks to God for sparing his life for service in his Kingdom. ●

the Acts

Henry VanderKam

THE APOSTLES BEFORE THE COUNCIL

Lesson 5

Acts 5:17-42

The church in its earliest days was very *successful*, judged by the numbers who joined it and the influence which it exerted. This success has its price, as the leaders soon discovered. Jesus had told them (Matt. 10, etc.) that if people had mistreated the Master of the house, they would do the same to his followers. Such mistreatment was now experienced by the Apostles.

An Increasing Threat

Immediately after the healing of the lame man at the temple gate the authorities imprison Peter and John. Now they go farther—all of the Apostles are placed in prison. The leaders of the people were “filled with jealousy,” says Luke, and jealousy is capable of strange things. Their jealousy stems from the fact that more and more people are following the Apostles and have left the leadership of the Sanhedrin. This must be stopped. They are also dependent on the following of the mass of the people. Accordingly, the occasion for this imprisonment is not as clearly defined as was the imprisonment of Peter and John at an earlier time. Then a lame man was healed. Now the author only mentions the miracles in a general way and emphasizes the growth of the church. The apostles are now placed in a more threatening situation than the two had confronted earlier. They are in the common prison where all the lawbreakers are placed. Drastic measures have to be taken to stop this movement.

Released for More Service

The imprisonment doesn't mean much when that same night an angel opens the door of the prison and leads them out! Before leaving them this angel tells them to go to the temple and preach to the people “...all the words of this life.” They are to preach the gospel based on the life of Christ and the kind of life which issues from this gospel of Christ Jesus. The fact of this deliverance is to comfort the hearts of the Apostles. No one can stop them! It is also to warn the opposition—divine power is on the side of the Apostles. Luke does not say much of this episode and no one mentions it later, but He who freed Daniel and his friends has freed them.

The Apostles are obedient to the command of the angel. They have not been delivered to hide, but to preach. At

daybreak they are already in the temple preaching Jesus Christ.

The Highpriest calls the whole council together in the morning. They are not aware of that which has taken place during the night. Apparently the council does not meet in the courts of the temple at this time. He calls the whole council together, for this is important business. Someone is sent to the prison to bring the Apostles before the council. None of them is there. But, do not blame the warden nor the security guards. Everything is in good order—but the prisoners are missing! The councilors have had enough trouble with these men. They are perplexed and wonder what is going to become of this whole matter. Apparently an eye-witness comes to tell them that the Apostles whom they imprisoned are now standing in the temple preaching the same gospel as before. Now the temple guard must bring them back, but, carefully, because this could lead to a riot. The common people must not be stirred up. The rulers need the people, but are also afraid of them. The leaders could be stoned if things get out of hand.

What is the charge? The apostles had been commanded by the Sanhedrin not to preach in this name (the highpriest doesn't even want to pronounce this name) and “you have filled Jerusalem with this teaching.” That is the crime! Don't preach the gospel, and everything will be all right; preach that word and you will lose your freedom. They have been disobedient to their rulers. Besides, “you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.” This would make us murderers. This is going too far. Not only are the apostles teaching the people those things which ought not to be taught, but they also incriminate the leaders. The gospel always cuts in two directions. Those who believe shall be saved and the guilt of the unbelievers becomes the greater.

Under God's Orders

Notice the reply of the Apostles: “We must obey God rather than men.” Here there is nothing of a revolutionary spirit. “We will indeed be obedient citizens but not when the command of you rulers is in direct conflict with the command of God.” The angel told them to preach. The Sanhedrin forbade them to preach. Is there a question whom they ought to obey? That it may be perfectly clear to these rulers, Peter will tell them a little more. We obey the same God as you do. It is this God of our fathers who called Jesus Christ into being. What did you do? You not only slew Him, but you even hung Him on a tree to show your utter contempt!

Everyone hanging on a tree was accursed. But, He didn't stay in the grave or in the realm of the dead. God exalted Him so that He is now a Prince and Savior and this was done to bring repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. That which you did, God turned to the good of yourselves and others. We are witnesses of these things. We are not speaking out of a vivid imagination. The Holy Spirit also witnessed to these facts. This Spirit is given to those who obey Him. Therefore, obey! lest you do not receive this gift. They, therefore, speak with authority.

Peter has stated matters briefly but fully enough to make it clear why they have done what they have done. In a few words he has made known to them Who the bearer of that Name is and also their responsibilities. His calmness is impressive.

The council does not take these words so calmly. These men were "cut to the heart," literally they were "bursting," they were "torn apart" by the words they had heard from this unlettered fisherman. They were ready to kill them! When a person is accused the way Peter has accused them, the only way to deal with them is to put them away. But, can this be done without a proper hearing? Without due process? These, who boast of their adherence to the law, are they to become lawless?

Political Advice

One of their number, Gamaliel, rises and seeks to calm them. It must be made clear at once that he is no friend of these Apostles. However, he sees many difficulties if things go on as some want them to go now. He is a Pharisee among all these Sadducees. He is highly respected both for his character and his ability. He was the teacher of the Apostle Paul. Some believe that he was a grandson of the great Hillel, one of the most famous of Jewish teachers. He wants to restore peace and is much milder in his criticism than the others. Let us talk calmly about this situation without these men being present.

