

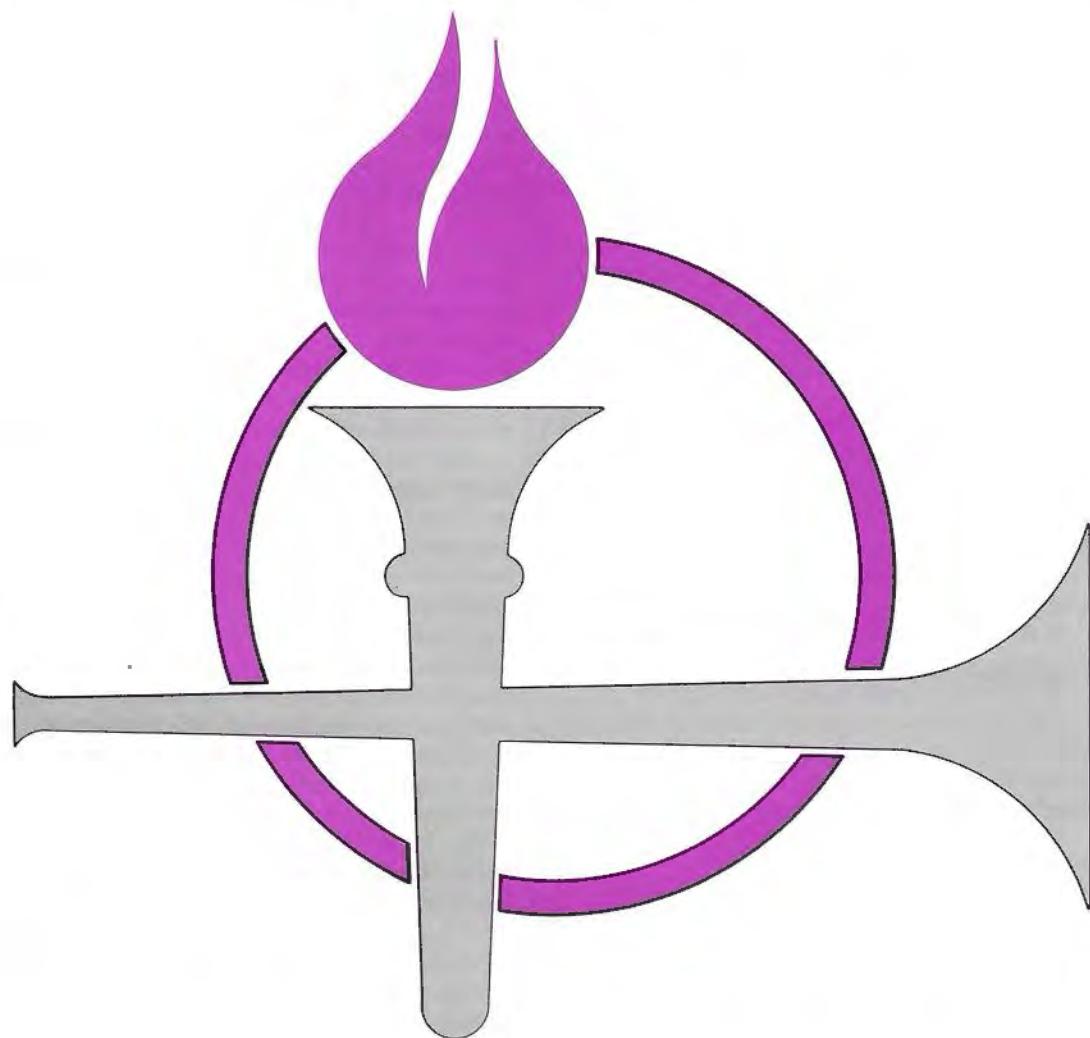
# THE OUTLOOK

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DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

DECEMBER 1985



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MAN'S AGE  
GOVERNING THE CHURCH  
THE BELIEVER'S OFFICE

# THE BEGINNING OF THE FULFILLMENT OF *Christmas*

John Blankespoor

"In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod Tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip Tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysania Tetrarch of Abilene — during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, son of Zechariah in the desert" (Luke 3:1,2).

Anyone who is acquainted with the Bible recognizes Luke 2 as the chapter that relates the birth of Jesus. It is the colorful, exciting story about the heavenly songs of angels and the joy of the shepherds. Later Jesus is presented in the temple, where he is received warmly and joyfully by Simeon and Anna.

But Luke 3 is different. It begins with an historical reference in which Luke, the historian, mentions Tiberius Caesar, Herod, Pilate, Philip, and other rulers. Annas and Caiaphas are also introduced as the high priests and then Luke writes about John the Baptist beginning his work in the wilderness. For most people the record of the secular rulers is of little interest. Notice that what we find in Luke 3 took place some thirty years after the accounts of Luke 2 of Jesus' birth.

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Why does Luke mention the names of all these rulers? Who cares who the secular rulers were? What difference does it make two thousand years later that Tiberius Caesar and other men were civil rulers over some countries of that day? What we have to know is that Jesus Christ is our Savior and Lord and that we belong to Him.

In answer to such questions or objections we must see that what took place following Luke 2, in the work of Jesus Christ, took place in a particular part of our world and at a specific time of world history. Not only does the historicity of Jesus Christ show the authenticity of the Bible.

Luke apparently has another reason for mentioning the names of these rulers. Consider who these men really were. Who was Tiberius Caesar? Caesar had become the name for the rulers of Rome as the rulers of Egypt were called Pharaoh.

Augustus Caesar ruled when Jesus was born. Now Tiberius Caesar was the dictator. They have rightly been called the antichrists of that day. For many years the Caesars had been busy building the empire of Rome. Augustus was busy with that at the time of Jesus' birth when he wanted all the citizens of specific countries registered. We know that Pilate was a wicked ruler, as well as Herod and Philip. Lysanius is named to make the list of the rulers of that area complete. Annas and Caiaphas are also mentioned. With them we find total desecration of the office of the high priest. Although there could be only one high priest at a time according to Levitical law, both of these men are here called high priests. Recall what we read about their wickedness at the trial of Jesus and their godless dealings with the apostles after Pentecost. We may conclude that the sanctity of the office of the high priest was completely lost. Add to this the fact that, according to historical records, the high priest at this time was appointed by civil rulers like the Caesars. Imagine, the high priest, who was supposed to be a type of Jesus Christ, appointed by an antichrist.

This list of rulers might give the impression that Satan and the powers of evil were in complete control. Little Israel is now a part of this vast, indomitable empire of Rome. How dark it must have looked to the true Israelite! How different were these days from the days of David and Solomon. Is this the people of God? Is this the theocratic kingdom of the Lord?

We read about the *fifteenth* year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar. According to history this was the peak of his reign. Now Rome was more consolidated than ever before. What 732 was for the Europeans with the defeat of the Turks, or what 1776 is for the United States the fifteenth year of Tiberius was for Rome. We should know this background of what is to follow.

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*THEN* the Word of the Lord came to John the Baptist and he began his work of preparing the way for Christ. The work of John was really a part of the great work of the Son of God. Christmas has to be fulfilled. John must preach repen-

tance from sin to receive Christ the Savior. He called for repentance, confession of sin and forgiveness and baptism. In this way the people of God were to receive a place in the kingdom of Christ that was to come.

But what can *one* man do, in the wilderness, far from civilization and the masses of people? He was not one of the mighty and influential people of the world. Neither was he a fanatic leader of some cult which makes itself heard throughout the world. His ministry didn't last long, only a year and a half approximately. However, he came with God's Word. And the Word is the mighty sword of the Spirit. Jeremiah the prophet said that it is so strong that it can crush rocks (Jer. 23:29). Against the Word, the inerrant and infallible Word of God, the world has no effective resistance. It is with this preaching of John that the meaning of Christmas begins to be fulfilled. How dark the future must have seemed to the true believers when, not only the world, but also the church was ruled by godless men! Thus it has often appeared to be for the church in many periods of history. What hope is there today for the church in Poland, Russia, China and other countries ruled by godless dictatorial powers? But when the church has the Word, with which John came, it has the power that conquers sin and the power by which the church is constantly gathered.

Let us, who live in North America not fail to see the dangers of the antichristian powers that prevail in our own countries. Although we have much for which to be thankful, not the least the freedom which we may still enjoy, let us beware of the apostasy that prevails all around us. It has been said many times and must be said again and again, that there is little response to the Christmas Gospel today. Perhaps there never is a time when the idols of humanism and secular materialism are worshipped more than during the Christmas season. A certain pastor wrote some time ago, "The devil has stolen Christmas as the day of our spiritual redemption and converted it into a day of worldly festivity. Christmas has almost been completely secularized, also in the church. That Christmas has become for so many people merely a pagan holiday, dedicated to the flesh, and lacking in spiritual significance is but one indication of the moral and spiritual blindness of this generation. That there was no room for Him in the inn was prophetic of today, where for millions He is neither wanted nor welcome. God's meaning of Christmas can never be understood until Christ is given priority in our hearts and lives."

Where God's Word is preached and obeyed we still find the blessings of a true and a joyful Christmas.

Almost two thousand years have passed since Tiberius and his contemporaries lived and ruled. They have been almost completely forgotten.

However, every year is still "A.D.," "Anno Domini," meaning the "year of the Lord." All other rulers and kings have come and gone, but Jesus is Lord throughout the ages. Thank God that He has seen fit that we can so calculate time to this day. And Jesus will continue to rule until time shall be no more. The Jesus about whom John the Baptist preached is still here. His kingdom is still being established and His church is being gathered where His Word is. He lives in the hearts and lives of His people. Where people are faithful to that Word the real Christmas will always be experienced and enjoyed.

# THE OUTLOOK

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

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# God's Calling: THE OFFICE OF THE CHRISTIAN BELIEVER (1)

Peter De Jong

## The Forgotten Office

This subject has gotten a great deal of attention in recent years. A growing number of books have been written about it—some of them with arresting titles such as, *Enemy in the Pew; God's Frozen People; Pete, You're God's Man*. Most of them seem to reveal a deep concern about the weaknesses and confusion of the churches in our time and suggest that if somehow the ordinary church members or "laymen" can be more widely and deeply involved in the churches' life and activities, this may be the road to church renewal. It is a curious fact that this subject, the focus of so much current attention, has been remarkably neglected throughout much of the churches' history. Hendrik Kraemer, one of the more orthodox (Barthian) leaders of the World Council of Churches, observed in his 1958 *A Theology of the Laity* (p. 10), that a systematic study of "the laity's place and meaning, as inherent in the nature and calling of the church, has not so far been undertaken" at least among non-Roman Catholics, and his little book was intended as a first such study. (He entitled his Dutch version of this material, *Het vergeten ambt in de kerk*, or "The Forgotten Office in the Church"). Later, in 1963 The World Council's study, *The Layman in Christian History* is prefaced with the rare claim that it is "a genuinely original book" in which "unmistakably new ground has been broken!" On the basis of the research of many collaborating scholars, the writers state that they "have gathered together a vast amount of information such as has never before been brought within the covers of a single book." It may seem almost unbelievable that in nearly 2000 years of the churches' history a matter as elementary as the proper role of the ordinary church member had never been given a systematic and thorough study. Yet these specialists conclude that, although there have been limited surveys of areas and periods, "church history has been written almost exclusively in terms of prelates, councils, movements and heresies," so that the role of the ordinary church member has been grossly neglected.

I became especially intrigued with the strategic role of the ordinary believer almost four decades ago when involved with a mission in mainland China. Later, the growing confusion about the proper order and functioning of the churches

and the current questions and controversies about our Christian responsibilities in our society and world made it steadily more evident that we must give more attention than we have to the role that God's Word assigns to the ordinary believer.

What have others done to help us study this subject? As has already been observed, there is surprisingly little. My own interest in the subject arose long before the comparatively recent flood of writing about it. As Kraemer observed, much of that volume of writing has been "practical," concerned with getting more action in the church, rather than founded on Christian doctrine, let alone the Bible. It is remarkable that most of this material has come from Roman Catholic, Liberal Protestant, or, at best, Barthian sources, and the resulting work, though sometimes useful, has been generally disappointing. In 1927 the Lutheran commentator, R.C.H. Lenski wrote a good little book, *Kings and Priests*, though its range of interests is somewhat limited. From a Reformed perspective, Harry G. Goodykoontz's (1963) *The Minister in the Reformed Tradition* has value, but its focus is not on the layman. When I looked for material on this subject years ago the only suggestion I could get was K. Sietsema's (pre-World War II) *Ambtsgedachte*, which has been translated by Dr. Henry Vander Goot and published this year by Paideia Press as *The Idea of Office*. This is a valuable book, stressing the fact that office involves God's appointment and authorization, not merely human ability, ambition and function. It too, however, is focused primarily on the church and that from a pastor's perspective. Abraham Kuyper concluded the third and last volume of his *Encyclopedia* with the observation that the office of the believer was a subject that should get some special attention but he did not in this massive survey of Christian doctrine supply it! This was still "the forgotten office."

