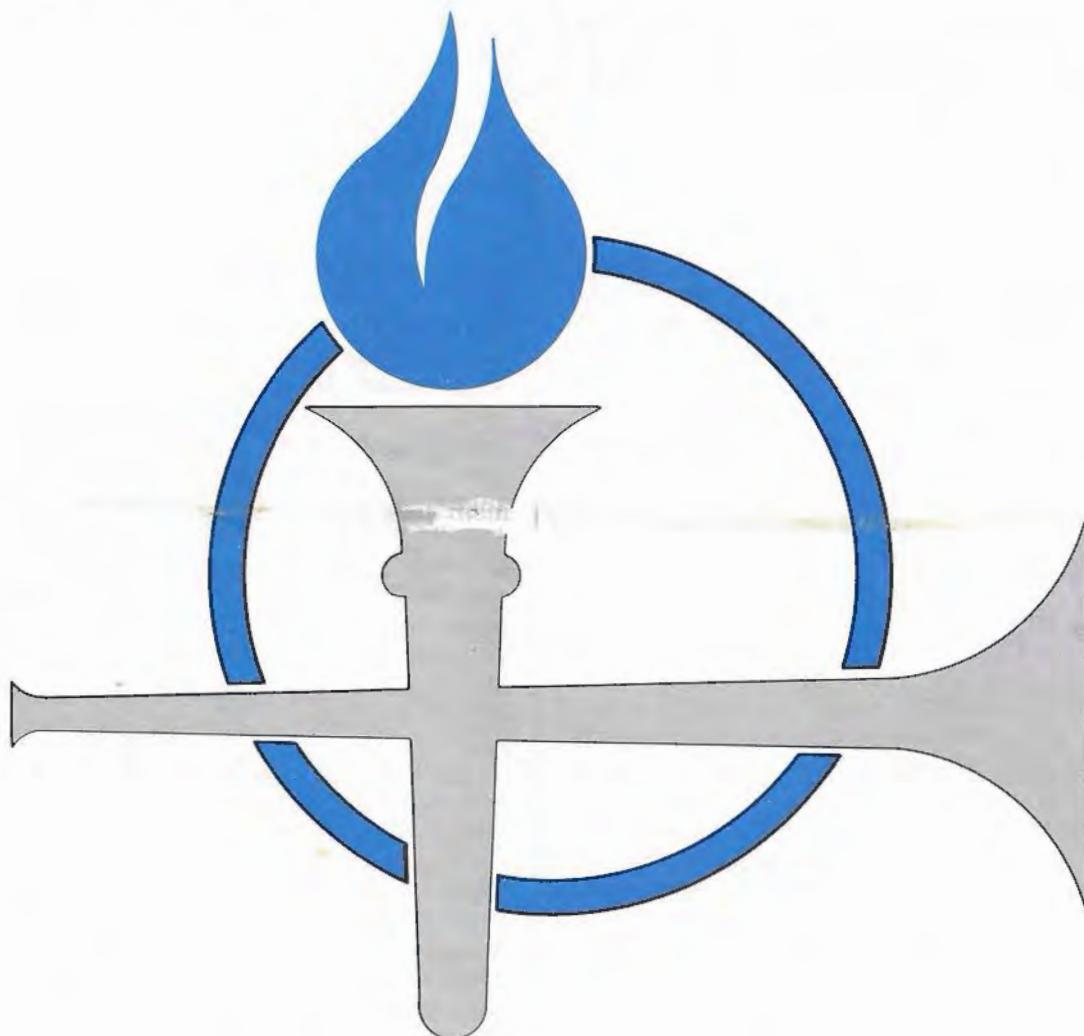


# THE OUTLOOK

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

JANUARY 1986



**RETHINKING MISSIONS TODAY  
SEMINARIANS ON THE CONTEMPORARY TESTIMONY  
S.W.I.M. AFTER 25 YEARS  
JOHN MURRAY**

# Human Tails

Aaldert Mennega

Did you ever hear of people having a tail? It may seem strange, but we do. But only when we are very small, long before we are born. So let's look at what the situation is at our beginning stages.

After the human ovum is fertilized it takes about four days to travel through the uterine tube and to arrive in the uterus. Then, on about the ninth day after fertilization, it is implanted into the lining of the uterus. At this time a vigorous growth period begins. From implantation up to the tenth week this new individual, who is developing in the womb, is called an embryo. After that it is called the fetus.

When the embryo is four weeks old and about 4 mm. long, the backbone is taking shape, including some tailbone features. At this stage the end of the backbone projects from the body, very similar to that of a pig of 4 mm. and to other animals at a comparable stage. Some people think that this should make us Christians uncomfortable, because they think that this would indicate that we developed from animals through evolution. But we need not at all be uncomfortable about this. And it does not indicate that we evolved.

In a classic example in an older textbook of Embryology, the authors, discussing the development of the lower end of the spine, say

It is interesting that at this state [ca. 5 weeks—AM] the human embryo has every bit as well developed a tail as a pig. The tail in our own later development normally undergoes regressive changes that leave us with only our symbolic coccyx. Occasionally, to the discomfiture of anti-evolutionists, this regression fails to occur, and a human infant is born with a sizable and unmistakable tail.<sup>1</sup>

The authors thus indicate that they see a problem for us.