We now receive the report of this "executive session." Paul may well have been present. Gamaliel tells them to be careful what they do. There have been such movements before. A certain Theudas some years ago, who thought he was somebody, had enough charisma to lead 400 men astray. He was killed and his followers were dispersed. Then there arose a certain Judas of Galilee, and the same thing happened again. Don't be too quick to do something about every individual who rises to lead the people away from the path they should follow. Now we have something similar. I would say, says Gamaliel, leave them alone. If what these men are doing and teaching is the work of men, it will come to nothing. However, should it be of God, you will not be able to do anything against it, because you will then even be fighting against God.

The council agrees to this. This sounds like wise and good counsel. It has been seen as that in the history of the church. Gamaliel says, "Let time judge them—then you won't have to!" His advice may seem wise but it is the wisdom of a serpent! Gamaliel wants to avoid the capital punishment of these harmless men. He says, "Wait and see! If it is of men—nothing to fear. If it is of God—you can't do anything about it." This is not the attitude of the Apostles now or of the Apostle Paul later. They know in Whom they have believed and will stand for the truth whatever the cause. But, this advice sounds good—following it, you won't have to do a thing and you can't be guilty!

The council adopts the advice of Gamaliel, but there is still some unfinished business. These Apostles are guilty of disobedience and for this they must be punished now. The council then proceeds to beat them in the meeting of the council, warn them not to speak again in the name of Jesus and then let them go.

Frustration and Triumph

How naive these council members are. The Apostles do not fear the whip lashes they have received, but they rejoice that they have been counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name. These are men with a mission. They are committed. Nothing is going to move them from the direction they have taken. Regardless of the warnings of the council, they never stop preaching Jesus everywhere! Whether in the temple or in less formal settings, they preach and teach that this Jesus is the Messiah which Israel sought. These men cannot be silenced. The gospel is like a fire within them. The Spirit drives them to speak. The truth drives them on. If they had only some moralisms to make known to the people they would have been stopped by these threatenings. They have more to say. They may be arrested again and again; they may have to lose their freedom and their life; they will continue to preach Christ!

Questions for discussion:

1. Why do the rulers become so excited about the Apostles' doings?
2. Why isn't the miraculous escape from prison emphasized more?
3. How far can we go with the statement: "We must obey God rather than men?"
4. Why is Peter's defense so effective?
5. Would it be well if we knew more about Theudas and Judas of Galilee? Josephus speaks of both but he cannot be trusted too well. Gamaliel makes his point with these examples. Is more needed?
6. Why is the counsel of Gamaliel devilish when it seems to be so wise? Does this kind of advice often fool the members of the church?
7. Would the Apostles have suffered as much if they had "toned down" the gospel a little? What does this say to us today?

ORGANIZATION AND PERSECUTION

Lesson 6

Acts 6

We believe, of course, that the book of *Acts* is the infallible Word of God, as are all the other books of the Bible. We therefore receive it as much more than beautiful literature. However, we must not lose sight of the beauty of the Word of God. The book of *Acts* is a work of art. The historian, Luke, gives us the needed information concerning the beginnings of the New Testament church and of its early development.

The Church in Transition

Chapter six is a transition chapter in the book of *Acts*. This does not mean that it does not have rich content of its own, but that it is a bridge to further development of the early church. Slowly the church comes to better organization. The gospel is first preached to the Jews in Jerusalem, but the Gospel must go out to the whole world. God so leads the history of that period that the leaders of the church will fulfill the mandate He has given to them.

The First Deacon

In the first seven verses of this chapter we hear of the addition of an *office* in the early church. This is the office of deacon. It is true that some today who do not believe that this is the institution of the diaconal office but that it was only the appointment of an *ad hoc* committee. These believe that this office (of deacon) was introduced some time later in the history of the church. I do not believe that this opinion rests on a solid foundation. The work which was given these men to do is work which has always been associated with the office of deacon. Our form for the installation of elders and deacons also mentions the fact that this distinct office had its beginning here.

A Problem of Growth

According to the review which the author has given us in the previous chapters, the church was doing very well. There was unbelievable growth. There was a spirit in the church which ought to be the envy of every future age. The church was strong. Its leaders were men of valor. Great things can be expected of this church. Now it is precisely at this particular time "when the number of the disciples was multiplying" that difficulties arose, not from without, but within the church. Complaints come from the Grecian Jews because their widows were not receiving adequate care. Just a word of explanation: these Grecian Jews were people who had lived outside of Palestine most of their lives. Many of them returned to Jerusalem late in life. As a result, there were many widows among them. Because they had lived most of their lives outside of Palestine, their language was Greek rather than Hebrew or Aramaic. They read their Bibles in Greek. Because of these differences, the division between the Jews of Palestine, and these Greeks who had spent most of their lives outside of the Holy land is easily understood. But, both groups were now believers in Christ!

A Money Matter

What the "ministration" mentioned in the complaints included is difficult to say. Some believe that it refers to the love feasts of which Paul speaks in I Corinthians. Whatever else was involved, it is clear that it included material aid. For a time the believers "had all things common." This spontaneous sharing did not long produce sufficient care for all the needy. Is it not strange that the first real difficulty rising out of the life of the church is a money matter? Yet, that is the case, and later history has shown that handling money often occasions problems in the church.

This is not a minor matter. The Apostles are fully aware of the seriousness of the problem and evidently recognize that these complaints are well-founded. They call the whole church together. This matter must be dealt with at once, lest it fester. Although the apostles had received and distributed the offerings of those who had sold property for the benefit of the believers (4:35, 37; 5:2), they want to delegate this work to others lest the most important task, i.e., prayer and the proclamation of the Word be neglected. Important as the work of benevolence is, it must not be placed on the same level as the ministration to the spiritual needs of the congregation.