It would be incorrect to say that the office of believers has been totally forgotten in the churches' history. We need only to recall the Heidelberg Catechism's 12th Lord's Day, 32nd question and answer: "But why are you called a Christian?" "Because by faith I am a member of Christ and so I share in his anointing. I am anointed to confess his name, to present myself to him as a living sacrifice of thanks, to strive with a good conscience against sin and the devil in this life,

and afterward to reign with Christ over all creation for all eternity." The catechism's statement is a good summary of a great deal of Biblical teaching about this important subject. We, however, need to give that Biblical teaching a great deal more attention than we usually do. To suggest that is the purpose of this writing.

### What Is a Christian Believer?

If we are to see clearly the Bible's teaching about the office of the Christian believer, we first need to consider what is meant by a "Christian believer." Both the growing religious confusion of our time and a look at some of the many books about the office of the believer or "layman" show that we need to do that. A little 1960 book by Karl H. Hertz, *Every Man a Priest*, nicely illustrates that need. In a promising arrangement of material, an introductory chapter on "What it Means to be a Christian" is followed by three on the Christian as priest, as king and as prophet. The Christian is characterized as open to radical change as we are "victims of the tides of human history," which currently seem to run against the Gospel. The writer suggests grasping the doctrine of "the universal priesthood" as a possible "Christian answer to the confusions and contradictions of our time." The Christian is then identified as "God's man, his handiwork through the redemptive deed of Christ." By an "encounter" he is, a "picked representative of the new humanity," "restored to the image of God himself," to be like Christ, a priest, king and prophet. The book's development of these three roles to show the Christian living as "the new humanity" obscures the difference between Christian and non-Christian, and stresses social action such as working for inexpensive open housing and removal of race discrimination. "The heart of the Christian priesthood is just this intercessory action on behalf of others." "The universal priesthood is universal. It includes all men in all the activities of life" (p. 24), so that even non-Christians, when they engage in this social action, are also "priests" (p. 19). In fact, the book repeatedly finds non-Christians seeking its "progressive" (priestly, kingly and prophetic) social objectives, while Christians and churches do not. Thus the believer's office, proposed in this and similar books as a remedy for the current secular confusion and demoralization of the church and society, is interpreted to wipe out the difference between believer and unbeliever and really make worse the confusion that it was supposed to remedy. A look at this book and the prevailing ideas it expresses underscores the fact that if we are to talk about the office of the believer in today's confusion, we have to begin by defining and distinguishing what it means to be a Christian believer.

### The Bible's Definition of a Believer

Let's turn to a passage in which the Apostle Paul anticipates and describes the kind of confusion that characterizes the church and society of our times, the third chapter of his second letter to Timothy: "There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholly, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (vv. 1-4). Do you know of a better description of the demoralization and violence that are tearing apart our communities and civilizations? The accompanying religion is described as "having a form of godliness but denying its power" (v. 5).

The remedy prescribed for this condition is the Christian faith. That "faith" does not mean only some vague experience. It is defined as believing "the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." We can and must trust those writings because "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (vv. 15-17). This definition by the Divinely inspired Scriptures is exactly what is lacking in the popular slogans which urge laymen to work at saving dying churches. Because the definition by God's word has been discarded, the action being promoted, despite its religious trimmings, often turns out to be, no Christianity at all, but only a weak copy of the secular ideals of the unbelieving world that are destroying those churches. These "progressive" programs of the main-line churches are still disturbingly like that of the missionary we once heard preaching in 1948 in Peking, China. His sermon did nothing but glorify the progressive ideals of the Communists and deplore the backwardness of the churches in failing to support their revolutionary social program.

While, just as in Paul's day, "evil men and imitators will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived" (v. 13) believers, like Timothy, are urged to "continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."

These Scriptures, however necessary and important, are not ends in themselves, but they are God's sure way to lead us to realize our sin and need of a savior and to turn to Jesus Christ as that only Savior. The Lord had to state that plainly to the learned theologians he encountered (John 5:39, 40), "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."

Our use of the Scriptures does not stop when they have led us to come to Christ. They continue to be our complete guide to the life of faith in Him, "teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Both James (1:18) and the Apostle Peter (1 Pet. 1:23) wrote of the believer being "born again . . . through the word of God." In connection with that we notice the currently popular claim of many to be "born again Christians." But the Scriptures aim at much more than only bringing people to rebirth. They are also designed to nourish and guide them in growing from birth to maturity and to equip them for adult Christian service — "so that the man of God may be equipped for every good work" (cf. 1 Pet. 2:2-5). If we are ever to begin to fulfill the calling and office of Christian believers we will have to be the kind of believers who are born and nourished by the Word of God.

The only reformations that have brought real renewal to the churches and societies in any time have been those that like King Josiah's, Augustine's, Luther's and Calvin's, De Kock's, Kuyper's, and Machen's received their motivations and direction from God's Word. In the further attention we hope to give to the office of the believer, let that be our starting point and guide. Further articles are intended to deal with the office of the Christian believer, its role in the church, in missions and in our duties in the world.

# The REAL Bible

Joseph A. Brinks

Some time ago I heard a radio preacher present a Reformation Day sermon about what he called the "real" Bible. At first the sermon left me mildly irritated. He said that the King James Version (KJV) was the only real Bible as opposed to all other versions and/or translations. He maintained that the Greek *textus receptus* upon which the KJV is based was the only valid Greek text and thus that the (old) KJV was the only real Bible today.

My mild irritation came about partly from his insistence on the sole validity of the KJV textual tradition. Neither could I give whole-hearted approval to his choice of words, namely his reference to a "real" Bible. If the KJV is real does that mean other versions are in some sense "unreal"? How can they be unreal? Do they lack existence or substance? Surely not. Or by "real" did he mean reliability according to God's Word as originally given? If so why did he not argue that the KJV was the only "reliable" Bible? Why is it fashionable in many circles today to use imprecise language? Are we perhaps losing something by trying to be too colloquial?

Enough by way of comment on the radio preacher. But his phrase "real" Bible did remain with me. I have reflected on it several times — finally concluding that in my congregations there have been various "real" Bibles. Let me share these musings with you.

First some definition is in order. I shall try consistently to refer to the Bible of 66 books as the Word of God. I shall use the phrase "real" Bible to refer to the real authority in a person's life. The Word of God and one's "real" Bible may or may not be the same. I suspect that many of our problems in the church today come because these are sometimes not the same.

## Is the Word of God Our Real Bible?

There is some evidence to suggest that the Word of God is not the "real" Bible for all the members of the congregations I have pastored. Let me illustrate.

Consider the matter of Sunday church attendance. Some do not see enough importance in worship and the Word to attend twice. Neither are they impressed with the authority and wisdom of the consistory or Church Order which require attendance at two Sunday worship services. These find two worship services too burdensome (and boring?) for their own good. But why? These same people watch television an average of six hours per day, or forty-two hours per week. They can watch football, basketball and baseball games two to three hours at a time several times per week. Doesn't this say, at the very least, that the Bible is less important to them than certain secular activities? And if the Bible is not that important to them, isn't it also true that the Bible is not a real authority in their lives? After all, we have time for what is really important to us.

Or consider the law of God. Why can many "Christians" easily ignore that law they hear on Sunday from Monday to Saturday? Why do many so easily dismiss law from life? Can it be that their real law is the law of the land? Is the law for some the law of the kingdom of this age rather than that of the Kingdom of God?

These illustrations point out the problem. They suggest that some among us have a "real" Bible or real authority other than the Word of God. If so, we need a Reformational emphasis today on *sola Scriptura* — the Bible only — once again.

## What Is a Person's Real Bible?

I see many different "real" Bibles among our people. While for many the Word of God is the real Bible, for others it is not. Among these others I notice some six main "real" Bibles. I mention these six but do not imply anything about order, importance, or popularity of these by the order. Pastors and church leaders do well to consider the "real" Bible of a person before they can carry out effective ministry.

The first group is the TRADITIONALISTS. These often appear fiercely loyal to the Word of God, though close scrutiny reveals the contrary. The traditionalist is always con-

servative — and usually authoritarian and negative. His real authority is some tradition. In one congregation I served, after we completed an Activities Building, we had a lunch with coffee and ice cream after a morning worship service to celebrate. While we were celebrating, one church member came up to an Elder and myself loudly complaining that coffee outside church after a worship service was sin in which he would have to refuse to participate. From where did he derive his view? Not the Bible, for the Bible does not condemn lunch after church. In fact, in Corinth they even ate a main meal with communion right in church! This objector spoke with the authority of tradition from certain earlier practices in his denomination.

Unfortunately these traditionalists hurt the genuine conservative cause. Over the years I have become very fearful of traditionalists. These can be as mistaken and cruel as the liberal members. A real problem with the pure traditionalists is that after a generation they cannot tell the difference between the Biblical and the traditional. These make me hesitant to identify too strongly with conservative causes lest I seem to be a traditionalist. These bring disfavor upon Biblical conservatives.

A second group with a "real" Bible other than the Word of God is the WORLDLY-WISE. Often these are highly educated and have advanced degrees. Their central problem is that their educational discipline is better known and more authoritative for them than the Word of God. These include scientists who accept what science says as true rather than what the Bible says. If science and the Bible seem to contradict each other, the Bible must be explained away. Of course these include many more persons than scientists. I wish to add emphatically too, that many others with advanced degrees do not belong to the worldly wise. Among the worldly-wise in our churches there is usually enough overt respect for the Word of God to want to harmonize it with their academic disciplines. Those who do not wish to harmonize have left the church. The worldly-wise do well to remember that the allegedly "sure findings" of science change in only a few years, and must always be viewed as subordinate to Scripture. In reality, Scripture and (correct) science can not contradict each other, for God's special and general revelation are one — not contradictory. But when Scripture says something clearly, that should settle it for us. Although academic and scientific disciplines can help us understand Scripture, these other disciplines may never become "real" Bibles in place of Scripture.

A third group with a "real" Bible other than the Word of God — a group with many members in the churches I have served — is those with WORLDLY-VALUES. These are enamored with riches, expensive vacations, and similar luxuries. This group seems to be getting larger in our churches. They find their fulfillment in the treasures of this world. They listen to the preaching of the Word of God only to the extent that preaching confirms their scale of values. They seldom want to hear anything else. They like sermons about positive thinking and God's blessing upon accomplishment. They usually do not like to think very deeply. They easily skip church if they do not hear what they want to hear. These seldom come to Bible studies or church societies.

They care little for the Bible, Christian tradition, or even scholarship. They easily leave one church for another which they "like" more for reasons vague even to them. In the secular world they are now called "yuppies." Yuppies are not scarce in churches today.

A fourth group with another "real" Bible are the HOBBYISTS. These have their favorite activities, hobbies, or interests that come before the Word of God. I can usually discern these because they can speak animatedly about their real interests, but become very quiet when discussion turns to the Word of God. They talk much better about baseball, football or basketball than about spiritual things. They may talk much about horse cleanliness but little about Christian holiness. Their heart is on their real hobby rather than on the Word of God. In one of my congregations we had a member who went to the racetrack Sunday mornings to race horses rather than to worship services.

A fifth group with a wrong "real" Bible are the FADISTS. These follow the latest fad or trend in the world. These may go camping weekends during the summer rather than to their own church. Or they may favor the ordination of women to church office for the simple reason that the worldly women's movement is demanding that. Their real authority is the fad, not the Bible. The pastor or church leader can pick this up quickly in conversation with them.

A sixth identifiable group is those whose "real" Bible seems to be simple PASSIVENESS. These seem interested primarily in leisure and laziness. They may refuse to get involved in any church work. They may refuse to put forth much effort to understand sermons or society lessons. A passive person told me he did not come to Bible study because it was not worth the effort of getting his coat on or wasting the gas to start his car.

Sometimes these have trouble working up the energy to go to church, especially if the weather is too hot or cold. One of these once told me that if our church would change its worship service from 9:30 to 10:00 a.m. he thought he could get up early enough on Sunday mornings to come, but he wasn't sure. These may not have other interests. They may not be opposed to much. But they have little interest and energy for spiritual matters either. Refusing spiritual exercise, they become spiritual cripples. They are just passive and uninvolved. They like to call themselves Christians, but they know nothing of discipline, exercise, sanctification, or spiritual warfare.

Let not pastors and church leaders think that all members in their congregations have the Word of God as their "real" Bible! Such thinking would be shallow and foolish indeed!