A closer look shows us, first of all, that they are correct in saying that we have a tail at that stage, and that it is as well developed as that of a pig of that stage

(not of an adult pig, of course). That there is a tail is a well established fact. To be more specific, that tail consists of the end of the vertebral column. And it is so noticeable because there are no legs yet to obscure its presence. At this time the legs are only just beginning to form as little paddle-shaped buds. It doesn't take long, however, before these leg buds elongate, develop bones and muscles, and start looking like regular tiny baby legs. And in so doing they grow around that early tail-like structure, which is really the end of the spine, so that definitive relationships can be established. In adults there is still that tail bone, but the end of the spine is then surrounded with hip and leg structures, such as bones, muscles, nerves, and blood vessels, all of which are necessary for normal functioning.

Secondly, what about being left "with only our symbolic coccyx?" The question is, then, "Of what is it symbolic?" The intention is obviously to suggest that it symbolizes our animal ancestry. But it symbolizes that only to those who have faith in the story of evolution. In actual fact, the coccyx is just an adult structure which is necessary, and without which we would have difficulty functioning normally. And the muscles which attach to that part of the spine have definite and useful functions. After all, there has to be some kind of end to the vertebral column.

Finally, what about the occasional infant that is "born with a sizable and unmistakable tail?" This is not any different from occasional children being born with other abnormalities, and indicates only that in the development of this individual something went wrong at a particular time in that specific location. And the tail that is sometimes depicted in textbooks is not the end of the vertebral column, as it would have to be in order to be homologous with the pig's tail, but only a fleshy one, which can be removed surgically, without involving the vertebral column.

In pigs the story goes a little different, because there the legs grow along the spine, too, but their corkscrew

tail does stick out beyond the end of the body, as it was designed to do.

There are many other similarities in the development of people and pigs as well, both in structure and in developmental control mechanisms. Not only are the eyes and ears similar in their development, but so are the early stages of the brain, the digestive system, the skin, and the kidneys, to name only a few. And the control mechanisms and principles that govern the regular development of the bones and muscles of legs and arms also are very similar in both.

In graduate school a lecturer once made a point of telling us about the many similarities between human and pig skin. These striking similarities were, of course, real. By pointing this out he wanted to suggest our evolutionary relationship to pigs. But it is natural that the structural and developmental plan for various creatures with backbones is similar, and to us this is exactly what we would expect when we believe that an all-wise Creator designed the plan for both.

The point is that in both man and pig these early relationships are necessary for the adult structures to be in the proper place at the right time. It is because of the common plan of development which the Creator designed for both of these organisms that they have similar developmental stages.

The idea of a human tail is indeed a little strange, or at least unexpected. But it is strange only until we think through the facts of embryonic development. Then we see the marvel of that common plan with its many variations, each one culminating in a perfect organism, and each organism fitting into its environment just the way the Lord wanted it, and all of them together fitting into a fine-tuned complex system.

Should we be uncomfortable about knowing that human embryos have a tail-like structure in very early development? Not at all. Knowing that the design calls for that stage so that adult structures can function properly is just something that we marvel at. And should you hear, or read, any talk about facts like these being evidence for a supposed slurring-over of our ancestral animal stages, you can just discount it. Such talk has no scientific value. It only serves to soothe the minds of unbelieving scientists who fail to acknowledge the great Designer who called forth these creatures by the power of His Word. And there is no need for Christians to jump on the evolutionist's bandwagon so that they might gain respectability. Compromise may result in acceptance into the secular community, but only at great cost. It creates tension with both the reality of created structure and the scriptural perspective on that created structure.

This knowledge, of how the spine and legs develop, fitted into the framework of a biblical view of reality, gives us a scientifically respectable picture and a glimpse of the truth here revealed. We can only marvel at the fact that we can actually understand this little part of the full story of human development in the womb.

1. B. M. Patten and B. M. Carlson. Foundations of Embryology. 3rd Ed. McGraw-Hill Book Comp., New York, 1974, p. 291.  
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# 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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# The LORD Is My Shepherd

John Blankespoor

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall lack nothing"  
Ps. 23:1.

Likely no psalm is better known than Psalm 23. It is one of the first psalms many of us memorized when young, and is considered to be one of the gems of Scripture.

Probably it was written by David when he was an older man who had experienced many struggles and dangers. He could talk about his enemies and going through the valley of the shadow of death. He is not the sun-burnt shepherd boy among the peaceful lambs, but the man, David, the veteran. He recalls in this psalm how he had been a shepherd when young. He had cared for his sheep, and even risked his life facing a lion and bear to protect them. He had often seen his sheep lying beside the still waters, or contentedly grazing. As he reflects upon all of this he considers the parallel to his earlier life, confessing that the Lord was his Shepherd.