Appointment to Office

The church is enjoined to appoint seven men to do this work which has now come to their attention. Why seven? Who knows? Apparently this number was able to do the

work! These men must be "of good report," they must be "full of the Spirit and of wisdom." These qualifications will be necessary for this work. That which the Sanhedrin and the people of the Jews could not accomplish, i.e., the destruction of the church, is now threatened from within. Let God's Spirit and uncommon wisdom reign here. The church agrees at once and they chose seven men. Although seven are named, we are further informed only about the first two. Stephen was a man "full of faith and of the Holy Spirit." No doubt the others were too, but in the case of Stephen it is stressed. Philip is also named. The last one named is a proselyte of Antioch. Interesting! He is a mission convert! These seven men are set before the Apostles; the whole congregation prays; and the Apostles lay their hands upon them. A new office has been created in the church. The organization is broadened and becomes more structured.

Healthy Church Growth

Before going on to the next section, Luke emphasizes that the "word of God increased," i.e., more and more people heard it and were made aware of it. In Jerusalem the number of disciples increased exceedingly. The complaints of the Grecians has not hurt the growth of the church. The matter was dealt with in time. Peace again reigns. "And a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." This is a new element. Nothing has been heard of this before. These were not the "chief" priests, but the common priests who took care of the worship in the Synagogues. But, what a breakthrough! Those who were in the employ of the priests who had condemned Christ and made life difficult for the Apostles were now openly confessing their faith in Jesus Christ. Nothing can stop the onward march of the gospel. According to Daniel, and according to Jesus, it would fill the entire earth. It is coming to pass!

At first glance the verses 8 to 15 seem to have very little to do with the first part of this chapter except for the fact that the name of Stephen plays the dominant role. He is one of the seven who has been appointed by the church as a deacon. These men were to be "of good report; full of the Spirit; and full of wisdom." Such men were chosen. Now it is said of this Stephen that he was full of grace and power and that he did great signs and wonders among the people. The Apostles were not to be burdened with the waiting on tables, so that they could give themselves to prayer and the proclamation of the Word. The inspired writer does *not* say that these Apostles were the only ones who preached the word. These deacons did too. Not only did Stephen and Philip speak the Word, they were also given the power to perform great wonders.

New Opposition

The wonders and signs performed by this good man are now opposed by men of the Hellenist (Greek) synagogues. (Christian widows from that background had been helped by those appointed according to the first part of this chapter). But, though they dispute with him, they are not able to win, nor are they able to hold their own against the wisdom and Spirit by which he spoke. He puts them to silence. This was the promise Jesus had given the disciples before His ascension that the Spirit would give them words to speak. This has now become reality.

If there is no possibility of winning in debate, the people of that age did not hesitate to use different methods. They will obtain false witnesses to testify against the object of their

hatred. This they have done with our Lord, this they also do with Stephen. He is accused of speaking blasphemous words against Moses and against God. This stirs up the people—naturally. He is brought before the council where these accusations are repeated and it is also stated that he has spoken against the holy place, the temple, and against the law! Such deeds cannot be condoned. They have heard him say that Jesus will destroy the temple and that this same Jesus will change the customs Moses taught them.

In a way this accusation may well be true. Jesus has foretold the destruction of the temple (Matt. 24). As for the customs and manner of life Moses had taught them, has Stephen perhaps emphasized the temporary character of these customs? They have served their purpose in the past and they fall away when the fulfillment of prophecy comes. Such words can easily be misunderstood. Besides, these were false witnesses which were testifying against him. Similar charges are hurled against the Christ at the time of His trial. He blasphemed! He said, "Tear this temple down and in three days I will rebuild it."

The witnesses have given their version of his teaching. Now the attention is focused on the defendant. How will he

reply? What will be his defense? Before they hear this, they encounter something very strange in this man. His face has become "like the face of an angel!" What does this mean? Who of them knows what an angel's face looks like? It is clear to all immediately. He has their full attention. Even before he speaks, the Lord makes them realize they are not dealing with something common. His defense will be the more forceful.

Questions for discussion:

1. Is it often true in the history of the church that dangers arise out of seemingly small things?
2. Why were there no deacons before? Does the need determine office?
3. Are their qualifications those which we must still seek for office?
4. Do you think the addition of a company of priests is significant?
5. Is Stephen leaving the deacon's office when he preaches?
6. Why can't the world defeat the church in debate? Or can it?
7. Was it right to teach the people not to obey Moses' laws?

What is Reformed?

Peter De Jong

CHRISTIAN AND REFORMED TODAY, by John Bolt, published by Paideia Press, Jordan Station, Ontario, Canada, 1984, 158 pp., paper.

This is an important and exciting little book. In it Dr. John Bolt, who has taught as a professor of religion and theology at Calvin College and now does so at Redeemer College in Hamilton, Ontario, attempts to answer the question, "What does it mean to be Christian and Reformed today?" It is the substance of a series of popular lectures previously presented before some churches and school organizations. He cautions us that "this volume is not to be seen as a complete book of dogmatics but rather as an attempt to penetrate to the heart of the Reformed vision" (p. 12). The need for such an effort as this, especially in our day of growing confusion is evident. The Scriptures enjoin us to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15). Many within our churches are ill-equipped to give such an account of their faith, and this booklet is an interesting and laudable attempt to help them to do so.

A Basic Question

The writer must first face the question of what it means to be "Reformed." His chapter headed by the question shows that its answer is by no means self-evident even to people

who are members of one or another kind of "Reformed church"—much less to the general public. "Drawing from the three great Reformed thinkers who I know best, John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, as well as from the Reformed Confessions," he suggests "as a definition of 'Reformed': A Reformed person is trinitarian in theology and catholic in vision" (p. 20).