### Toward Making God's Word the "Real" Bible of Our People

What can a pastor and consistory do to correct these conditions? How can we emphasize the Reformational principle of "the Bible only" today? How can we most effectively minister in an age when the real enemy is no longer the Romish Church but the spirit of the age? How can we best lead when some church members will not submit to the Word and law of God, but are laws unto themselves, doing what is right in their own eyes?

Happily, pastors and church leaders can to an extent minister effectively. But I must begin with a pessimistic and cautionary note. I have noticed that when I as a pastor try to help some church members toward a more Biblical position they immediately leave. For instance, if I suggest that Christian schools are good, some members say that if they have to hear anymore of that they will go to the church down the street where they do not have to hear trash for sermons. Or if I suggest we should tithe, some members say that they will go to the large church across town where they do not pay

quotas. We simply have to recognize that we live in an age of consumer Christians who will attend church where they hear what they want to hear. Many people see church attendance and membership as spiritually parallel to shopping at one department store or another. They go where the product or religion is cheapest and easiest. And they have little loyalty to one place or another, but go from one store or church to another without feeling any obligation to any store or church. Many Christians today have a consumer mentality. In this situation churches find it difficult to speak truth. They must meet consumer demands. And the ecclesiastical media give full support and approval to "church growth" effort, which usually means numerical growth in membership. Often church growth has little to do with growth in Biblical knowledge or Christian maturity. Too often truth is set aside for warm bodies. It is hard for pastors and church leaders to hold the Bible high when the popularly approved movements of the day do just the opposite.

Yet pastors and church leaders can help people toward the Word of God in some ways. And the true sheep will listen and follow. We must not despair. A minority with God is better than a majority without God, as the two spies found out who had the opposition of ten spies and a whole nation (Numbers 13-14). Rightness is more important than relationships. Truth is better than numbers. How can we help people make the Word of God their "real" Bible?

First, we must understand the situation described above. People seldom say what their real Bible is, but they always show it. We must look carefully at lifestyles and works. Then we see the trumpet people are following. We must be informed before we can transform.

Second, pastors and church leaders can truthfully but lovingly confront people with the facts. The Bible tells us to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Both truth and love are important. Sometimes doctrinally solid church leaders have spoken truth without much love. On the contrary, the spirit of the age in ecclesiastical churches today has moved radically in the opposite direction, often totally dismissing truth and only emphasizing love or relationship. Blessed is the church where the truth is spoken in love. Paul told Timothy to refute false doctrines and heresies by simply presenting the truth positively (I Timothy 4:13-16).

Third, pastors and church leaders must insist in situations of conflict that the Biblical way be followed. It is a simple fact that the leadership and majority in a church determine direction. If the leadership is right the church can have some weaker members who will tend to be drawn in the right direction. But if the leadership is wrong then even the minority of strong members will tend to be led astray. Sheep follow their shepherds. Pastor and church leaders, make sure that your "real" Bible is the Word of God!

Fourth and finally, pastors and church leaders must always remember to say, "Thus says the Lord." They must say no less, and they may say no more. Many times in ministry I would have been in trouble except that the Lord's Words resulted in God getting the blame (or credit). For instance, I once preached on Galatians 1:8 where the Bible says that anyone who comes with another gospel is accursed. One visitor became very angry at me for being so narrow-minded and bigoted. I tried to say gently that if he could show that I had misrepresented what God said, I would make a public apology. As he was forced to see that it was God who said it and not I, the Word began to work powerfully in him, eventually converting him. Another young parishioner who was far from God and who attended church only sporadically became very upset when I preached on Revelation 3:14-22 and spoke against lukewarmness. He vowed never to come to church to hear me again. But some time later He testified to the elders that he gradually came to see that it was really God speaking, and that he was the lukewarm one to whom the Word was directed. He is progressing, though still has far to go. Pastors and elders, make sure God gets all the blame or credit for what you say. That way, we do not have to worry. After all, we are only messengers. And as we become better and better messengers we find that the living, powerful, active Word of God (Hebrews 4:12) still speaks. "Thus says the Lord" still today.

Let the *sola Scriptura*, or "The Bible only" of the Reformation still be heard today! Let our "real" Bible be THE WORD OF GOD!

*Rev. Joseph A. Brinks is pastor of the Christian Reformed Church at Sully, Iowa.*

## REFORMED FELLOWSHIP ANNUAL MEETING

When the Reformed Fellowship was organized just over a third of a century ago, it began as a local group who began meeting together out of their common concern to promote and maintain the Reformed faith. As through the years the organization came to include members scattered across the continent, opportunities for such "fellowship" meetings necessarily came to be limited to occasional gatherings in various localities and a general meeting once a year in Grand

Rapids, Michigan. This year that general meeting was held October 10 at Kelloggsville. It featured Dr. Henry Vander Goot, Calvin College Bible professor, as speaker at its afternoon session, and Rev. Edward J. Knott, pastor of the Forest Grove (CR) Church as speaker for the evening. We plan to include Dr. Vander Goot's illuminating and provocative address on reading the Bible, given to a sizable audience, in a future *Outlook*.

## "The Challenge We Face"

### (1) To Be Reformed

Pastor Knott's address to the well-filled church was entitled "The Challenge We Face." In the undeniably increasing crisis that confronts our churches, he saw a challenge to (1) be Reformed, (2) be consistent, and (3) act positively. As a Reformed Fellowship we are committed to study the Reformed Faith and develop its implications for all of life, to disseminate and defend that faith against opposing errors, to encourage and promote respect for the Reformed tradition and to publish Reformed periodicals and literature. We as individuals as well as an organization, are committed to this. In our personal confessions of faith we make such a commitment. We do so in connection with baptisms and all in offices in our churches publicly commit themselves to that faith and subscribe to it.

What does it mean to be "Reformed"? Dr. Richard Gaffin of Westminster Seminary cited the famous Presbyterian, B. B. Warfield's observation that Calvinism (or the Reformed Faith) is "resolutely God-centered," totally "subjected to the absolute authority of Scripture." It is "the attitude of prayer extended to the whole of life." Again appealing to these writers, the speaker observed that this Faith is to be distinguished as the "more perfectly developed representative differs from the less perfectly developed representatives" (of Christianity). This is not a proud claim, but a humble recognition that this is the Faith God has revealed and given (1 Cor. 4:7). The Reformed tries to be true to the whole of the Scriptures in a "world and life view." This necessarily makes him recognize (as Dr. Vander Goot earlier observed) the *antithesis* that exists between light and darkness, the kingdom of Christ and that of the devil. This is not often recognized in our time.

### (2) To Be Consistent

As Reformed we must work to be consistent. That requires consistent Bible study. In the past more such solid individual and group Bible study was done than today. While today there is much Bible study, it does not seem to produce much assured conviction and confession because of the faulty way in which it is done. It is afraid to recognize the unity of the Bible and its assured teachings (doctrines), out of a pretext of being "unbiased." We must rediscover and learn to wield "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17), in the defense of this Biblical Faith.

Committed to recognizing the greatness of God in all His works, we may not compromise with the spirit and practice of our secular age in the interests of peace. The warning to the Laodicean church shows that God rejects such accommodation. We must not let our faith be robbed of its specific content by the false notion that all that matters is that one only continue to believe in Christ. To suggest, as some do, for example, that the issue of women in office is not very important because it does not affect our salvation, is to forget that we are called to obey the Word of the Lord and to do that consistently. In the past our church synods have said that our practice in this matter is not to be changed unless compelling Biblical evidence shows that we must do so. Our last two synods have reversed that position with only a passing reference to the Bible. We must take God's Word as our starting point and basis in making decisions. That means that we must stop trying, as many do, to "get behind the Scrip-

tures" to explain them away. We must do this regarding the matter of origins, in opposition to those who in our schools and colleges try to "brainwash" us to a contrary view.

We must, in personal and church practice, be consistent in church attendance, in voting in elections of officers and of delegates to assemblies, and in facing the responsibilities of office. The prevailing complaint that ministers "run everything" is an indictment of elders, who, heavily outnumbering the ministers, are called to rule in Christ's name and should not fear to "speak up." In all of these areas of activity we must insist on faithfulness to the Scriptures. When ministers treat a congregation as "personal property" to be led according to their own or popular opinions, or seem to enter the ministry with an arrogant notion of their "gifts" and little or no awareness of any calling by the Lord through His church to preach His Word, consistories must assume their responsibilities as "watchmen" for the welfare of the church and work for Reformation.

### (3) To Act Positively

Seeking to be faithful to our callings in consistories or in the office of all believers, we must speak up in loyalty to God's Word. That entails the duty to protest against decisions contrary to God's Word and the church order. We may not let fear of controversy silence us. We may not "sacrifice our deepest convictions" in order "to stay together." "To speak in love is not being contentious." Our congregations and denomination are not so fragile that they must be preserved by silence about Biblical convictions to preserve a false peace.

The speaker was convinced that "we should not just walk away," as some have done. Even though some in the past were deprived of office, they evidently had more influence than if they had walked away. We are challenged today to reform. This means (1) a whole-hearted soul-commitment to our creeds and the truths that they express, and (2) rededication to prophetic Biblical preaching with a decidedly Reformed commitment (Reformed means Biblical). We must insist that the seminary produce men who are so dedicated, and if it does not, look elsewhere for them. We may not be satisfied with pastors who are anything less than that. (3) We must protest again and again to the synods against un-Biblical decisions. The majority of our church members have a right to be rightly represented at our synods and we must insist that our delegates rightly represent us. (4) We must overcome the malaise of the denomination and stop being ashamed of being Reformed. We must quit letting foolish considerations such as "Dutch background" or being "all white" inhibit us from speaking up for God's Truth. (5) This will entail hard work for each believer and church member, each consistory and consistory member, and each classis, to maintain, extend and expand the Reformed witness without compromise so that it reaches even to the synod of the churches. We have to work hard to be Reformed, which means to be Biblical and obedient. That may be difficult and costly, but it is called for now, in the fellowship of others who share this commitment, using our organizational resources, for the sake of Christ's church. Engaged in that endeavor, we will experience what our Lord promised (John 16:33), "In the world ye have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome..."

PDJ

*The complete address is available on tape from the Reformed Fellowship office for \$3.00.*

# The Democratization of the Church

Norman DeJong

Almost twenty years ago I began pondering the relationship between the Kingdom of God and democracy. Could I concurrently believe that Christ is King of my life and also claim to believe in democracy? Was it logically and theologically consistent to be both a democrat<sup>1</sup> and a Christian? Was the sovereignty of God (which Calvinists claim to be the backbone of Biblical teaching) antithetical to human autonomy?

## May Christianity Really Be Democratic?

I broached those questions to a number of friends and colleagues, but no one was willing to engage in prolonged discussion. They seemed to look askance at anyone crazy enough to question the sacred concept of democracy. What kind of radical nut, posing as a scholar, is this?

My curiosity would not die, however, for the questions would not go away. Mildly frustrated, I returned to the University of Iowa, where I could pursue my research in an atmosphere of academic inquiry. My doctoral supervisor, a nominal Catholic and a worshipper of John Dewey, seemed to be equally curious and assisted me in setting up a research program that would culminate in a dissertation for the Ph.D. To conduct the investigation, I not only had to examine the theological and philosophical claims of each position, but had to ground the research in concrete experiences so that the end-product could be demonstrable and sufficiently realistic to convince the democratic adherents who made up my examining committee.

## Bode's History

With the enthusiastic approval of the powers that governed the process, I chose to focus my studies on the life and writings of Boyd A. Bode.<sup>2</sup> Bode, I discovered, was the son of a popular Christian Reformed minister and had grown up in the parsonage. As a young man he had taught catechism classes and generously assisted in his father's ministry. Later, however, during his graduate studies, he began to question his Christian assumptions and caused his father no little embarrassment. By the time he was entrenched in a professorship at the University of Wisconsin, he was regularly debating John Dewey at gatherings of philosophers. By mid-

life he was agreeing more and more with the preacher of democracy, and by the height of his career, he was vigorously campaigning for the demise of conservative Protestant churches.

When my dissertation became available to the public, almost everyone preferred to ignore it. But not the family and friends of Boyd H. Bode. They bristled at the charge that Bode had rejected Christianity in favor of democracy and threatened to sue me for labelling their father as an anti-Christian. Dad, the children insisted, was really an enlightened Christian who tried to establish heaven on earth and who embodied the very best of the social gospel.