• • •

The Bible uses many metaphors, speaking of birds, plants, animals and other parts of the great creation. Here God's people are compared with sheep. Sheep have their own characteristics. When a sheep goes astray, it cannot easily find its way back. It is quickly lost. Also, a sheep is an animal with practically no self-defense. A dog can bite, bark and run, a cow or horse can kick. But sheep have no defense. They are helpless before hungry, vicious dogs or wolves. We are equally weak and helpless against our spiritual enemies, the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh. We need protection and security and often cannot cope with our problems. As Christians we fear the powers of the world the more as we see our children threatened by them.

The other metaphor used in this psalm is that of a shepherd. When we visited Israel some years ago our guide told us that today's shepherds cannot be compared with those of Bible times. Those shepherds literally lived with their sheep; the sheep were a part of their lives. They knew each by name, and would risk their lives to protect the sheep. Shepherds of today, he said, are more like the hirelings of which the Bible speaks (John 10:12, 13).

"The Lord is my shepherd," says David in these well-known words. The name L O R D, written with capital letters in the NIV, is the covenant name of God. An older version has the name "Jehovah," which I still like. It is the name which stresses God's faithfulness; He is the "I am that I am." With His almighty power, He is always faithful in His care for us. All this became real in Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

The familiar psalm's portrayal of God as the Shepherd, the Lord Jesus attributes to Himself in John 10. He is the Good Shepherd, and not a hireling. This God is David's Shepherd.

• • •

The psalm emphasizes what the Lord meant for David, what He had done and would do for him in the future. Scripture, in describing the relationship between God and His people sometimes speaks of what we do by faith. We are told to receive the Lord. Of course, this is possible only by the grace of God (Eph. 2:8). But nevertheless we have to do something. At other times and in other places there is a different emphasis on what the Lord does for us His people, and what He means to us. Here all the emphasis is on what the Lord does for us. This emphasis we also find in the first Lord's Day of the Heidelberg

Catechism's speaking of our only comfort. Not in ourselves, but in belonging to Him with body and soul we have that great comfort. The psalm stresses not what we do for the Lord, or should do, but what He is for us and always will be.

In our sins, failures, insecurities, fear and worries we can look to Him as our Shepherd. Even in our sins He does not leave us. Of course, when we sin we have to repent, confess and turn to Him. But even when we are unfaithful, as we often are, He remains faithful. His mercy is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear Him. His love never fails. He is the Shepherd who always watches over us with His protecting eye. In Him we are always safe, regardless of how steep the path or how heavy the burden may be. There is not an adverse wind that blows, nor an enemy that opposes, nor a problem we face, that escapes His control or can snatch us away from His mercy (John 10:28).

• • •

The Lord is my Shepherd.

This is personal.

David doesn't just say that the Lord is the Shepherd of His people, which, of course, is true. He will always keep His elect people. If we say no more than that, this objective doctrine may seem to mean little to us individually and personally.

I must know that He is my Shepherd, that He paid for my sins and bought me, that He cares for me and always will be my faithful Shepherd. Believing this, I must say it, confess it. Say it to yourself, dear Friend, say it to and before others. Confess it also with a view to the new year that lies ahead.

1986 is upon us, or soon will be. The beginning of another year always makes us wonder and often worry. What will the new year bring? We know little about the future. At new year's time we think about ourselves, our family, children and parents, about the church, our country and many other things that are close to our hearts. About all these we know absolutely nothing in detail as to what will happen in the coming year. But we do know that we are still living in the same world. That has not changed. When we worry, let us say from the heart, "The Lord will be our Shepherd also in 1986."

David couldn't always say this (Ps. 22:1) He certainly was not always on mountain peaks of faith. Likely he didn't compose Ps. 23 on the same day when he cried out in Ps. 10 "Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?" Or in Ps. 13, "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?"

Which Christian does not understand this difference of expression, of faith and anxiety? But every Christian also knows that it is only by faith that he can confess the truth of Ps. 23. Only by faith in God's daily forgiving grace and promises of everlasting mercy can we have the assurance that He is our Shepherd.

It is the faith of self-denial and self-surrender, of commitment to Him alone, that can confess this truth and enjoy its comfort.

• • •

"I shall lack nothing," or (in the older versions) "I shall not want." That follows the first confession, "The Lord is my Shepherd."

I shall lack nothing in 1986.

What a comprehensive statement and confession! At no time in this whole year will I have any real need or want. That's what it implies. The Lord will always be my Shepherd.

Our experiences are often quite different. We can and do try to say, "The Lord is my Shepherd." But we don't so readily add, as a result, "I shall lack nothing." Yet the second confession follows the first. If the first one is a real and full confession, the second will follow. Saying from the heart that the Lord is my Shepherd, I will also be able to say, "I shall lack nothing."

But does this confession that the Lord is our Shepherd mean that in the future we will have no needs, whatsoever, physical or spiritual? Does David mean to say, that the Lord being his Shepherd, he will lack nothing in any way or manner? Of course not.

Positively, this confession implies that the Lord generally will give us what we need, physical and spiritual. He will give us our daily bread. Remember, however, that there is a big difference between what we need and usually want. There is a big difference between "daily bread" for which we pray every day and the abundance which the Lord gives us. But as He was giving to David a table (of bread) in the face of his enemies, so the Lord will give us what we need, generally. From the spiritual viewpoint, there surely will be adversities and problems in 1986. But with this faith, He as our Shepherd will so care for us with His comprehensive love that He will give us what we really need. He will always give grace according to circumstances. We shall lack nothing that is really important or what we really need.