A Deficient Answer

A most significant characteristic of this proposed "definition" is that it makes no mention of the Bible! The point is the more striking when one considers that this section of the discussion is dealing with "the question of what determines and who finally decides what is 'Reformed'." Why is the Bible not included in this fundamental definition of Reformed? The answer seems to be suggested in a following observation that "the Scripture principle is acknowledged even by such sectarian groups as Jehovah's Witnesses (one of the most orthodox statements on biblical inerrancy that I have on file came from the Watchtower Society!). The formal principle, sola and tota scripture... is thus of vital importance but it is not enough—one needs to spell out the material content of that affirmation" (p. 21). But the fact that some people outrageously pervert the teachings of the

Bible and that in defining the Reformed faith we have to say more than that it is Biblical certainly are not adequate reasons for failing to state, at the outset, as a fundamental principle that our faith aims to be nothing more and nothing less than the teachings of God's Word. That was the principle that directed and drove the Reformers in their divergence from the traditions and abuses that were destroying the faith and life of the Christian church in their time. B. B. Warfield, in his essay on "John Calvin the Theologian" (from which Dr. Bolt quotes extensively later in his book [pp. 76, 77], in *Calvin and Augustine* pp. 487ff.) found the distinguishing character of Calvin to be that "he was distinctly a Biblical theologian, or . . . by way of eminence the *Biblical theologian of his age*. Whither the Bible took him, thither he went: where scriptural declarations failed him, there he stopped short. It is this which imparts to Calvin's theological teaching the quality which is its prime characteristic and its real offense in the eyes of his critics—I mean its positiveness. There is no mistaking the note of confidence in his teaching, and it is perhaps not surprising that this note of confidence irritates his critics. They resent the air of finality he gives to his declarations, not staying to consider that he gives them this air of finality because he presents them, not as his teachings, but as the teachings of the Holy Spirit in His inspired Word." "And it was just because he refused to go one step beyond what is written that he felt so sure of his steps." In the light of this fact—evident to anyone who is familiar with Calvin's *Institutes* or *Commentaries*—it would seem necessary that if we are to properly define this kind of faith and life we must begin, with Calvin, by grounding it in what God Himself says.*

It becomes increasingly evident that current demoralization of our churches—as of many others—is directly traceable to the failure to make this our starting point. We may talk, as this book ably does, of basic doctrines which Calvin and the other Reformers taught, but if we fail to emphasize, as Calvin and the others did, from where they had derived them and why they must adamantly hold to them, we thereby, perhaps inadvertently, help to cut the ground from under them. If our churches are to experience a renewed commitment to the Reformed faith and life, we will have to explicitly ground the testimony to that faith exactly where the Reformers found and grounded it, not in the wavering opinions and changing fancies of men, but in what God plainly said and says. That may arouse resentment and criticism—few things exasperate people more than that in our time when "Everybody has a right to his own opinion" rules in the churches, as in the world, but God's Word does not permit us to back away from its authoritative claim. It supplies the only sure ground. That seems to be vanishing from the sight of our confused and demoralized churches. We will have to call attention to that if we are going to give them any real help in their predicament.

This point is worth belaboring. For a half century I have increasingly observed that among us, where the Reformed teachings are still taught they are rarely grounded, as Calvin and the other Reformers grounded them, step by step, in the plain teachings of the Bible. "We don't have to go to that trouble; we had professors who did that for us in seminary!" one veteran minister retorted when the need for doing this was suggested. A new Calvin College professor almost two decades ago, when asked about his impressions of teaching there, observed that in his Presbyterian background he was used to hearing everything referred to the Bible, while at

Calvin points under discussion were treated by appealing to philosophical principles. The accuracy of his observation has often been confirmed. It is not merely current advocates of change who take this approach: many of those trying to preserve the "Reformed heritage," in the past as well as today, have really contributed to the present confusion by failing to ground what they believed and taught in the Bible as their Reformed ancestors did. We have fallen into an unhealthy traditionalism, which has provoked the present anti-traditional reaction. We have gotten so far away from the real Reformed faith that one who insists that we must ground our faith not only in tradition and creed, but in the Bible, may be suspected as almost heretical (called a "Bibli-cist" or "Fundamentalist"). The fact that this book dedicated to a revival of the Reformed faith, does not treat its Biblical basis as fundamental is a telling exhibit of our common "Christian Reformed" weakness. That fundamental failure must be exposed and corrected if we are to have real reformation and revival. A well-developed presentation of the principal doctrines of the faith, no matter how well done, will not carry authority or much conviction if it is grounded on only one among a variety of traditions. No matter how carefully a building is built, it is not likely to be more stable than flimsy foundations.

We Must Start Here

When Luder G. Whitlock, President of the Reformed Theological Seminary at Jackson, Mississippi, addressed himself in the seminary's bulletin to the question, "What does it mean to be 'Reformed'?" he began, "The Reformation insisted on the final authority of Scripture rather than tradition or reason. Therefore, we view the Bible as God's inerrant Word and as the norm for all that we believe or do. To be Reformed means a commitment to study the Scriptures regularly with a willingness to change our thoughts or actions as necessary to conform to the Bible. Simply put, to be Reformed is to be biblical." One suspects that that forthright commitment to God's Word may have something to do with the phenomenal rise of that institution in the last two decades in which our denomination has especially revealed its growing demoralization.