## An Unpopular Question

In the late 1970's I once again embarked on an effort to alert the church to the threat of democracy, but again I found the general public to be uninterested. Questioning the democratic gospel, I found out, is unpopular with those who prefer to treat it as sacred.<sup>3</sup> What most people fail to realize is that democracy can not be equated with the republican form of government. Democracy is a philosophy of life, a world-view, that is separate and distinct from the form of government which we enjoy in Western culture. Republicanism, in fact, is so closely parallel to our presbyterian form of ecclesiastical governance that it would be unwise to question its legitimacy. What I have been advocating for almost two decades is that we recognize that democracy, as a philosophy of life, must be critically and carefully examined so as to prevent it from capturing the hearts and minds of the church. Democracy, I would assert, is as much a heresy as are homosexualism, apartheid, and evolution. It is heretical in spite of being so universally embraced and so widely accepted as compatible with Christianity. Democracy is a wolf in sheep's clothing. It is a fox in the chicken coop, disguised as a rooster.

## Why Beat a Dead Horse?

By now the reader may be asking why the author persists in beating a dead horse. Why continue to proclaim the perils of democratic belief, when it has been repeatedly demonstrated that no one really cares?

The answer lies in a two week experience in the Dominican Republic. While my denominational Synod was debating the direction and beliefs of the Christian Reformed Church, my wife and I chose to live and work in the incredibly poor villages of the Dominican Republic. In a totally different culture, there was ample opportunity to see a flourishing Christian church and to analyze the problems of our denomination from a very different perspective. Why, the missionaries on the field wanted to know, are the North American churches so polarized that each Synod becomes another exercise in schism prevention? Not only is the CRC progressively being polarized, but so are the RCA, the United Presbyterians, the Methodists, and the Southern Baptists. We all claim to be Biblical Christians, but more and more we notice that there are fundamental, foundational issues that divide us. Issues at our Synods seem to be more deep-seated and divisions seem to be almost irreversible. What lies beneath it all? Can we pause long enough to analyze the issues so that our unity in Christ is not fractured further? Can we suggest that our differences are not only theological, but even more importantly and peculiarly philosophical?

Well aware that philosophy is usually reserved for eggheads, and that we may lose some readers at this point, allow me a few paragraphs to compare the basic beliefs of Christianity and democracy.

Christianity, as we all know, has as its core beliefs the sovereignty of God and the kingship of Jesus Christ. God not only created the entire universe and the human race, but providentially and powerfully directs and governs from his eternal throne. The *King* rules, creating and destroying life when and where He wills. Jesus Himself said that all authority originates with the Father. He controls all things so that not even a hair can fall from our balding heads or a baby sparrow from its nest outside of our Ruler's will. In the terminology of governance, Christianity is truly a top-down theory. (By contrast, democracy is a bottom-up theory). According to Scripture, kings, princes, governors, mayors, premiers, and presidents are all appointed by God, to do His will. Government officials, whether in Washington, Ottawa, or in Chicago, are His agents, albeit in sometimes mysterious fashion. At the heart of the Biblical message is the *Kingdom of God*.

Democracy, on the other hand, is a philosophy and/or a religion that surfaces only sporadically on the pages of history. It was notorious and passionately embraced in ancient Athens, where Plato and Socrates found it necessary to argue militantly against it. Socrates' conviction that democracy was at the heart of Athenian troubles became the running theme of many of Plato's Dialogues and resulted finally in Socrates' untimely death.

Democracy also raised its sweet-looking head in the latter part of the eighteenth century, when both France and the American colonies erupted in bloody revolutions in attempts to preserve it. Now, in the late twentieth century, democracy is bringing South Africa to the brink of a deadly civil war, and also threatens numerous other countries around the world.

Those who are in love with democracy always pretend that their philosophy is completely compatible with other religions, but also insist on the priority of democratic doctrines. It is always permissible to be both democratic and "Christian," but it is never okay to be "only Christian." You simply must be democratic. If not, civil disobedience is justified and revolution is encouraged, in order that

democracy may take its pre-eminent place. In the early twentieth century we proudly entered World War I "in order to make the world safe for democracy." What if the war was being fought between avowedly Christian nations? Democracy was at stake, so we could put our Christianity into second place while we brutally killed each other by the millions.

The central themes of the democratic religion are equality and fraternity. The equality of all men and the brotherhood of all men are the core beliefs of those who have embraced democracy. Equality, however, is impossible, undesirable, non-existent in any meaningful sense, and unbiblical.

Our recent two week mission with the Christian Medical Society illustrated this for me in a fresh, new way. The Dominican Republic is very, very poor, with millions of people living in incredible poverty. Slums and hovels with chickens and goats sharing the dirt floor with clothesless children abound throughout the country. Medical treatment is only available when the Christian Medical Society or the Luke Society come to set up clinics. These may appear to be horrible conditions under which to live. Any democratic do-gooder experiencing such conditions would be apt to encourage a revolution, as many have done throughout Central America.

One of the Dominican Republic's major problems, however, is that it is being invaded by hundreds of thousands of immigrants from Haiti, who come to share the relative wealth and improve their lot in life. Haiti, after all, is twice as poor as is the D.R. Wealth, I am convinced, is very relative and not worth pursuing. The Dominicanos, in spite of their poverty, are some of the happiest and most fun-loving people I have ever met.

Not only is there no equality in the Dominican Republic. There is also very little fraternity. In a country inhabited only by Negroes, racism is everywhere present. Racial attitudes are determined by the blackness of the skin — the darker the skin, the more despised; the lighter the skin, the higher on the social and economic scale.

This troubled me a great deal at first, but more reflection reminded me that there is no equality in the U.S. or in Canada either. Everywhere you look there is tremendous variation in wealth, living conditions, political power, influence, and status. Equality is a statement of faith — a blind faith which, if pushed to its logical conclusion, must result in communism. Theoretically and practically, democracy is only a step away from communism. For me, that helps to explain why so many democratic do-gooders love to sing the praises of the Sandinistas and the revolutionaries in other Central American countries. If everyone were to be forced into a state of equal wealth, equal kinds of housing, equal means of transportation, and equal voting privilege, we would have fulfilled Karl Marx's blueprint and given children the same authority as parents. In the process we would have had to ignore the Scriptures, for neither democrats nor communists are willing to listen to the authoritative voice of a divine sovereign. God's Word has no place in the theory of those who have set themselves up as equal and autonomous.

## So What?

But what does all of this talk about democratic theory have to do with the church of Christ in the 1980's? Are not political theory and theology poles apart? How can our deep-seated allegiance to sacred democracy be linked to the theological differences which seem to be pulling us apart?

Let me suggest, to use an old Greek analogy, that democracy is the Trojan horse devised by Satan to divide and undermine the Christian church. Democracy is so universally approved, both by the communist rulers throughout the world and by leaders of republican governments, that we have never felt inclined to examine it in the light of Scripture. Democracy has crept in unawares, and we have welcomed it with open arms. We have dubbed it an angel of light, when it really is a purveyor of darkness. The Scriptures never teach it, but we have assumed that it is in harmony with the gospel.

The Western church, which is so very different from the churches in the Third World, has become progressively democratized. Living in the midst of cultures which proudly preach the democratic gospel of equality and fraternity, we have been transformed slowly and steadily by those cultures. Instead of living only "in" the world, we have become "of" the world. Where Scripture conflicts with the teachings of democracy, we have chosen for democracy. Instead of transforming the world for Christ, we have been transformed by the world.

The Reformed churches, the Presbyterians, the Methodists, the Roman Catholics, many of the Baptists, and numerous other Protestant denominations all have been permeated and heavily influenced by the gospel of democracy. Instead of preaching the sovereignty of God, we have more and more preached the equality of the sexes and of the various races. Restricting church office to mature, married men of faith is anathema to some because it violates the doctrine of equality. Apartheid in South Africa is similarly cast because the defense of it flies so squarely in the face of both fraternity and equality. No matter that our fellow Christians in South Africa loudly insist that they love their black brothers and have provided well for their needs! As long as democracy is not preached and practiced by them, those Christians must be labelled as heretics. In the name of democracy and fraternity we push for membership in the World Council of Churches (WCC), the National Council of Christian Churches (NCCC), and other ecumenical agencies, all the while diluting the doctrine of the antithesis so that we not risk offending our brethren. The antithesis between God and Satan can no longer be preached with any clarity because it may offend our brothers. Better even to coddle with communists than to jeopardize fraternity.

Another way in which democracy has influenced the church is in the growing tendency toward congregationalism. The congregational form of church government is based on the democratic belief that authority originates with the people and is delegated to the leaders so long as they follow the majority's wishes. Presbyterianism, on the other hand, is based on the belief that all authority comes from God, who calls His servants to their respective offices to be His agents. As the CRC drifts more and more toward congregationalism, it becomes apparent that the democratic philosophy is becoming more deeply entrenched.

When parents try to apply democratic principles to family life or when teachers try to apply it to the classroom, they soon have a complete breakdown of authority and discipline, resulting in moral and ethical chaos. When church members start superimposing the doctrines of equality and fraternity on the Christian church, the same results occur. Anti-clericalism replaces a Biblical respect for the office of minister; equality of the sexes replaces the divinely mandated

headship of the father; and brotherhood dulls the two-edged sword of God's Holy Word.

Christianity and democracy will not mix, although the republican form of government is very compatible with the former. Rejecting democracy in favor of Biblical Christianity may offend some of our brethren and even cause them to fight against us, but a thorough critique of the Trojan horse that has invaded the church is long overdue. For too long we have tried to combine the two and have produced only a social gospel and a civil religion. Biblical Christianity demands more. ●

*1. Not to be confused with Democrats. We are not talking about political parties, even though there may be more than coincidental links between democracy as a philosophy and the principles on which the Democratic Party rests.*

*2. The dissertation was entitled Boyd H. Bode: A Study of the Relationship Between the Kingdom of God and Democracy and was published jointly by the University of Iowa and University of Michigan Microfilms in 1972.*

*3. In 1978 The Craig Press published my Christianity vs. Democracy, but again the church seemed to be apathetic. Intending to use Bode's life "as a clear case study and thus...as a warning to all Christian youth concerning the perils of apostasy,"...I warned that "democracy represents a subtle, deadly, and formidable alternative to orthodox Christianity" (p. vii). Reviewers tended to totally misread the book and complained that Christians could not find in it prescriptions for democratic activity. Even the publisher failed to catch a gross error by those who designed the cover, mislabeling it Christianity And Democracy, and giving it the colors of super-patriotism.*

*The book is still in print and can be obtained from Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., Box 817, Phillipsburg, NJ 08865.*

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# Who Should Govern the CHURCH?

Leonard Verduin

Whose task is it to govern and guide the affairs of the Church? According to the *Belgic Confession* in its original version the answer to that question is: the elders assisted by the deacons. After describing the "true" church in Article 29 this *Confession*, in its original version, goes on to say, in Article 30: "We believe that this true church ought to be governed in accordance with the polity which our Lord has taught us in his Word; that is, it shall have Ministers and Pastors for the preaching of the Word of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments, shall also have supervisors [the original French, from which we are translating, has *urveillans*] and deacons, to constitute the governing body [the French has *senat*]" and then it goes on to explain that by means of the three offices named "the true religion may be preserved and wicked people be corrected and held back, the poor and the afflicted helped and comforted according to their needs, that by these means all things may run right and in good order in the Church, when such personages are elected, faithful ones, and in line with the rule which St. Paul gave to Timothy."

This Article 30 makes a clear-cut distinction between what is known in Presbyterian parlance as "teaching elder" (known as *leeraar* in the Dutch tradition) and "ruling elder" (known as *ouderling* in the Dutch tradition). What is even more noteworthy is that this Article 30 does not include the "teaching elder" in the "senat," the governing body.

Although the *Belgic Confession* as printed in 1561 was in 1566 subjected to what has rightly been called "*een duchtige revisie*," "a mighty revision," the reading of 1561 was at this point allowed to stand (save for the insertion of the adverb "spiritually" before the word "corrected"). So things stood until just before the Great Synod, held at Dordrecht in 1618-19, for in 1610 a printing of the *Confession* came out, under the church's supervision, in which the original (with its ascription of the ruling function to a *senat* consisting of elders and deacons) is repeated.

It was in the text allegedly approved at the Synod of Dordrecht that the "teaching elder" was given a hand in the governing of the church. This was done by adding the phrase "*avec les Pasteurs*" (to be translated with "along with the Pastors") to the expression "to be the *senat*." With that "*avec les Pasteurs*" inserted the distinction of "teaching elder" and "ruling elder" was blurred. Since that time the Preacher/Pastor is by definition a member of the *senat*; he is, moreover, by definition the chairman of the *senat*, and that not merely as order-keeper but (in practice at least) as direction-determiner. Moreover while the "ruling elder" takes a seat in the *senat* with the understanding that he will vacate it again, in a year or two, the "teaching elder" now functioning as a "ruling elder" is seated permanently, for as long as he does not accept a call to go elsewhere. All told, we have, during the years, moved quite a distance in a given direction, whether for good or for bad.