Physically, we live in a world of many wants, of greed and selfishness. Even in our land of abundance people always want more. But the Christian, being a good steward, and assuming his responsibilities, will say, when he confesses Ps. 23, that he is satisfied because he knows that the Lord is his Shepherd.

Others may and will have more. But he says that he has enough and is contented (Phil. 4:11). Confessing that the Lord is his Shepherd, and possessing the fruits of the Spirit, he will be confident and in peace.

In this entire confession of Ps. 23 David means to say that he has such faith in the Lord his Shepherd that he knows all the ways in which the Lord will lead him will be for his good. With a firm trust in this Lord's faithfulness and a real commitment to Him, he can say, I really lack nothing. Even in danger he knows the Lord will protect him and give him the grace needed for every trial.

This is living on mountain tops of faith!

This kind of faith gives spiritual strength and wonderful peace of mind and heart.

Looking to this Lord and having the feeling and assurance that we belong to Him, our faithful Shepherd, we can face the new year.

May the Lord graciously enable us to take Ps. 23 with us into 1986.

# Rethinking Missions Today<sup>(1)</sup>

Bassam M. Madany

## **Neo-Evangelical Missiology and the Christian Mission to Islam**

During the last two decades, some severe criticisms have been levelled at the missionary work which has been undertaken since the days of William Carey. We are told by these critics, for example, that missions among Muslims have been a failure. Most missionaries in the past, the critics say, were not good at "cross-cultural communication." They failed to "contextualize" the Christian message.

In this paper, I refer to evangelical missionary theorists who have espoused and propagated this way of looking at the modern missionary enterprise as the neo-evangelical missiologists. Let us examine their thesis about the alleged failure of missions among Muslims from three inter-related perspectives: the historical, the theological and the Biblical perspectives.

### **I — The Historical Perspective**

In attempting to work out a new methodology of missions, several neo-evangelical missiologists base their endeavor on their own interpretation of the history of missions in the last 200 years. This is especially the case when they are re-thinking the Christian mission to Muslims. They seem to be oblivious to the fact that the Christian-Muslim encounter began almost fourteen centuries ago! The difficulties we face as we seek to reach Muslims with the Gospel were embedded in history long before the rise of the Protestant missionary enterprise. To put all the blame on the messengers of the Gospel during the last 200 years does not only ignore history, but it dishonors the testimony of countless Christians who lived under Islam and who were not ashamed of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We must never forget these facts of history: According to the Arabian prophet, Christ never claimed to be the Son of God, the belief in the Trinity amounted to faith in many gods, and, most importantly, the Messiah never died on the cross. In the Islamic tradition, the whole system of Christian doctrine has been judged inferior and corrupt. Islam

alone is the final and complete faith. As some Muslims remind me in their letters, the preaching of the Christian faith is anachronistic. As far as Allah is concerned, INNA DEENA INDA ALLAHI ISLAMU, i.e. the accepted religion with God is Islam!

Rather than indulge in too much introspection as we survey the history of missions to Muslims during the last two centuries, we must bear in mind that, as far as Muslims are concerned, there is no real need to seriously consider the claims of the Christian message. The Gospel, the Injeel, no longer exists, for the Christians have corrupted it. Anyhow, the Quran has superseded and supplanted the Gospel. There is nothing more striking about the Muslim's attitude to other religions than his absolute assurance about the superiority and finality of his faith!

The majority of the people conquered by the Arab armies in the initial days of the conquest were Christian. Their Christianity was not pure. Some were Chalcedonian while others entertained erroneous teachings concerning the two natures of Jesus Christ. But in all fairness to the Eastern Christians, we must not write them off as if they presented no Christian testimony to the invaders. Granted that they were weak in the areas of Biblical anthropology and soteriology, they all confessed their faith in the triune God, the deity and sonship of Jesus Christ, His atoning death on the cross and the complete trustworthiness and final authority of the Bible.

The writings of the Christians of the Middle East who lived during the caliphates of the Umayyads (7th and 8th centuries) and the 'Abbasids (8th—13th centuries) reveal that they did not hesitate to explain why they did not Islamize. It is very surprising to read the contents of their apologetical and polemical works. Many Christians worked in the courts of the Caliphs in Damascus and later on in Baghdad. They conversed freely about points of difference between the two religions. Some neo-evangelical missiologists seem to forget that the core of the Christian message was adequately defended by the conquered Christians of the Middle East. The hardening of the attitude towards the Christian faith among Muslims happened before

the conversion of the ancestors of many European and American missionaries!

Having referred briefly to the role played by the Christians of the conquered lands, we may consider the record of some of the pioneer missionaries who worked in the Arab world. I am better equipped to deal with this part of the Muslim world, since my pre-semester education took place within the Arab world. Furthermore, my own involvement in the Muslim world has continued because of the very nature of my ministry. I have had the privilege of corresponding with thousands of Arabic speaking listeners, both Muslim and Eastern Christian. And thus, my knowledge of Islam is neither purely academic nor archaic.