A Worthwhile Book

Following that expression of commitment to the Bible, Mr. Whitlock's statement goes on to observe that "flowing from this is our conviction that all of life must be lived in obedience to the Lord as He reveals His will and character in the Bible. Here is a comprehensive, inclusive view of the Christian life." Dr. Bolt's book (after its deficient beginning) proceeds in a similar vein to deal in successive chapters with, "God the Father, Creation and Culture," "God the Son, Redemption and Discipleship," and "God the Holy Spirit, Sanctification and Holiness." The treatment of this material is in many ways admirable. His observations about the importance of Creation and the Old Testament in our Christian perspective are well developed, a discussion of Calvinism and Capitalism is to the point, and one on Common Grace and Worldliness is equally appropriate. In this section a point might have been made of the fact that when we begin with the confession, "I believe in God the Father, Almighty Maker of heaven and earth," it seems glaringly inappropriate that a number of our Christian professors range themselves on the side of the evolutionists in opposition to those who would stress creation—and that at a time when

secular scientists are beginning to expose the falseness of evolutionary theory.

The discussion of the doctrine of the Son gets similar development, noting particularly the Christian's commitment both to a variety of responsibilities in creation and to his missionary duties. The chapter on the Holy Spirit notes John Calvin's extensive treatment of that subject and stresses the Christian's call to holy living. This brings up the subject of the churches' change from former condemnations of worldliness to the current reaction. Although the writer expresses some appreciation of the old warnings against worldliness, there was, I believe, in those decisions a certain ambiguity about the way to apply them to which his forthright condemnations of their "legalism" does not do justice. His treatment of the Pentecostal movement is well done.

The subsequent chapter on Reformed Christian Education is a somewhat independent lecture. After noting the stress the Reformed Churches have placed on education the discussion deals with the grounding of such education in God's covenant. Dr. Bolt tends to endorse N. Beversluis' grounding of that education in "the covenant of works." This strikes one as a doubtful business, especially in the light of that "covenant of works" scanty ground in the Bible and its inappropriateness in the Christian life. In this connection he brings up the Bible's teaching about God's Kingdom. He sharply criticizes Beversluis' and Wolterstorff's proposal to make the "transformation" of culture the aim of Christian education, because of its secular sociological character and its neglect of the antithesis God has established between those who serve Him and those who do not. Dr. Bolt cites the talk of "redeeming the dance" as an example of the resulting confusion. He points out that viewing the kingdom of God as a "transformation" of culture makes that kingdom "an entity which man builds on earth"—a notion "completely foreign to the Scriptures" which never "speak of the kingdom of God as a human achievement" (p. 108).

A final chapter on ethics contains an interesting contrast between Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck. Bavinck had to warn the Kuyperians that, despite their enthusiasm for "Christian principles," they could lose their own souls if they were not converted to Christ. The difference between Kuyper and Bavinck at this point should not be exaggerated. Kuyper himself issued exactly the same warning to his followers in his *E Voto* sermon on Catechism Lord's Day 11, that all the philosophical learning and cultural development that was not centered on Christ as the Savior of sinners would quickly run dead "like a stream in the desert sands," and that only as the churches returned as sinners to Him would they have life. Similar warnings appear in his introduction to *Pro Rege*.

This little book deserves wide reading. May there be more of such discussions. If they are to be effective, however, they will always have to define the Christian and Reformed Faith as the Faith of God's Word. Unless our Reformation efforts are firmly and squarely rooted and grounded in the "Thus saith the Lord" of the Scriptures they will and must turn into the disillusionments that all such subjectivist efforts (traditional, anti-traditional, or philosophical) as Barth's, the Toronto AACS' and a host of others, despite good intentions, became. "The voice said, 'Cry out!' And he said, 'What shall I cry?' 'All flesh is grass, And its loveliness is like the flower of the field. . . . The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever'" (Isaiah 40:6, 8).

**Didn't Calvin quote voluminously from the church fathers as well as from the Bible? Indeed he did, and from no one more extensively than St. Augustine. (Ford Lewis Battles' index to Calvin's Institutes has a 6-1/2 page list of his quotations from that church father). But he quoted and appealed to him and the other fathers not as independent authorities, but only because and to the extent that they had been the church's faithful teachers of God's Word.*

WHO AM I?

Glenn P. Palmer

This is only a partial list of names that I have been called:

"The man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan"	
"This fellow"	"Good Teacher"
"Elijah"	"drunkard"
"John"	"Glutton"
"the man"	"Rabboni"

Who am I?

What would you like to have written on your tombstone as an epitaph? In one book of the Bible I am once called "the man of God," four times "my servant," and thirteen times "the servant of the Lord." Should that suggest a goal for you? I do not want to sound boastful, for the Good Book calls me "a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth." Why does the Bible call me "the servant of the Lord" so often? One possible reason is that as a "servant," I obeyed my master. Fifteen times in two chapters it is written that I did "as the Lord commanded." Who am I?

SOWING IN TEARS

(Ps. 126:5,6)

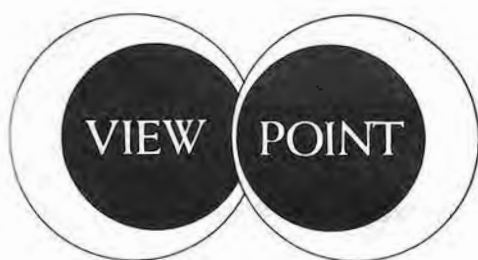
*"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy"
Is the precious promise given;
On earth perhaps, but it may be
Our joy will come in heaven.*

*Discouragements are often great,
Temptations ever near;
But they who sow in tears today
May trust and never fear.*

*Perhaps if we should see success
Our hearts would swell with pride;
Far better still that we should cling
In meekness to His side.*

*"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy"
This promise we receive;
Help us to bear the precious seed
And someday bring the sheaves.*

Annetta Jansen
Dorr, Michigan



Translation or ILLEGITIMATE Revision

The *Wachter* editor (Aug. 18, 1985) expresses indignation ("When you read such a thing your blood can boil!") at the charges expressed in the pages of the *Outlook* (March, 1985, pp. 8f., June, pp. 17f.) that a translation committee deceptively revised our Belgic Confession, and suggests that an apology would be appropriate.