We come now to a second (but by no means *unrelated*) development. It is that although the *Confession* speaks of but three offices we have permitted a fourth kind of officer to come on the scene, that of a "teaching elder" who only *teaches*, one who does not by definition also *preach*, that of the "professor." This new kind of officer enjoys a special status in that he is, by definition, a member of every eventual synodical gathering, and not just a member but a more than averagely prominent one. Unlike the "elder," who gets to synod, maybe, once in a lifetime, these non-preaching "preaching elders" are expected to be on hand at every such gathering. Nor is that the extent of their preferment; they can count on being given an assignment on at least one Advisory Committee of such a synod, serving, as it were, as advisor to the advisors. This imbalance, this seat-of-prominence, assigned to a kind of "officer" unknown to the pertinent article in the *Belgic Confession*, needs to be given a second look, perhaps corrected.

As we ponder this possibility it is to be kept in mind that people whose sole task is to "teach" must be on guard constantly lest they become lopsidedly theoretical, have their "heads in the clouds," as it has been put, live in an "ivory tower," as it has likewise been put. Far be it from us to say, or even suggest, that such long-on-theory people are a needless luxury — but it remains a fact that parish ministers, as well as the elders whom they were meant to assist, meet up constantly with life as it is lived. This implies that synods should address themselves primarily to the problems which elders and ministers encounter as they go about their assignment in this work-a-day world, that synods should only by way of exception concern themselves with refinement of theoretical truth. It is our conviction that if this provision were faithfully put in practice, the agenda of a prospective synod would be appreciably less voluminous.

Of this we may be sure: if those Reformed people who in 1563 were already signing their names to the *Belgic Confession*, as a Formula of Unity, were to return to the scene, they would be amazed to find a *senat* in which deacons are almost absent and preachers are at the steering wheel. They would arch their eyebrows at the sight of non-preaching "elders" sitting on more or less elevated seats, determining to a goodly extent how things go at the *senat* of *senats*, known to us as synodical gatherings. ●

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Rev. Leonard Verduin is a retired Christian Reformed pastor living at Grand Rapids, Michigan (winters, Apache Junction, Arizona).

# Comment and Opinion

John H. Piersma

**LITURGY** — *Liturgy* is really a rather new word in Christian Reformed churches. We learned the meaning of a rather substantial doctrinal and confessional vocabulary when I was growing up, but I don't remember any instruction in this now very popular term. The "order of worship" was once quite consistent throughout Reformed churches (I do not think it was ever altered the first twenty years of my life, nor did we even think it might be). And you didn't need much space on the Sunday bulletin for "liturgical matters." Just a few lines to list the Psalter numbers, the Scripture reading, the sermon theme. Everybody knew that the worship service would begin with the recitation of Psalm 124:8, followed by the salutation (e.g. 1 Tim. 1:2, Rev. 1:4, 5), singing, the reading of the Decalogue or Apostles' Creed, singing, the "long prayer," singing (during which the offering was received), the sermon, prayer, singing, the benediction (e.g. 2 Cor. 13:14), and "the doxology" (always Old Hundredth). That was "church."

Well, things have changed!

I have preached in something like thirty different congregations in both RCA and CRC since being emerited some eighteen months ago and I can testify to the wide variation in liturgical practice. One can find most anything, from the simplest to the most complex, from the most traditional to an almost reckless innovationism. It seems as if there is little consensus as to what Reformed worship *is*, and what the principles are that govern it. It appears as well that the arrangement of the worship service is no longer regarded as the exclusive or even primary responsibility of the elders. Pastors individually or "worship committees" make up the program, and whatever they come up with seems to be acceptable.

This is another of those things which one finds hard to accept, and even more difficult to assess. The result, it seems to me, is such a hodgepodge of experiment and invention that one feels at a loss as to what to think or say. It seems to me that we have to hope that somehow greater clarity and conviction will emerge from this current confusion. All kinds of questions surface. What is essential to the worship of the church? If the sermon is central, why do some devise liturgies which give it little more than fifteen minutes of the first hour

(and everyone knows that after the hour it becomes very difficult to keep people "in church" happily). Why did we read the Decalogue, and is it still important to do so? Should we give strict obedience to regular, systematic preaching according to the Heidelberg Catechism, and in its own order?

To these questions you can add many others.

I know that a great deal of work has been done by the Liturgical Committee of the CRC in recent years. Its last contribution is a defense and recommendation of the liturgical dance. (The rationale and need for this innovation eludes this simple writer!) My reason for mentioning this "permanent committee" is that, in spite of all of their lengthy studies, I do not notice any clearer understanding of the real meaning and purpose of a Reformed "service of the Word" (our fathers spoke of worship as *dienst des Woerds*), in the churches.

Thanks to a ministerial colleague in another denomination of Reformed persuasion my attention was called to the following citation from C.S. Lewis. Under the heading *Liturgy* Lewis once wrote:

Every service is a structure of acts and words through which we receive a sacrament, or repent, or supplicate, or adore. And it enables us to do these things best — if you like it, it "works" best — when, through long familiarity, we don't have to think about it. As long as you notice, and have to count the steps, you are not yet dancing but only learning to dance. A good shoe is a shoe you don't notice. Good reading becomes possible when you need not consciously think about eyes, or light, or print, or spelling. The perfect church service would be the one we were almost unaware of; *our attention would have been on God* (italics inserted, JHP).

But every novelty prevents this. It fixes our attention on the service itself; and thinking about worship is a different thing from worshipping. The important question about the Grail (the cup or platter used according to medieval legend by our Lord at the Last Supper and the object of knightly search, JHP) was "for what does it serve?" "Tis mad idolatry that makes the service greater than the god."

A still worse thing may happen. Novelty may fix our attention not even on the service but the celebrant. You know what I mean. Try as one may to exclude it, the question, "What on earth is he up to now?" will intrude. It lay one's devotion waste. There is really some excuse for the man who said, "I wish they'd remember that the charge to Peter was Feed my sheep; not, Try experiments on my rats, or even, Teach my performing dogs new tricks."

Thus my whole liturgical position really boils down to an entreaty for permanence and uniformity... (From *The Joyful Christian*, Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. New York, 1977. pp. 80, 81.

Amen!

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**MEDIA FUSS IN GRAND RAPIDS** —I am an out-state subscriber to *The Grand Rapids Press*. It has the best obituary department of any paper I know, and at my age it is of some interest to keep track of such things, even though the paper arrives several days late.

Recently a Calvin College decision not to go on with an art exhibit because one of the paintings was considered unedifying (I gather it featured a couple of people engaged in "the act") has aroused a great deal of discussion. The artist(s) involved didn't like the decision, and screamed of misunderstanding and intolerance. And all of this "got into the paper." In fact, one of the more prominent *Press* columnists, John Douglas, was interested enough to offer his opinions. Against Calvin's decision, of course, and in favor of the idea of showing this collection of art.

Calvin sympathizers gave him the business, as might be expected. Several letters appeared in the "Public Pulse" department berating Mr. Douglas and his supposedly "anti-Calvin" column.

Douglas is not running scared, however, and so he offered (Oct. 3, 1985) a second column on this business of art censorship. The heart of his second contribution might be these paragraphs:

My point was that adults should not be so afraid of a painting (and, I suppose, sex). And, since it was stated (by people connected with Calvin College, I suppose, JHP) that those who give money to the school might stop contributing if they saw this painting on the wall, I questioned just how much academic freedom there is at the school.

This isn't the first time I've run into that brand of fear at Calvin. The school has one of the best film series in West Michigan and even though it is open to the general public I was told by a member of the administration that they didn't want to publicize the series lest some of the wrong people be lured into the auditorium and see that they are showing Bergman instead of Bambi.

I have to wonder if that sort of fear hovers over the people who are buying textbooks or those who lecture in classrooms...

I think it is the college's right to do any and all of these things, including rejecting the painting at the art show. Probably the only people with the right to attempt to institute change are the students or those who are paying for the students' education. If they have no complaints,

then everything is hunky-dory. However, I reserve my right to comment.

I must say that as a member of the CRC I find this both alarming and embarrassing.

I think it is alarming when Mr. Douglas writes that he really doesn't know what to think of people who do things not out of Christian conviction or principle but in order to keep a segment of the paying constituency quiet. It seems to me as I read Douglas that he doesn't really trust us.

And it is embarrassing when we continue, year in and year out, to experience these kinds of situations rising from the confusion which results when a church runs a school for higher education. That rather awkward sentence means that we ought to try once again to separate Calvin College from the CRC as institute. There is such a thing as academic freedom, of course. But when you mix that with ecclesiastical commitment you get a strange mixture which makes both church and school look very bad.

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**A FRIGHTENING ASSESSMENT** — A rather recent institutional creation in the CRC is the Pastor-Church Relations Committee. It has seven members (Peter Borgdorff, Robert DeVries, Cal Kammeraad, Joanne DeJong, Eugene Los, Mirth Vos, Richard Westmaas). Its most recent report (*Acts*, 1985, pp. 271 ff.) explains that the "Synod of 1982 launched a ministry of pastoral care for pastors and councils, and appointed a standing committee to supervise that ministry."

This committee is not afraid to state the facts. It tells us that 75 ministers in the CRC resigned, were deposed or released in the seventies, and that it appears as if no less than 55 such cases will have occurred by the end of this year. That comes to 130 people! It takes no imagination whatever to realize the burden of grief and pain this statistic implies.

In connection with this fact the committee offers its opinion as to the causes and conditions under which all of this professional disappointment and disaster takes place. It reports:

Pastors facing these traumatic experiences come from every age group, every size church, and every type of theological inclination. Since 1980, however, the age of pastors suffering from burnout has crept upward.

We live in an age of momentous problems involving increased levels of education, constant mobility, decreased family size, sophisticated communications systems, economic upheavals, and new and imaginative worship patterns in evangelical churches. None of these have left church life among us unaffected. People expect more from the churches than in the past. The ministry has become more demanding.

Added to the complexity of ministry is the growing polarization in our circles. In subtle ways various groupings solicit the backing of the pastor, and often without realizing it, withhold loyalty and encouragement when they feel the pastor does not give it to them. And pastors themselves have at times mistaken partisan approval for guileless response to the gospel ministry. Polarization tends to dim the vision of the central biblical kingdom themes and the core challenges of the Christian life. The silent majority in our churches seeks a type of church life that will restore them to spiritual joy and afford them

genuine Christian fellowship. Where they don't experience that many tend to join nearby evangelical churches. Our denomination is no longer growing in terms of numbers. The young people among us do not stay with their parents' churches automatically, for reasons of loyalty only. The churches must be concerned to upgrade the quality of ministry to a new generation.

This is a very significant and, I believe, quite accurate statement. One might comment on almost every facet of it.

Please note that it singles out *polarization* as the chief culprit. Note also that the committee thinks it is *growing*. We aren't, they assert, out of this problem yet. It is getting worse. And it is woefully effective. It renders pastors stupid (they think their supporters love the Truth when all they really love is their own party). It brings blindness to the "silent majority" (good people, I take it) so that they no longer see what is really at the heart of the kingdom and its challenges. This robs them of their joy and now they go looking around at other churches. Maybe still worse is the fact that we seem no longer to have firm hold on the loyalties of our Covenant youth, even though we spend huge amounts of time and effort, not to mention money, to give them sound catechetical instruction and Christian schooling from kindergarten through college.

It is interesting to note that people on both ends of the pole are said to agree on one thing: We need better ministers. I hope both Calvin and Mid-America Reformed Seminaries, not to mention other theological schools established on a Reformed basis, will set themselves to this task with relentless determination.

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**ALLAN BOESAK** — The Reverend Dr. Allen Boesak is a Minister of the Gospel in the troubled Republic of South Africa. He is well-educated, having done graduate work in theology in the seminary of the GKN, Kampen. He is bright, personable, articulate and dedicated. He is one of the best-known of anti-apartheid leaders, ranking in importance with Bishop Tutu and the imprisoned (since 1964) Nelson Mandela. Although he came under some suggestion of scandal recently, he was exonerated by his church and seems not to have lost popularity with his followers.

On August 27 Boesak was arrested in Cape Town, charged with violation of South Africa's Internal Security Act.

Apparently the news of this arrest reached Grand Rapids very rapidly. *The Banner* (Sept. 30) tells us that Rev. Leonard Hofman, stated clerk of the CRC, cabled President P. W. Botha on August 29 protesting Boesak's arrest. According to MM (Malcom McBryde) Hofman told Botha that there was "deep disturbance" in the CRC because of Dr. Boesak's arrest.