Does the historical record uphold the charge that the pioneer missionaries who labored among the Muslims were intent upon spreading their culture as well as the Gospel? Let's take the history of the American University of Beirut. This institution of higher education is considered as the most powerful academic institution in the entire Middle East. But it was not founded as an American cultural mission. Its original name was the Syrian Protestant College and it was founded by Presbyterian missionaries in 1866. The founders planned to teach all the subjects in Arabic. The Evangelical Church which they organized was an Arabic-speaking church. Its liturgy was simple, the Word of God was central and every part of the worship service was in Arabic. When we think of the translation of the Arabic Bible we think immediately of the pioneer missionaries Eli Smith and Cornelius Van Dyck. But their work was not accomplished without the help and cooperation of Lebanese scholars such as the famous Yazigi and Bustani. Some of the early missionaries learned Arabic so well that they actually composed Arabic hymns which are sung today in the evangelical churches of the Arab world!

Of course one should not hide the fact that some of the later missionaries did attempt to foist western concepts on the people of the Middle East through the instrumentality of educational institutions which were modeled after Western schools. This is part of my personal experience as I have had the privilege to study and later on to teach in Roman Catholic and Protestant mission schools. But this later development took place after the triumph of religious liberalism in Protestant missionary circles. That this was a factor in the decline of missionary work among Muslims cannot be denied. I am puzzled by the fact that neo-evangelical missiologists do not seem to take this sad fact into account. I am still referring to the impact of liberalism on missions. Why this silence? Is history a lesser discipline than the newer discipline of cultural anthropology? May we give less heed to history when we are dealing with Muslims who happen to be the most historically conscious community in the world? How can anyone maintain that Christian missions among Muslims have failed when for more than a quarter of a century (i.e. between the two great wars while the Middle East was under British and French colonial rule) the gospel was seldom heard in most of the mission schools? I can never forget many commencement speeches in mission schools which were disgusting because they con-

tained nothing Biblically Christian, just plain platitudes. No wonder that some graduates of mission schools joined radical movements including the Communist parties of their respective countries.

To sum up, a careful study of the history of Islam and the Christian presence in the Muslim world indicates that the thesis that missions to Muslims have failed and that this failure would not have taken place had the pioneer missionaries and those who followed them contextualized the Gospel, cannot be sustained. Islam from its beginnings had a built-in bias against the Christian faith. This strong anti-Christian motif has solidified across the centuries. Western culture has indeed invaded the Middle East and other Islamic countries. This took place primarily because of the triumph of Western imperialism among the followers of Islam. We cannot speak of the temporary setbacks of missions to Islam without taking into account the destructive role played by the liberals in the mission field. And finally, as we end this historical excursion, we must thank God for the advent of radio missions and the awakening of many nationals to expound the Biblical Gospel to their fellow citizens who follow the Muslim way. The Gospel is being proclaimed without Western baggage and equally without the novel methods of syncretistic missiologists.

Rev. Bassam M. Madany has for over 25 years been the minister of Arabic broadcasting of the Christian Reformed Back-to-God Hour at Palos Heights, Illinois. Born in Lebanon and preaching in his native language, he is well acquainted with the Muslim world.

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# *The Bible in the C.R.C. Today*

Henry Vander Goot

## **I. Introduction**

Let me begin by thanking you for the invitation to speak here this afternoon. I thank you in particular because I feel at home here. The Reformed Fellowship represents a very significant organization in the life of the Christian Reformed Church. It represents, I believe, this church's tradition, this church's majority membership, and this church's orthodox wing; and so it represents what I have wished to be identified with since my earliest years as a young student when I was a member of the Grandville Ave. Christian Reformed Church of this city. There I was raised on the solid food of Dr. Ymen Peter DeJong and somewhat later and somewhat more intensively on the Reformed preaching of my good friend, the Rev. John Piersma. I should not fail to mention that with these brethren I am a Frisian, and that resistance to the growing process of erosion in the CRC permeates my being like blood flows through my body. I remember that it was different once, and I dare say better, and there is no way that I am able to shake that impression.

Today the CRC has a strong institution and organization at the top. Because that top has been taken possession of by what I shall today call the Mind of Common Grace (Dr. Henry Stob gave it the self-congratulatory designation of "the Positive Mind"), the CRC is being severed from its moorings and increasingly accommodated to the dominant mind of the mainline Protestant denominations in the US and of the World Council of Churches. This fact is evident in many areas of the church's life, and so it is also evident in the church's use and abuse of the Bible.

I shall deal briefly this afternoon with two major matters. First, on the basis of my recent book, *Interpreting the Bible in Theology and the Church*, I wish to address how I think the Bible ought to be read (how it most often has been and is being read in the life of the believing community). Second, I wish to comment on how Scripture is increasingly being read historical-

ly critically by leaders of the church, though without any malice aforethought. I shall conclude my remarks by asking why this shift has taken place in the CRC.

## **II. How to Read the Bible**

First, then, something about the major, positive thesis of my book: Let me throw out three terms to describe how the Bible ought to be read. These three terms are "Naively," "Canonically," and "Literally."