The church's creeds are its officially approved confessions of its faith in the teachings of God's Word. If anyone has objections to them, the way to correct them is by the gravamen procedure. In 1977 a committee was appointed, not to make any substantive changes in the confession, but only to update its language. In going about its work the committee translated, not the officially approved creed, but an allegedly early and unapproved version of it. Dr. Norman De Jong was a delegate in 1979 (when the synod refused to approve that substitution) and in 1983 when the translation matter again came up for discussion. He pointed out in our March, 1985, *Outlook* that in those discussions, "although it did not come to the attention of the synodical delegates in 1979 or 1983, and has not been cited by the committee when calling attention to the 'revisions,' the male language used in reference to the ecclesiastical officers has all been removed and replaced with non-sexist language." Thus the Biblical qualification that holders of these church offices be men (1 Tim. 2:3; 1 Cor. 14:33ff.) which we have always confessed in this creed, was quietly removed from it under the guise of merely up-dating the English. Need anyone apologize for calling that deceptive?

Readers may be interested in the Synod's handling of the matter (*Acts*, pp. 787f.). While the committee attempted to justify its revisions by appeal to French and Dutch versions, Overtures 59 and 60 (pp. 639, 640) exposed the fallacies of its arguments. The divided Synod, in what has the appearance of a political compromise, approved the committee's revision of Article 30, but rejected that of Article 31, keeping the masculine pronouns!

Encouraging Church Disorder

The *Wachter* editor, in the Aug. 13 issue already mentioned, reported that the Synod had declared that "adjunct" officers were not in conformity with the church order. His "interpretation" of that decision should be noted. He repeatedly observes that the Synod did *not* say that consistories which had introduced the practice of having "adjuncts" *should stop it*. Although conceding that this neglect was "naturally unintentional," he considers it very significant. At considerable length he pleads for the consciences of those who disagree with the Synod decision, and for the need for a church order that is not "static." "A really living congregation will always at one or more points be somewhat ahead of the church order." "It is not at all unusual that a Spirit-led church is ahead of the rules!" He suggests proceeding in the same direction with having these adjuncts, for, "Who can say in what direction the Spirit will drive our churches?"

It should not be forgotten that the Florida Classis attempted to ask the *Banner* editor to give account before the same Synod of his editorial utterances in conflict with Scripture and the creeds, but had its effort brushed aside on a technicality. When the denomination permits its official publications to publicly contradict the Bible, creeds, church order and official Synod decisions, how can it keep the respect and support of its members?

DODGING Denominational Responsibility

We need to consider some of the implications of the Synod's dismissal of the Florida overture. Although that overture was, by action of the officers ruled legally before the Synod (p. 678) and was accordingly considered by the Synod, the overture, including a justification and precedents for its procedure of going to the Synod, does not appear in the *Acts* although the Board's and committees' debatable arguments for rejecting it are printed (p. 728; of April, 1985 *Outlook*, p. 10ff. and Rev. E. Heerema's article in this issue).

The advisory committee, looking for a precedent for refusing to consider the matter, rather surprisingly, cited the action of the Synod of 1976 (9 years ago) in refusing to consider the legally presented objections to the classis' approval of Dr. Allan Verhey. Anyone familiar with both cases can find little similarity between the two—except that in both

cases the Synod wanted to evade doing its duty under the church order. One dereliction of duty is used to justify another!

Suppose the classis should follow the procedure the Synod said it should, addressing the man, his consistory and his classis. This would entail delays of perhaps a year or two. Then, if the matter ever got to Synod by this route, that Synod could reasonably answer, "You have followed the wrong procedure! Your objection is against the editorial policy of the *Banner* over which the consistory and classis had no jurisdiction. If you had objection to the man's handling of his job you should have objected to his bosses, the Board of Publications and Synod!" They are responsible for what the church publishes in its papers.

The drastic implications of this case should be considered. It is evidently telling us that the only way you can object to something produced by the churches' board of publications is by starting a personal heresy trial against the author. The Board and Synod for whom these people work are refusing any responsibility for what they are doing. If this principle is to be generally accepted, as the decision indicates it should be, it means that the Synod and Calvin Board can also not be expected to take responsibility for what is taught in our seminary, a parallel denominational institution! Thus the churches are losing control over our growing denominational bureaucracy! The denomination is already giving the churches very little accounting for what its agents are doing with their money. (Surprisingly little financial information can be found in our 864-page *Acts*.) Now it is also refusing to take any responsibility for views and doctrines promoted in our official church papers. The message of the Synod is beginning to get through to the church members. The multitude of long-suffering concerned among them are being told, "If you are convinced that something is going wrong in the church, it is your duty to start procedures to correct it—and we will do what we can to stop you!" P.D.J.

Synod Injustice

Synod of 85 decided that in the matter of training candidates for the ministry and licensing them for preaching, the reins would stay in the hands of Calvin Seminary and its Board of Trustees. No principle reasons were given for this decision, of course, because there are none to give. If Reformed church polity and principle arguments had prevailed, Synod would have changed the (new) rules.