I can share in sympathy for most anyone who falls into the toils of the law. I have seen Boesak interviewed on my television set, and I can also understand that those who know him feel very much attracted to him. And, as his year of teaching at our own Calvin College would indicate, Boesak, like Botha, is a Reformed Christian, and in such people we have a particular interest.

But... it seems to me that this whole business raises some very important questions. Questions to which we as the constituency of the CRC have a right to expect answers. To list a few:

1. How could our church authorities know so quickly that Boesak's arrest was an act of injustice? Are we not the people of the Ninth Commandment, which means, says Lord's Day 43 of the Heidelberg Catechism, that we never "join in condemning anyone without a hearing or without just cause?"
2. Upon whose authority did Leonard Hofman dispatch this cable? What procedure was followed to decide so to act? Why isn't the CRC given the full text of the cable? Isn't this use of the office of the stated clerk a new development, and if so does it not look like something with alarming hierarchical possibilities?
3. Are we sure that we know exactly how to understand the South African situation that we can, from this distance, offer opinions *in the Name of Christ* (I assume that Hofman and all other ecclesiastical officers will agree that a church is not just another organization, but very really the body of Christ entrusted with His Word)?

I think we ought to know a lot more than *The Banner*'s rather feeble explanation ("In an interview Hofman explained that the messages arose from *his belief* [italics inserted, JHP] that the Christian Reformed Church should take a stand on Boesak's arrest. 'I felt I should say something... We have made statements as a church about apartheid,' he said.").

Surely Hofman and whoever supervises his work (the Synodical Interim Committee, I suppose) can give us better explanations than that.

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## Man's Age

Aaldert Mennega

Nowadays it is not at all unusual for a person to reach the age of seventy, or even of eighty. Compared with life-expectancy in medieval times, and in many underdeveloped countries today, this is rather phenomenal.

On the other hand, when we look at the Book of Genesis, we find that in the earliest days of mankind things were different. We read, for example, that the patriarchs from Adam to Noah mostly lived to the amazing age of nine hundred years or more. After Noah, these figures first dropped to around six hundred years, and then to about three hundred years before a plateau was reached of around 100 years.

We know that in our times people seldom live to be over 100 years old. If we were to calculate, from what we know happens today, how old people would have gotten in the dis-

tant past, we might conclude that people always were limited to the age of about 100. But this is obviously not true, and therefore we know that we have to be very careful about such extrapolation. And we must always be sure to keep our eyes closely on what Scripture has to say to us.

We have to use this caution also when we ask how long ago Adam lived and when mankind originated.

Several different answers have been given to the question of the antiquity of the human race. Let us look briefly at four of these answers, as they are given by secular humanists, theistic evolutionists, progressive creationists, and those who hold to the historic view of Genesis.

### Secular Humanism

Secular humanists reject the Genesis account of the origin of the human race, because they do not accept the Bible as God's Word. They theorize that the first human creatures appeared a minimum of 20,000 years ago. According to some reports, evidences of man may even go back as far as 3.5 million years. Mary Leakey, for example, has found a number of footprints at Laetoli in Africa, in layers dated at 3.6 million years. These footprints, she says, show a "bipedal, free-striding gait," and "the form of [the] foot was exactly the same as ours." Since only man can make such footprints, original man in the secular story goes back extremely far. This view just cannot be reconciled with the Genesis record. They must fit into a better framework.

### Theistic Evolution

Secondly, theistic evolutionists do believe in God. But they also believe in the theory of organic evolution, claiming that God used the process of evolution to call things into existence gradually, by means of natural processes. They also accept the secular view of the origin of man, and therefore have a dilemma of having to choose between the secular view of man's origin and the account found written in Genesis. Their choice has been to disregard the Genesis account as being non-historical, because of their faith in the theories of secular scientists. Jan Lever, a biologist in Amsterdam, goes along with the theory that man evolved from the animals. In his book *Where Are We Headed*, he says, "I know that the central thrust of this answer is right, simply because I believe in it." As a scientist I cannot accept that, of course. And as a Christian I must reject it, because of the real conflict it poses with the Genesis record.

### Progressive Creation

The third group of people, the progressive creationists, also take a stand on this issue. By and large, they emphasize that the Genesis account of man's origin is correct. But since they also maintain that the creation days must have been very long periods of time, they get into a bind when they try to reconcile Genesis givens with the secular view of the earth's history and the age assigned to earth layers. One Christian geologist, D. A. Young, goes so far as to say in his book *Creation and the Flood*, that:

thus the body of pre-man could be viewed as evolving in accordance with divinely controlled biological laws and processes up to a point at which the spirit was miraculously formed in this pre-man. The being in view would suddenly be constituted man. This miraculous in-breathing could be the divine miraculous initiation that is required to bring man, the new structure, into existence.

This obviously is also a compromise view, which theologically and scientifically takes us way out on a limb. This kind of hermeneutics and this kind of science I would no longer consider Reformed.

### Biblical Creation

It appears that only the fourth position is acceptable to responsible, Reformed, Bible-believing Christians. We believe that the Bible is clear in its teachings, and we maintain the principle that Scripture must be its own interpreter. Therefore we know that Adam and Eve were supernaturally created by God; that they constitute the first human beings, who lived only a few thousand years ago; and that they are the parents of the entire human race. And since the current so-called "scientific" view of the origin of man is in real turmoil because of new discoveries in the last dozen or so years, there is no reason for us to compromise our views.

We know, of course, that there are many variations on these four basic positions, but it becomes apparent that we have to choose basically between accepting or rejecting the inspired Genesis account. The conflict is not between what the Bible says and what the facts show, because those two will never contradict each other. The ultimate question is in regard to where we place our faith — in God's Word or in the theories of secular man. I know where my sure foundation lies.

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## WHO AM I?

Glenn P. Palmer

Now in those days there were certain Israelites who served false gods, the Baals and the Asherahs. There was a contest between a good Israelite and the false ones. In the contest I said, "Are you going to plead Baal's cause? Are you trying to save him? If Baal is really a god, he can defend himself." Let me tell you one more thing before you guess who I am. Of Elisha I know nothing, and the name Ahab does not mean anything to me. Now, who am I?

Hello, I am a mighty warrior of old, a man of valor, and the Spirit of the Lord was on me. I won my wife, Achsah, by capturing Kiriath Sepher. Her father and my uncle was one of the twelve spies who entered Canaan, and one of two who re-entered that promised land. I went on to defeat the king of Aram(Syria), Cushan-Rishathaim. Who am I and who is my father-in-law?

*Who Am I? Judges 6:31; 1:12.*

# the Acts

Henry VanderKam

## STEPHEN'S DEFENSE

### Lesson 7

### Acts 7

After various accusations have been made against Stephen, he is allowed by the high priest to defend himself. This defense we find in this rather long chapter. Some have said that he does not defend himself against the particular accusations which have been leveled against him, but this is not true. He indeed answers his accusers. He is going to do this out of Israel's own history. He divides this history into the time of Abraham (vs. 2-16); the time of Moses (vs. 17-43); and into the time of David and Solomon (vs. 44-50). Although this defense cannot very well be split, it is divided into three parts.

The way in which Stephen now reviews the history of Israel for the Sanhedrin is educational. It is not merely a review of a history which each one of his listeners knew very well, nor is it a review of the entire history of God's Old Testament people. He has something very definite in mind. He will show these people before whom he makes his defense that he is not guilty of those things of which they have accused him, but that they are the guilty ones. He is also going to show by this brief review that the Old Testament history is redemptive in character. One may not look upon the Old Testament as merely a group of stories from which we may derive lessons, as the Scriptures are often used to do even to the present day. All things in the Old Testament revelation pointed forward to the fulfillment of what the Old Testament saints saw. This fulfillment occurred in Jesus Christ! The members of this Sanhedrin also looked at the visible things of the Old Testament and thought that those things had to be preserved at all costs. Stephen will show them that they are wrong, and that their wrong interpretation has led them to crucify the Lord of glory. He takes an "*historical redemptive*" approach perhaps more than any other writer of New Testament times. Those before whom he makes his defense will be able to learn a lot from this man and he will show them a whole new approach to Old Testament history.

He urges his listeners to give their attention not to him but to the revelation of God. He is polite in his address. In this address we encounter various problems when we carefully compare his account with the Old Testament history. For our purpose it is not necessary to go into all of them. Many, though not all, of these difficulties fall away, when we consider that he used the Greek translation of the Old Testament. It is also worthy of note that the members of the Sanhedrin do not interrupt him in his discourse despite the fact that they held the O.T. in high regard.

## The Patriarchs

First of all he considers the history of Abraham. This man was called from "beyond the river" and finally came into the land where the Jews now dwell. This land was given him as an inheritance, but, at the time of his death he did not own a square foot of it. He had to *buy* a piece of land so that he might bury his wife. Besides this, Abraham's seed would inherit this land. This promise was made when he had no children and it did not appear that he ever would be a father. God had already spoken to Abraham of the fact that his descendants would be taken captive to another land where they would be treated shamefully. But, God will watch over his seed and judge the nation which oppressed them. Then they will return to their land. God used many detours to make His promises stand. He asked for great faith!

God gave Abraham a sacrament. This was to assure him again of the truth of the promise he had received from his God. Stephen compresses this history. He only speaks of the circumcision of Isaac. Isaac begat Jacob and Jacob, the twelve patriarchs. These were the heads of the tribes. Now only Joseph is mentioned, because it is through the happenings in the life of Joseph that God realizes His purposes with His people. Joseph is elevated to the second in command in Egypt and the famine drives the entire household of Jacob there. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, speaks of nine sons of Joseph and therefore 75 and not 70. It is noteworthy that Isaac was promised the land before his circumcision and that the patriarchs had to leave the promised land in their lifetime and were only buried there!

## Moses

Stephen had been accused of not sufficiently honoring Moses. He now goes into the history of this man of God. This history is necessary to see how Israel again came out of the land of Egypt and finally found their home in the land of Canaan.

Stephen shows only the preparation of this man Moses. He was very fair in the sight of God. He, though belonging to that hated race which Pharaoh sought to eliminate, was brought up by Pharaoh's daughter! God has the controls firmly in His hand. Because he was brought up in the household of Pharaoh, he was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. This was considerable already in that time. Later Paul receives a very good classical education before his conversion. Moses received this kind of education before he was called to lead God's people.

This Moses, who was to become the deliverer of Israel, was not successful in his first attempt to do so. He was about 40 years old at this time, says Stephen. Moses took things

into his own hands. Of course, this failed. He delivered one person — but is now in danger of his life and has to flee to Midian. Here he will have to learn a great deal. The deliverance of Israel seems far removed. God then calls him to his task in the burning bush. Here there was no temple, notice, but the ground where God is holy! Stephen had not rejected Moses, but their fathers had done so. God sends him back to Egypt and Moses leads the people out with many wonders and signs. Did the people follow him? No, they rebelled against him time and again. This Moses prophesied of a prophet like him who would be raised up later! Through Moses God gave the law to Israel and many other revelations. However, the people rejected Moses. They went so far as to make a golden calf, and they worshipped the stars and heathen gods. The fathers did not obey Moses and wanted to return to Egypt.

According to Amos, which Stephen quotes, they did not bring the sacrifices during the time they wandered in the wilderness. For forty years these proper sacrifices were not brought.

### Tabernacle and Temple

Then God gave them a tabernacle as a symbol of His dwelling with His people. This had to be made in such a way that it was evident that God Himself was the architect. This tabernacle went into Canaan with them in the days of Joshua. It lasted until the time of David. Notice how he skips large segments of history in order to come to the point on which he has been accused, that he did not hold the temple in proper honor. There was none until David's time! He was not even allowed to build it! It had to wait another generation, because Solomon finally built the temple unto God. Solomon makes it very clear at the dedication of this temple that God cannot be contained in it. Isaiah is quoted to bolster this view.

This defense of Stephen is just beautifully crafted! It is a work of art! Joseph did not make himself known to his brothers the first time they came, but the second. Moses did not deliver Israel the first time he tried, but the second. Moses is not THE prophet, but there is Another Who is to come. God allows them to make a tent (tabernacle) first, but finally a permanent house (the temple). He moves slowly through this history but He moves methodically toward the Christ! He, after all, is the fulfillment of all of this Old Testament history.

### Fixing Blame

Having made this most appropriate defense, Stephen proceeds with the application. Does he admit guilt on any count? On none — instead — they, his accusers are guilty of the things whereof they have accused him. He has turned the proceedings about completely. They always cling to the material and to the visible. They hold to the stones of the temple. Their fathers persecuted the prophets, and his listeners do the same thing. Their fathers killed the prophets and their sons have even gone farther — they have killed the Righteous One! Their fathers killed those who spoke of Him; they have killed Him. They are heathenish in their hearts and ears. They rejected the law and Him who fulfilled it. That law came through the instrumentality of angels, and they didn't keep it!