### **1. Naively**

The first term is "naively." I believe that the Bible belongs to the church, to the body of Christ in the world, wherever and however represented. The Bible was never meant to be analyzed as an object of scientific inquiry; that is, to get at its meaning, expert processes are not necessary. This is so because the Bible is a story, a rather simple story at that. Moreover, it is a story realistically told from beginning to end. There is something genuinely old-fashioned about it, for unlike most of the things we read today, including novels, the Bible's narrative is straightforward and painstaking. It does not exploit sex, violence, power, money, intrigue, or any of the other subjects that we moderns consider de rigueur, strictly required to be sophisticated. The Bible treats its subject matter in a matter-of-fact way as the natural occurrences that constitute it. Its characters are ordinary people, real acquaintances, easily identifiable as historical personages.

Similarly, the storyline of the Bible is a storyline of events in ordinary history. The events recorded are simply presented as those that, when taken together, constitute the true meaning of human life as a whole. The Bible's story is like the story a novel tells, or that a narrative relates. One might say that the Bible's message is a historicized fiction or a fictionalized history, except that the word "fiction" leaves the impression of untruth. In the case of Scripture we would add that the Bible's narrative is the true story about

God and His relationship to man from the beginning of history to its end. By that story of the real meaning of the whole we are to live, plot our lives, and understand the significance of everything else that transpires. Man was made to live by story and this is the one that tells it the way it is. Hence, people ought to read it directly as such.

## 2. Canonically

Second, the Bible is meant to be read "canonically." What is the canon? The canon is the revelation of the Word of God in the Bible construed as a whole by the believing community. The Bible must hence be read first and foremost for the whole message it narrates; the Bible not only contains books and various parts but is itself a book. It must be read accordingly.

Furthermore, the church reads the Bible's parts as harmonious, from the vantage point of the whole, and always primarily in relation to one another. Scripture sheds light on itself and is thus best read when read in connection with itself. Scripture interprets Scripture; Scripture is perspicacious; no framework or outside knowledge need be brought to bear on the Bible to unlock its sense. Scripture is sufficient unto itself and is therefore best read internally and on its own terms.

In addition, canonical reading is the reading that seeks to take full advantage of the fact that the Bible comes to us from God, its single Author. Naturally God used means, human means, earthly means, to execute His authorship; God works no other way in the world than in congenial harmony with, in and through His creatures. We should let this confession affect our hermeneutical theory beyond letting it stand as a pious introductory acknowledgment. And letting it so function leads us to say that the overall canonical sense of Scripture's story is the primary level of its meaning, not what the Bible's individual human authors meant by what they wrote in the situation of the text's origin. The canonical sense takes precedence over the historical, sometimes even going so far as to upset it rather brutally. The canonical sense, the sense intended by the Bible's single author, God, takes precedence over the subordinate historical level of meaning. Only in this way, moreover, can the church's response to Scripture be considered normative even for the scientific study of the Bible that takes place in the Christian community.

## 3. Literally

Thirdly, and finally, the Bible must be interpreted "literally." In other words, the Bible must be interpreted for what it says the way it says it; the Bible must be interpreted for the message it intends to convey, the best way of getting at which is the very form in which the text says it. Every identifiable block of Scripture is given to say something; what it is given to message is its literal sense. So parables, for example, have a literal sense, without their characters being real persons and their circumstances actual historical situations. When the latter is thought to be the case, I would say that the parable is being misinterpreted literally. Written texts have an immediate

value or sense on the face of them. Novels do, even though we often know next to nothing about their authors or situations of origin. In the case of Scripture, that sense is the text's present sense, the sense as it applies to us in our own situation. In the case of Scripture that sense is the sense as intended by the only One of Scripture's Authors who is present and alive today, guaranteeing the normativity of the present logical sense of what is said in the way in which it is said. To make the historical sense, some hidden genesis of meaning, the essential sense is, functionally, to discard and take no advantage of the confession that God is the Author of Scripture. It is to turn that confession into a pious platitude, good for one's Board of Trustees to hear, but having no real pay-off for one's interpretation of the Bible.

It is with these thoughts in mind, among others, that I would make the claim that to be read as it ought, Scripture must be read naively, canonically, and literally.

## III. The Bible and Higher Criticism in the CRC Today

I turn now to the phenomenon of increased sympathy for an historical critical reading of Scripture in the CRC. First, I shall illustrate that this is happening, and, second, I shall try to say something about why we can expect more of the same in the future in the CRC.

First, then, about the fact of increased use of higher criticism in the CRC, without any malice aforethought on the part of its practitioners, I refer you, by way of illustration, to the first minority report on "headship" of the Synod of 1984. Let me emphasize that I do not speak against the authors as persons, but rather critically against the method itself and its bad consequences.

An interesting general mode of argumentation is present in this report. Where previously it was thought in the Reformed tradition that the church should confess or do that for which there can be found only compelling biblical grounds, this report recommends opening all of the ecclesiastical offices to women on the ground that the traditional Scripture used to close the offices to women need not be taken the way in which it has been in the past. There seems to be not only an untroubled acceptance of the claim that Scripture is unclear, but an attempt to take advantage of this as well. We are told that there is no compelling biblical argument against opening the offices, the assumption being that we must decide this matter and others like it on an other than biblical basis. Throughout the report we are left with the impression that the matter of who is eligible for office-holding in the church is of the kind about which the Bible could not possibly give us a clinching conviction. The reason for this absence of compelling biblical grounds is the fact that multiple readings of the crucial texts are possible on the basis of the meaning of these passages in their historical context.