Even though students studying at other Reformed institutions such as Mid-America or Westminster will be required to take that extra year at Calvin, the same Synod granted special concessions to students from other ethnic backgrounds (Asians, Blacks, Hispanics & Native Americans). They will not have to take the regular course of study required of other

students. It appears that Synod was so eager to avoid even the appearance of discrimination to those of non-white background that it fell into the error of "reverse discrimination." It's a case of measuring with two measures, or of "straining out the gnat but swallowing the camel." There is something about this whole business that is not above board. It smells a bit of hypocrisy. I personally think it's time that some consistories and classes take a stand and say: We have the right to license candidates and to ordain them when they have had qualified Reformed training, even if they haven't been at Calvin. Why should we continue to submit meekly to all these unjust rules? Righteousness and truth have a higher priority than petty ecclesiastical rules. ●

J. Tuininga, Lethbridge, Alta.

THE CRISIS in South Africa

In regard to the one-sided campaign that is being carried on in this country by the liberal news media and liberal politicians concerning internal affairs in the nation of South Africa, interference that we would not tolerate in our own government, the following comments should be in order.

The Blacks in South Africa, who outnumber the Whites about five to one, are waging a campaign, often violent, against the government for racial equality and majority rule. Their slogan is, "One man, one vote." But in one African nation after another that policy has resulted in "One man, one vote—once"; or, "One man, one vote—then chaos." The President soon gets himself elected for life, then he begins accepting help from Russia, and soon it is a Communist country. To see what the result of that policy would be we need only look at Uganda, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, or Sudan. There is no reason to believe that the result in South Africa would be any different.

Majority rule would mean Black rule, with certain persecution of Whites.

The Blacks in South Africa receive much better wages than do those in any other Black nation. They have better housing, better clothing, better food and plenty of it while various other Black nations are starving, unable to support themselves, and are calling on the United States for help. They have more automobiles (the usual symbol of good living) than do the Blacks in all of the rest of Africa put together. But instead of showing a sense of appreciation for their greatly improved conditions they seem to think that if only they can get control of the government all of the prosperity of the nation will be theirs. But what a rude awakening they

would have!! Experience shows that neither Socialism nor Communism can produce or maintain prosperity in a nation. People work industriously to produce only when they can keep what they earn. When either Socialism or Communism is introduced prosperity literally disappears overnight.

When the Dutch went into South Africa in 1652 that was all open country. There were no Bantus or Zulus within hundreds of miles. The British came in 1795, nearly two centuries ago, and gained control of the country in 1910. And the economic grandeur of that country has been due largely to the Anglo-Dutch industry and ingenuity. As the country developed the Blacks came in ever increasing numbers as they found much better living conditions than in their own countries. South Africa did not have to build fences to keep their people in, as have Russia and other Communist nations. Rather she had to build fences to keep others out.

The Communists are behind much of the rioting and anarchy that is going on in South Africa. Time after time they have promoted unrest and insurrection in countries where there is trouble. They have furnished arms and supplies and have vigorously promoted propaganda favorable to their cause. That has been standard Communist policy. We need think only of Korea, Vietnam, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Afghanistan. The present South African government is strongly opposed to Communism, and wants to be friendly to the United States. The problem in South Africa is not so much Black as it is Red. That racial agitator, Bishop Tutu, is a professed Socialist, strongly inclined toward Communism. He has called for the destruction of the Capitalist Free Market, the very system through which South Africa has grown to greatness, and he has said that Communism would be better than what they now have. What nonsense!!

The outcome of the present rioting and the meddling of other nations in South Africa's internal affairs can lead only to a victory for Russia. And then, with the sea lanes around South Africa in Russian hands, we and the European nations, who are so dependent on Arab oil, will *really* be in trouble. ●

September 4, 1985, (Mr.) Loraine Boettner, P. O. Box 56, Rock Port, MO 64482. (Dr. Boettner is the author of a number of books including his classic, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*).

South Africa

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

The recent criticism of South Africa's so-called apartheid has been so distorted that since we were there two years ago, we must tell the other side of the story.

Twenty-five couples rented recreational vehicles, and in seven weeks drove 5,000 miles across South Africa. We camped in their parks, rode their trains and public buses, visited their homes and most large cities. We therefore had many excellent contacts with both Whites and Blacks. We found both easy to talk to, happy, and mixing freely with each other in the market places, stores, banks, industry, and all walks of life.

When we visited a large General Motors plant, we noticed many Blacks and Whites in the same cafeteria line, dining areas, offices, and working areas. Just like home!

Our group often commented that in many ways, in our observation, we have as much apartheid here in the U.S. as South Africa has. There it is supposedly "legalized" and ineffective. Here it is done by "people and their attitudes" and very effective. Incidentally, how many Blacks come to your church?

Yes, we were in Soweto (the suburb of Johannesburg with 1.25 million Blacks), where the housing was like new, spacious, one-story, and clean. The Blacks are purchasing these homes with 5% down on a 40-year plan at 4% interest. Many are doing this. Obviously heavily subsidized by their government. Ironically our Blacks live mainly in the old and decrepit areas of our towns. Soweto has several hospitals for the Blacks, one of which is the largest in the southern hemisphere and likely one of the largest in the world. It has 2400 beds (here few have more than 450 beds), 1200 Black nurses in training, and a staff of 150 Black doctors plus 300 White doctors.