### The Martyrdom

The members of the Sanhedrin have not interrupted him as he took them through the history of Israel, but this ap-

plication is too much. They become enraged. Beside themselves, they gnash their teeth and lose control of themselves. The proclamation of the truth does this!

It is said again that Stephen "was filled with the Holy Spirit." He sees the heavens open and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God. He doesn't keep this to himself, but tells them what he sees! This intensifies the fury of his accusers. Together they rush at him, take him outside the city and stone him. Luke tells us that they lay their garments at the feet of a certain Saul of Tarsus.

Where are the Roman authorities? The Jews may not kill someone. But, Rome often winked at such happenings, that was the *Pax Romana*.

Stephen cries: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." At the close he cries: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Forgiveness! He was heard. A certain Saul of Tarsus later turns to the Lord. Then Stephen "fell asleep." This is a common New Testament statement concerning the death of believers, and is never used of unbelievers.

### Questions for discussion:

1. What is usually the importance of Bible stories for us? Do we deal with them in a manner much different from fables?
2. Does the fact that Stephen speaks as he does detract at all from the fact that he was a deacon?
3. Is it of importance to see how the Scriptures are often works of art? Notice the groups of eight verses as found in Psalm 119.
4. Is Stephen sometimes mistaken in his facts? Compare Genesis and Acts 7.
5. In which way was Moses the Mediator of the Old Testament?
6. Is there significance in the fact that Solomon rather than David was allowed to build the temple?
7. Does the true preaching of the word lead men to crazed actions? Why?

## THE GOSPEL COMES TO SAMARIA

### Lesson 8

### Acts 8:1-24

Chapter eight is very important for our understanding of the book of Acts. The beginning of this chapter records that Saul of Tarsus, though not the instigator of the death of Stephen, was nevertheless in complete agreement with it. This is the man of whom much will be said later. Here is an indication of the long road he must travel before he becomes the fit instrument for the Spirit's use in bringing many to faith in the Lord. The rather cursory remarks which Luke makes about Saul all serve to give us a full picture of what the Spirit of God is able to accomplish in the heart of a man. Saul found delight in the death of Stephen and will later seek to bring many more to the same condemnation.

Devout men buried Stephen and lamented his death. It must seem to these early Christians that God is seeking to thwart His own purposes. Why does He allow such a foul deed to happen? The church had need of men of the caliber of Stephen. There are never many such people.

### Persecution Spreads the Gospel

By the persecution that began with the death of Stephen the believers are now scattered outside of Jerusalem. The authorities are not going to be satisfied with the death of this one man, they will seek out many more. Faith is now going to be put to the test. People will have to leave homes and

fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, sons, and daughters for the sake of the gospel. Is it not strange that there was not this kind of scattering after the death of Christ, but now, after the death of Stephen the people are not left alone? The answer is rather simple — upon the death of Jesus there was *no church!* Only a handful of people clung to His teaching. That posed no threat. Now, when the number of believers was counted in thousands, the threat is not imaginary. But, the agenda which Jesus had given the Apostles in Acts 1:8 is slowly being fulfilled. Those who are scattered abroad do not behave in a passive manner — they go everywhere preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is indeed true that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. This was shown after this first martyrdom.

It is also strange that the Apostles were *not* scattered abroad. One would think that these would be the first to be forced to leave. This is, however, not the case. There still remained a church in Jerusalem, and the Apostles ministered to this church. No doubt, they were in hiding, but they stayed in the capital of the Jews.

Once more we read of Saul. As a wild man, he seeks to lay waste the church of Christ! He seems to have obtained authority to go into the homes of people and drag them to prison. Saul is not a citizen of Laodicea! He goes to all lengths to do those things which he considers to be right.

### Philip Preaches in Samaria

One of those who has been forced to flee Jerusalem is the deacon and evangelist, Philip. He comes to a city in Samaria and there preaches Christ. This is the message of the gospel. It has a Person as its subject. He is not able to carry on his task of "waiting on tables" in Jerusalem any longer, and now he does a far greater work in proclaiming the gospel. No doubt, he was an evangelist before he had been appointed a deacon. The history of the church has not yet developed to the stage in which a clear differentiation is made between the offices in the church. This becomes clearer in the later books of the New Testament, such as the letters to Timothy. But, it is clear that the death of one deacon has led to the fleeing of another deacon to Samaria where he may proclaim the good news of salvation. Luke later tells us that Paul stayed with Philip (Acts 21:8).

Is the work of Philip approved by God? He finds phenomenal success. He preaches boldly and the Lord gives him the power to do miracles so that evil spirits come out of those possessed by them, and the palsied and the lame were healed. It is almost as though we were back in the days in which Jesus was here on earth. When the name of Christ truly goes forth in the preaching of the word, great things happen. Because the people have heard the gospel and see the accompanying signs, they rejoice!

### Encounter With Simon

The manner in which the gospel was received in Samaria gives promise of great things to come. However, does the gospel ever have smooth sailing? It seems as though there are always difficulties to surmount. Samaria was no exception. There is a man in this city who has exerted tremendous influence before Philip came. He was a sorcerer, a wizard, who received his power from evil spirits. This man had a wide following because he also did marvelous signs in the city. How is it possible that the Lord allows such men to mislead the people? How is it possible that they are able to do miracles? This is by no means the only time that this

phenomenon is referred to in the Bible. Jesus says: "If I cast out demons by the prince of demons, then by whom do your sons cast them out?" In other words, they cast them out too. Moses and Aaron do great miracles before Pharaoh in Egypt, but the magicians are able to do some of them too. This Simon the sorcerer gave the impression to the people that he was indeed a great man. Is there here, perhaps, an allusion to the fact that the Samaritans also looked for a Messiah and that this man gave the impression that he was the one? All the people had followed him and proclaimed that "This man is that power of God which is called Great!" His influence has long been great in this city. More and more, the people follow him as his success breeds more success.

### True and False Conversions

With the coming of Philip, things change. Simon might be able to do signs; he was not able to give the good news of salvation. The people left him and followed Philip instead. It is now added that beside the preaching of the name of Jesus Christ, he also preached about the kingdom of God. Salvation?, most assuredly. But, this salvation brings certain responsibilities. Every part of life must be subjected to the true King of our lives. The people believed this preaching and were then baptized. Even Simon the sorcerer is baptized. It seems that he cannot get enough of the teaching of Philip, because he clings to him, amazed at the miracles performed by Philip. Evidently these miracles are different from those he has performed.

The next paragraph offers many problems, but is also of great significance to the church of later ages. The tidings of what has happened in Samaria comes to Jerusalem. The church sends Peter and John. Must these men do something which Philip could not do? They come to investigate. These two Apostles pray for the believers here in Samaria that the Holy Spirit may be given them. These believers have not yet received the Spirit but have only been baptized into the name of Jesus. When the two Apostles lay their hands on them, they receive the Spirit.

Various questions rise. How could they believe without having received the Holy Spirit? How could they be allowed to receive baptism without having received the Spirit? Is the preaching of a Philip only preparatory and does it not really have the authority of the preaching of the Apostles? These are legitimate questions and must be faced. By their words they must have indicated to Philip that they believed and that they were therefore fit candidates for baptism. It seems that the gift of the Spirit, in the sense of Pentecost, could only come through the Apostles. Christ had entrusted the disciples with the planting of the church. The laying on of hands was not always found (cf. Acts 10 on Cornelius). We must be careful that we do not make normative what is here only given us as a true account of this episode.

Remember, Simon has also been baptized. He had "believed." But, his was not the genuine faith. He sees that the people have received the Spirit through the laying on of hands by the Apostles. How he can see this is not said. There may have been some of the wonders again which also accompanied the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost. This looks good to him. If he only had the power to give this to people! He will pay for that power and will then later charge those to whom he has given the Spirit. To Simon it becomes a business deal. From his name and his actions we have received the term "simony," which means to traffic in that which is sacred. It is incredible that a man who has heard Philip

and the two Apostles and has seen what they have done should make such a proposal! The whole idea is preposterous.

Simon is the kind of man who has seen true faith, knows about it, wonders at it, but does not possess it. These are sad cases.

Peter condemns him roundly. Both he and his money will perish. He has no part in the kingdom of God. His heart is not right with God. May Peter judge the heart? Of course — “by their fruits ye shall know them.” He tells him to repent. How does one do that without having the Spirit of God? Don’t let theology get in the way of a perfectly normal command. “You are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity!” Your sin is indescribable! It is horrible. Pray for forgiveness — *perhaps* it will be forgiven. Why the “*perhaps*”? Peter does not know whether there is forgiveness for a sin such as this! Is it not against the Spirit?

Simon does not pray for himself but asks that the Apostles pray for him so that he may not receive his due punishment.

Peter had dealt differently with Ananias and Sapphira. But, remember, those were of the house of Israel, while Simon is out of heathendom.

#### Questions for discussion:

1. Was the flight of believers from Jerusalem a blessing for the church?
2. Do the Apostles do right by staying in Jerusalem?
3. Is the missionary work now taken out of the hands of the twelve?
4. Does the fact that Philip was both a deacon and evangelist have anything to say to us?
5. Was Philip’s preaching and baptizing adequate? Why did the Apostles have to come?
6. Was it a great advantage to the church that one like Simon joined them?
7. In how far should religious services be “paid for”? Is “simony” still a danger? •

#### In Memorium:

## DR. LEONARD GREENWAY 1907-1985

Arthur Besteman

Dr. Leonard Greenway, one of the founders of Reformed Fellowship and its publication *Torch and Trumpet* (*The Outlook*), passed away at his home in Grand Rapids, Michigan on September 16, 1985 following a brief illness.

He was born on February 28, 1907 in Seattle, Washington, but spent most of his life and ministry in Western Michigan.

The first eleven years of his ministry were spent in the Reformed Church in America serving first the 2nd Reformed Church of Grand Haven, Michigan, and then the 8th Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

In 1943 he entered the Christian Reformed Church. For the next nine years he was School Pastor and Instructor of Bible at Grand Rapids Christian High School. He endeared himself to the hearts of his students, many of whom still recall his lively classroom instruction and challenging weekly chapel talks. His concern for the spiritual welfare of his students was readily discerned and until the time of his death former students sought his assistance and counsel.

Dr. Greenway left Grand Rapids Christian High School in 1952 to become the pastor of the Burton Heights Christian Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Later he served the Bethel Church of Grand Rapids, the Third Church of Kalamazoo, Michigan, the 9th Street Church of Holland, Michigan, and the Riverside Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan. In each of these congregations he is remembered for his powerful preaching. This writer remembers well that during Dr. Greenway’s pastorate at Burton Heights it was necessary, not only in the morning, but also in the evening to provide additional seating for the many young people who came to worship with the congregation. It was not unusual to have seminarians present at the worship services taking notes as they listened to this gifted pulpiteer. Dr. Greenway was always aware that it was the Word of God that he was called to proclaim. He preached with power, authority, clarity and conviction. His conduct in the pulpit was always marked by dignity. The people of God, both young and older, came to hear him gladly.

Following his emeritization in 1977, Dr. Greenway accepted the directorship of the Pastoral Care Center at Highland Hills Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan. His services as counselor were sought out by many until the time of his death. He also remained active in preaching and in a daily radio program called *Telephone Time*.

He was an accomplished organist and for many years his sacred organ music was heard over Michigan radio stations. His ability as an Old Testament scholar was recognized, as he was invited to participate as a translator in the preparation of the *Berkeley Bible*. He authored three books for young people and was in frequent demand as a speaker at Bible conferences and special meetings.

In the early years of the *Torch and Trumpet* he was a frequent contributor and for a time was the editor of a column entitled “Our Question Box.” Many friends of Reformed Fellowship will recall with blessing the powerful address entitled, “The Old Time Religion” delivered at the 1982 annual meeting.

A member of Dr. Greenway’s family said to me, following his death, that Dr. Greenway had lived to serve God and the people of God. He was granted the health to do that almost until the time of his death and thereby thousands were influenced and blessed by his ministry of the Word and his life of godliness.

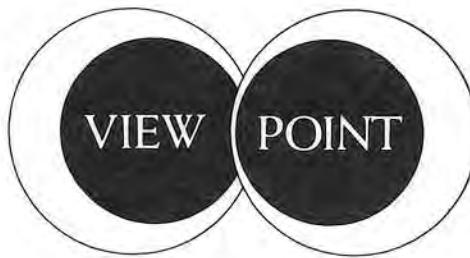
Dr. Greenway is survived by his wife Anna, his son and daughter-in-law, Roger and Edna, of Philadelphia, five grandchildren, five great grandchildren and a sister.