A specific example from the report itself will illustrate this procedure, as well as lead us on to make an additional point. The authors' handling of I Tim. 2:11-15 is of special interest. Commenting on the

words "Let a women learn in silence in all submissiveness," and "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over man; she is to keep silent," the authors query whether this is really a "permanent prohibition." Calling attention to the Diana cult in the background, the authors conclude that since these words have a specific historical sense in the Ephesian and other churches, the traditional understanding "need not be the only way to hear these words." Historical information about the Diana cult is needed clearly to see the meaning, to see that Paul was reacting to myths circulating at the time, often being propagated by women in the congregation. Thus the report argues that the meaning is not immediately clear to later readers; and, once it has become clear, it can be seen that Paul's words pertained to "that situation and time." Moreover, since we now know the historical sense, the prohibition saying, "I permit no women to teach" can be read to mean "I am not now permitting them to teach." By means of an historical analysis, a passage can thus be made to mean nearly the exact opposite of what it says.

Besides taking for granted that the historical sense is the essential, determinative one against which all others must be checked, the authors also reflect another dubious historical critical prejudice in their work, one which they, by the way, do not in turn subject to historical criticism. The fact that an utterance had a specific historical meaning in its situation of origin does not mean that it does not have that meaning now, in the present situation of the reader. Yet that is often, functionally, what establishing a passage's historical sense comes down to in the mind of the historical critical interpreter. "That's what it meant then, but now...etc., etc."

However, just because I learned historically, that is, from my parents (they told me so, among the other historical circumstances that influenced me) that murder is wrong, does not mean that the prohibition against it is merely their opinion rather than a divine mandate or a permanent prohibition. General truth, God's truth, never becomes known except in and through some specific historical form. A change in historical circumstances between our times and Paul's, does not make the prohibition inapplicable. It merely means that the manner of applying it may differ.

#### **IV. Higher Criticism and the Mind of Common Grace in the CRC Today**

Why this uncritical use of so-called historical critical methods and assumptions? I fear that, in the area of biblical studies in the CRC tradition, this is the outgrowth of what I earlier called the Mind of Common Grace. The Mind of Common Grace sensitizes people only to the so-called moments of truth in contemporary academic and cultural developments. The first question that occurs to representatives of this mind is what "good things" modern historical criticism has brought to light. As immigrants, we continue to crave acceptance by and participation in the mainline culture that surrounds us. We need to look for possibilities of cooperation and adaptation. So the Mind of Common Grace causes the

practitioners of higher criticism to become desensitized to the exact spiritual and religious meaning of historical criticism in the situation of its origin in western intellectual history. The Mind of Common Grace causes us to lose sight of the dynamic, historical element in the events that happen around us. We thus acquire an abstract view of the world and of what is happening in it, in ironic contrast to the very historical methods we have now come to advocate.

A prime example of this is present in Dr. Harry Boer's little book entitled *Above the Battle? The Bible and Its Critics*. How does Boer evaluate the phenomenon of historical criticism? Ironically, purely structurally and purely a-historically, like a veteran scholastic. He advocates it not by testing its actual spirit and direction and the actual havoc it has produced in the modern centuries but by giving us, of all things, a dictionary definition of it. To Boer historical criticism is merely a formal discipline, a certain tool or method that it would naturally be obscurantist to reject. To Boer, criticism's essence is "the spirit of rational, scientific analysis uninfluenced, in so far as that is humanly possible, by dogmatic presuppositions" (p. 18). Or, again, in Boer's own words: "The discipline as a technical academic activity is neutral" (p. 50).

The Mind of Common Grace, of accommodation to the existing culture in the academy, out of the desperate immigrant desire to be accepted, obscures the concrete, dynamic element in the actual phenomenon of higher criticism in the modern period. The Mind of Common Grace blurs the element of conflict with and antithesis in modern scholarship. In this way it is left with so-called "good points" or "moments of truth" that it now lets stand for the whole and the real meaning of the phenomenon in question. How convenient for persons who are eager to flee their narrow Dutch past to embrace the academically prestigious in mainstream ecclesiastical culture!