Education for the Blacks is free. At Pretoria, the university has 28,000 students; 60% are Blacks. There are thousands of Black churches of almost all faiths in South Africa. Eighty percent of the Blacks profess to be Christians. Thanks to the Whites.

When the Europeans came to South Africa in the 1600's, there were few Blacks. The climate was too dry—almost desert and no food. The Whites began building huge dams, reservoirs, and irrigation systems. Now they store up to five years' supply of water and several years of staple food. Obviously there is no starvation here. Production of food here exceeds demand by 20%—a condition very rare in any of the 50 countries in Africa. Most of them produce 20-30% under demand and need imports. The present drought (also common here) has little effect, and South Africa regularly exports considerable food.

Almost all of South Africa became the home of the Whites before it became the home of the Blacks. Most of the Blacks were migrants from the north and returned frequently.

In terms of industry, South Africa is the Japan of Africa. South African Blacks share in these successes and have the highest literacy and standard of living of Blacks among the 400 million in Africa. When we were there the unemployment of the Blacks was below 8%. Ours is 30% or more.

As a result, Blacks and Whites in neighboring countries continue to migrate to South Africa, and no one leaves. In the last 70 years, South African Blacks have increased ten-fold, the Whites only three-fold. A 7-to-1 ratio now exists. The ratio explains why South Africa doesn't dare grant voting rights to the Blacks. It would obviously result in a complete Black takeover. However, South Africa does place many Blacks in governmental positions. Actually Blacks never did vote in Africa because their culture revolves around tribal councils and chiefs.

Now what is the answer to the voting problem? Many of the Blacks in South Africa were not born there. Should South Africa grant voting rights only to Black natives? Should it bar all those who had less than a 6th grade education? Remember almost all of the Blacks pouring in from surrounding countries came because they wanted a better livelihood, found it and stayed. They didn't vote where they came from, nor expect to vote where they were going. Now we insist they vote, and are trying to wreck their country if they don't! How ridiculous! We and all the other countries should stay out of South Africa and let them solve their own problems. All we do is stir up discontentment!

That Black tribalism is still so strong in South Africa was a surprise to most of us. There are 9 distinct tribes and the hatred between them is generations old, and usually much stronger between tribes than between Blacks and Whites. This is apparent in the present uprising and riots. Of the 600 Blacks killed, practically all were killed by Blacks. Few Whites were involved.

Another good reason for South African opposition to a Black government follows from failures of the 30 nations in Africa that were pushed into Black control by the identical external and internal forces that South Africa is experiencing now. The Blacks were not ready! Tribalism is still strong among Blacks and became open warfare—thousands killed—economies failed—the work force deteriorated—Marxism moved into almost all countries and starvation followed. Now most Blacks vote Russian style—only one candidate—or as some analysts said, “1-man, 1-vote, 1-time.” For confirmation of these facts, we may read about Zimbabwe (Rhodesia)—a recent victim. It would be a catastrophe if South Africa would be forced to follow its lead.

Clarence E. Bruins, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The Dated NEW Left

Calvin College English professor, Dr. Edward E. Ericson, Jr. has over the years become something of an acknowledged expert on the illustrious modern Russian refugee writer, Aleksandr Isayevich Solzhenitsyn and has

been engaged in an abridgement of his masterwork, *The Gulag Archipelego*. The August, 1985, *Reformed Journal* (for which Dr. Ericson is a contributing editor) begins with his remarkably critical article on the leftist political stance that characterizes much of Calvin's faculty. Dr. Ericson observes that as the once popular “tide of political radicalism” has receded, he has “been surprised to find that old new radicalism surfacing in bits and pieces in—of all places—Christian colleges, conspicuously including” his own. “More than a decade after this ideology has lost its appeal in the academy at large, here we Christians come to it as if it were a new viable intellectual alternative. Today the idea that we should politicize (read *radicalize*) the curriculum sounds new and daring to some Christian academics. Often I have had secular counterparts let me know, subtly or not, that they considered our Christian colleges to be consistently behind the times. Never did I expect that we would provide them with such clear evidence.”

Among the views which Ericson sees the old left leaders rejecting and Christian colleagues currently embracing, is especially a “self-aggrandizing romance with the corrupt Third World.” While he notes a conspicuous silence about the atrocities occurring in Ethiopia and Afghanistan, he sees campaigning in favor of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua (to which, incidentally, the U.S. government had given more aid in 18 months than to Samozia in the previous 20 years). While there is talk of curriculum revision to promote “justice” and “peace,” no one is concerned about *freedom*. “Next year Calvin College will offer a course in which students are to be taken to Nicaragua. You can be sure that they will meet with persons who blame Central America's troubles on the United States and justify the activities of Daniel Ortega and the Sandinistas. You cannot be sure that they will hear good representatives of some other point of view, though I sincerely hope that they do.” He expresses his apprehensions about the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship's projected 1986-1987 study “Toward a Reformed Response to the Conflicts in Central America.” He sees similar potential for “Third Worldist” misrepresentation in a movement to “internationalize the curriculum.” While Dr. Ericson does not question the Christian commitment of his colleagues, he sees their effort to politicize the curriculum as “very damaging” to the mission of the school as a Christian college, as well as to other schools which it influences.

P.D.J.

More recently these political sympathies were demonstrated when the September 4 Grand Rapids Press headlined the protest which more than 130 of Calvin's 250-member faculty sent to the South African government against the arrest of Dr. Allan Boesak because he had called for a march on the jail where convicted Communist terrorist Nelson Mandela is held. Dr. Boesak had taught for a time at Calvin College some years ago. (He was released after a brief imprisonment.)