In the first issue of *Torch and Trumpet* appeared a meditation on Psalm 91 written by this departed servant of the Lord. It ended with these words: “Even in trouble he (God) can

satisfy. So marvelous is his transfiguration of the dark day that we do not fail to see his goodness. And seeing his goodness, we find fullness of life. Seeing his goodness, though we fall in the flower of youth or in the prime of manhood, we fall, still testifying that with long life the Lord has satisfied us. Even the youth of tender years, once he has known the Name, falling in death while spring is still green, dies as old as the aged Simeon who said, 'Lord, now lettest

thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation'."

Leonard Greenway left this life testifying to the goodness of God and the peace which He gives. He is now experiencing the fullness of life in the glorified service of his exalted Lord. It is the prayer of the members of Reformed Fellowship that his loved ones may continue to experience the grace and comfort of the God of peace and love.



## Denominational Student Aid?

There is an item in the 1985 *Acts of Synod* that deserves the attention and careful scrutiny of consistories and classes. It concerns the "Denominational Calvin Seminary Student Aid Fund." Readers are no doubt aware that up till now every Classis has a "Student Aid Fund" designed to help needy students studying for the ministry in the CRC. Students in a particular classis may apply for aid to the Student Fund Committee, and that Committee in turn seeks the approval of Classis for its recommendations.

The new proposed Denominational Student Aid Fund would change all that. Instead of many regional Funds, we would have one big centralized fund from which all students would get aid. The new fund "will be supervised by the Board of Trustees and will be administered by the Seminary Financial Need Committee." "The treasurer of each classis shall forward, quarterly, an appropriate amount to the Seminary Financial Aid Committee." This could be a *quota*, "a per-family allocation required from each classical student fund committee."

The above proposal was presented to synod by the Board of Trustees for Calvin College & Seminary. Happily, synod's pre-advice committee which had to deal with this matter saw some potential problems with this proposal and recommended the synod refer this matter to the churches and classes for reflection and evaluation. Synod adopted that recommendation, and churches now have til Jan. 31, 86 (not far off!) to respond.

When I first heard about this proposal, I could hardly believe my ears! I wondered to myself: Whose brain-child is this? Talk about hierarchy — here you have it! As if we don't already have too much of that in our church. We have more than we need of "Boardism" and "Executive Committeeism" and now we're going to add yet another brick to this structure. I see this as a very evil trend, and it bodes no good for the churches at all.

The main argument in favor of such a centralized fund is that it promotes equality in aid given. The present set-up lends

itself to "inequity" it is said. But so what? Does everything have to be offered on the altar of egalitarianism? Variety is the spice of life.

The disadvantages far outweigh the (ostensible) advantage: the entire matter would become much more impersonal than it is now; churches and classes would have little knowledge of how their money is being used, and the students themselves would be another step removed from their home churches and classes. What is worse, local churches and classes would have very little say in how the money is administered — it would simply be sent to "the big pot." Note too, that this centralized fund would only be for students studying at *Calvin Seminary*. Those studying elsewhere would have to go to their local classes or churches for support. And who knows how soon some of this money would be used to finance female aspirants for the ministry?

There is absolutely *no way* that I want the Board of Trustees deciding for the churches who is and who is not going to get aid! With the local churches and classes meekly paying the bill!

It is to be hoped that local consistories and classes will adamantly oppose this new scheme. It is another big step toward hierarchy and centralization, and that runs completely counter to the biblical and Reformed way of doing things in the church.

One might also ask the question: Who gives the Board of Trustees the right to bring such a proposal before synod? Are matters for the synodical agenda not to come from the churches themselves? This too is a very dangerous way of doing things — witness the debacle of 1944 in the Netherlands, the result of dealing with matters not properly before synod (i.e. not having arisen from the churches).

*Note: The relevant information regarding this can be found on pp. 565-567 & 791-2 of the 85 Acts.*

*J. Tuininga, Lethbridge, Alta.*

# False Prophecy on a Grand Scale

The present pope is a man who in some ways inspires respect. He speaks out decisively for the sanctity of the family and against the atrocity of abortion. In taking such a stand, in contrast with many leaders in mainline Protestant churches who show their kinship with the devil, the original murderer (John 8:44), by crusading against the "right" to murder the unborn, the pope seems to stand out like light against the darkness.

While we need to appreciate his taking such public stands, the May, 1985, Dutch paper, *Getrouw*, in an article by P. Kuijt with the above title, cautions us that we should not be misled by them. It recalls the career of Pope John Paul II since the smoke from the Sistine Chapel indicated his election to that office in 1978. Then the Polish Karol Woytyla, the first non-Italian to hold that office in 455 years, appeared on the balcony of St. Peter's to declare his and the church's "trust in the Mother of Christ and of the church." The article points out that from the outset, this pope expressed his determination not to be swayed or ordered, as was his predecessor, by others. "I myself determine what I do." And he has shown that determination in the succeeding six and a half years. His unpublished doctoral thesis indicated his commitment to the traditions of the church, including the decrees of the Council of Trent (against the Reformation) and, in particular, the church's exaltation of Mary. Accordingly, this much-traveled pope has made well-publicized pilgrimages to shrines dedicated to Mary, to "the brown mother of God" the miracle-working image of the Madonna of Guadalupe in Central America, and to "the Black Madonna" in Czestochowa, in his native Poland, "In Mary," said the pope, "God and man, man and God are united... What Christ won, God has put in her hands... I put my lot and yours, and the lot of this world in her hands. In the hands outstretched to you of my dearly loved mother Mary."

Thus, what God's Word characterizes as the gracious gifts of God in Christ to a lost sinner, applied by the Holy Spirit by means of the preached Word, this pope attributes to Mary and to mystical union with her.

The article begins by recalling the stern warnings in Jeremiah 23:9-40 against false prophets who told the people lies in the name of God. It observes that in the leadership of the present pope with his widespread appeals to people

of all nations we have another such example of what, by the definition of God's Word, is simply false prophecy, promoting the same errors that that church did centuries ago.

Despite the pope's high moral stands for the integrity of the family and against abortion, his morality is rooted in a false doctrine of salvation leading people to trust in Mary and an infallible church instead of to rely in faith only on Christ and to obey Him. Now, as in the days of Jeremiah, when people turn away from the Lord, one of His judgments against them comes in the form of false prophets by whom He permits them to be misled (Cf. 2 Thess. 2:9ff.). The need now, no less than 5 centuries ago, is for real Reformation guided and directed by God's Word and Spirit, not by an apostate church — or churches.

Perhaps you, as I on occasion, have encountered Roman Catholics who say that their trust is in Christ rather than in the Church and its erroneous Mariolatry and doctrines of merit. One hopes that their number is great. Such encounters do not mitigate, but underscore the continuing error of the institution and its head who misdirect the hopes of people to someone other than Christ the only Savior. PDJ

## On the Liberal Track

The *Reformed Ecumenical Synod News Exchange* of September 3 relayed a brief news item from *The Presbyterian Laymen* under the heading, "Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) 'still on Liberal track.'" After noting the disappointment of Conservatives because the denomination had reaffirmed its pro-choice stand on abortion, the report continued:

Though some positive things did occur in Indianapolis, the assembly spent most of its time on political/social economic issues, such as the United States involvement in Central America and divestment in South Africa. The editor laments that things are made more difficult for Presbyterian evangelicals by the way things are done. Very rarely in any of the meetings of the General Assembly is there opportunity for examination of viewpoints other than those of the official agencies. The printed materials presented are biased toward one point of view. The great number of issues makes it impossible particularly for elder commissioners, to come prepared. The editorial states: "...the number of issues considered by the General Assembly each year must be reduced. Issues to be considered should be those that affect the spiritual and moral well-being of society and not every political, social and economic problem facing the world."

Could these comments not also describe much of the activity of our Christian Reformed synods? PDJ

PLEASE REMEMBER THE OUTLOOK WHEN YOU  
DISTRIBUTE YOUR YEAR-END GIFTS



THE SEDUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY  
SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT  
IN THE LAST DAYS

by

Dave Hunt and T. A. McMahon  
Harvest House Publishers  
Eugene House Publishers 97402  
1985

Reviewed by John H. Sietsema

Is the Gospel what it does to a person or rather is it what it does for a person? Is this a subtle distinction without a difference? Hardly! The first is Biblical Gospel whereby, through the work of the Holy Spirit a sinner is regenerated, converted, sanctified and renewed, and he says, "Thy will be done in my life."

The latter (what the Gospel does for a person) is that which panders to the sinner's own will and desires for wealth, peace of mind, and self-esteem. This is what is propagated by Robert Schuller and Norman Vincent Peal from their pulpits in their messages of "positive thinking" and "possibility thinking."

*The Seduction of Christianity* states that one sign of the end times and a sign belonging only to the end times is the rise of false prophets and messiahs who in their very work will help to usher in the reign of the Anti-Christ. The authors reveal very clearly that we are in that day.

Why? Sorcery and "shamanism" have insinuated their presence into American businesses, professions, and even into the church through practices disguising themselves under innocent sounding labels, such as positive and possibility thinking, New Thought, hypnosis, faith-healing, and "visualization."

However, what is sorcery (a practice severely condemned by God's Word) by definition? Sorcery is that attempt to manipulate reality (internal, external, past, present, or future) by various mind-over-matter techniques. In the secular world such is called "mind-power" and in the Christian church it is mistaken for "faith."

In shamanism a person enters an altered state of consciousness-at-will to contact and utilize an ordinarily hidden reality in order to acquire knowledge, power, and to help other persons. In earlier times shamanism was practiced by an Indian witchdoctor or sorcerer. Today it is warmly embraced by psychotherapy and psychiatrists, and, sadly enough, by ministers in the folds of the Christian faith.

Sorcery and shamanism have their origins in the Eastern mystic religions of Hinduism and Buddhism, which hold to a pantheistic view of creation. In this pantheism, matter is but an illusion and mind is the ultimate reality. Each person's mind is a part of this universal mind which controls matter.

However, a person can through a proper exercise of yoga, transcendental meditations, "visualizations," etc. learn to control and manipulate matter, for at such times the human mind is in proper union with the universal mind, otherwise called the Oversoul.

The seedbed of this thinking in our own country was sown by the Transcendentalists, Ralph W. Emerson and Ellery Channing, of the previous century. Emerson's essay "The Oversoul" clearly advocated this pantheistic concept of the world, with Thought as the ultimate power and matter simply the pliable material for thought.

This "New Thought" of the Transcendentalists gave birth to Christian Science of Mary Baker Eddy, Religious Science, and Unity. The authors reveal how presently the church is being swept by a revival of New Thought, though now called Positive Thinking or Possibility Thinking, positive Confession, Positive Mental Attitudes and Inner Healing. They state that New Thought which is

present in the church is similar to New Age in the secular world.

In the book the authors explain how recognized leaders in great numbers of the Fundamentalist branch of the church have fully embraced this New Thought by reducing prayer to a technique by which one achieves the desire of the will. This technique, called "visualization," is really a method of shamanism through which matter is the servant of the mind. Understandably then, prayer is no longer communion of a suppliant believer with a transcendent God which will be accepted in faith and trust. Rather prayer is a method by which one attunes himself with the laws of nature to achieve his ends. God, thus, is not transcendent and above His creation and its laws; rather He is encompassed and compelled to fulfill the demands of the creature, as in the pantheism of the Hindus.

*The Seduction of Christianity* discloses how orthodox churches are adopting and employing psychological techniques of counseling of the Jung and Freudian schools that are fully paganistic in their outlook, even though Freud's and Jung's concepts are discredited in the secular world.

Among these techniques being employed are: (1) imagination — the calling forth to one's mind great thinkers of the past, (2) visualization of Christ, something strictly forbidden in the Second Commandment, (3) Primal Scream and "rebirthing" — conjuring, supposedly, the trauma and memories of one's birth and infancy. The insidious dangers of the Primal Scream and "rebirthing" is the thought that each person is the prisoner of his past and subconscious, and that one's present behavior is fully explained in the light of his subconscious past. This is Freudian determinism with a vengeance. Aligning one's thinking to such concepts, in effect, denies one's free will and personal responsibility. It shuts out God's grace to convert and change a person through the operative presence of the Holy Spirit.

Apostle Paul in Ephesians warns the believer that his ultimate struggle is not against flesh and blood but rather against evil spirits and principalities of the air, that is, the Devil and his myriads of demons. Satan and his hosts are worming their way into the lives of duped human beings by means of sorcery and shamanistic rites which have entered the fold of the church under the cloak of positive and possibility thinking, visualization, rebirthing, hypnosis, and psychic trances.

How true the hymn is: "Christian dost thou see them on the holy ground. How the powers of darkness compass thee around... How they work within, striving, tempting, goading into sin."

This is a *must* book for the Christian who seeks to be alert and abreast of his own times. •