Will we see more of this kind of legitimization and explicit use of criticism in the future? There is, I believe, no way to prevent it, since the Mind of Common Grace has become the dominant mind of the CRC's leadership. Though the Mind of the Antithesis won a battle over higher criticism in the CRC in 1922, it lost the war in 1924, at least in the higher educational institutions of the CRC. Such massive trends are hard to reverse, especially now that the CRC has become a strong organization at the top. Every effort to counter the erosion will be foiled by the deadliest means available to the establishment, namely institutional procedures, which are both more locked-up than they used to be and much more complex than before. To challenge the dominant Mind of Common Grace, we will need to think in terms of alternative institutions, and that, I believe, will be the trend of the future in a church whose organizational structure is becoming increasingly separated from and alien to the people it is supposed to serve and represent. •

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## The Office of the Christian Believer<sup>(2)</sup>

Peter De Jong

### The Bible's Teaching About the Believer's Office

Our Lord taught us that when we face important questions about which there are confused opinions we need to go back to the beginnings and see what God's Word says about His creative purpose. That is the way He treated the knotty questions about divorce in Matthew 19. He cut His way through the theologians' rationalizations of divorce (when they wanted one) by asking, "Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and said, For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

### God's Creative Purpose

In considering the role the Lord intended for the ordinary believer, about which there is also so much confusion, we ought to begin at the same point, the expressed purpose of the Creator. "God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over . . . ' the other creatures. This principle that man is created "in the image of God," long assumed as a basis for Western civilization's respect for human life is now being denied. The result is that despite continued talk of "human rights," (our government defends the "right" to murder over 15 million unborn, and) all real appreciation of the Creator's purpose with the individual's life has virtually disappeared. The Word of God reminds us of that Creator's design, to restore a sense of our meaning and purpose in God's world.

### Man "in God's Image"

What does this "image of God" really mean and what is His purpose for it? The Bible quickly goes on to tell us of mankind's fall away from God—so evident through later history and especially today. Then it traces the history of God's promises and their fulfillment in the sending of Christ our Savior, to bring us

back to God. In detailing the results of this reconciliation to God the Apostle Paul wrote to the Colossian Christians, "Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Col. 3:9, 10). In the similar letter to the Ephesian Christians, Paul wrote that these believers were taught "to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:23, 24). In other words, the Apostle teaches us that through the saving work of Christ the "image of God," defaced and lost through man's fall into revolt against God, is being restored. That "image" is to be thought of, not as a visual image, but as consisting in knowledge, righteousness and holiness. That is, each individual Christian is being restored and called to know God, to serve God, and to love God. That is his and her high "calling" or "vocation" and "office."

### The Image after the Fall

At this point the question might be raised whether, since the "image of God" is being restored in the Christian, this means that the non-Christian is no longer the "image of God." Some Christian theologians have concluded that they are not, but the Bible seems to indicate that matters are not quite that simple. After God judged and destroyed man and his world by flood, He established capital punishment for murder to protect human life saying (Gen. 9:6), "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man." Despite the fall into sin, it is evident that mankind is still to be respected as, in some sense, the "image of God." The same point is evident in the letter of James (3:9). There we are warned not only against killing, but even against cursing our fellow men "who have been made in God's likeness." Each man and woman with his and her unique capacities as a human being is to be respected as the image of God, but the trouble is that each one of these unique human capacities is being misused and misdirected.

Mankind without God may make amazing discoveries and become very learned, but having lost the knowledge of God, lives "as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity with a continual lust for more" (Eph. 4:17-19). Despite all of his learning, man is still in the dark, "without hope and without God in the world" (2:12). The same kind of perversion appears in the use of other human abilities, such as the ability to manage and rule. Has that management ability enabled us to live peacefully and safely in the world? The ability to "love" and establish relationships continues, but consider how that too, is perverted and misdirected. Thus the Bible spotlights the pervasive and destructive results of sin in the present and the worse consequences in the judgments of the future.

### **"Anointed" for Saving Office**

From this plight, Jesus Christ is promised and comes to save us. His official name or title is "Christ," meaning "the anointed." That word "anointed" calls attention to the ceremonial way men called and equipped by God in the Old Testament were officially placed in office. Exodus 30:22ff. details the prescription for a special oil or perfume. It was to be used for no other purpose than to symbolize that the people or things anointed with it were separated from all secular use and reserved for the special service for which God called and equipped them with the Holy Spirit. In this case especially the priests were ordered to be so set aside. They had to read God's law to the people to remind them of their obligations to Him and they had to offer the sacrifices which represented the way by which the people who had transgressed those laws might be forgiven and brought back to Him. In addition to the priests, the kings, called to govern and protect the Israelites as God's people, had to be ceremonially appointed to office by similar anointing. We also find the prophet, Elijah, who had to speak for God to the wayward people, ordered to anoint Elisha to succeed him in that role (1 Kings 19:16). That role of prophet is perhaps introduced most interestingly in Deuteronomy 18. The Israelites were warned that when they entered the land of Canaan they would find the people there resorting to all kinds of pagan fortune-tellers and spiritists in effort to find guidance. They were warned that God detested such practices and promised that they would be provided with real prophets like Moses who would speak for God in counseling and guiding them.

### **Christ, Our Prophet, Priest and King**

When Jesus comes He is announced as the "Christ," the Anointed, of whom all of these Old Testament officials were only limited anticipations. While they were only men like ourselves, He was uniquely God the Son, "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Heb. 1:3). Our Heidelberg Catechism (LD. 12, Q.31) nicely sum-

marizes the Biblical teaching about Him. "Why is He called 'Christ' meaning 'anointed?' Because he has been ordained by God the Father and has been anointed with the Holy Spirit to be our chief prophet and teacher who perfectly reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God for our deliverance; our only high priest who has set us free by the one sacrifice of his body and who continually pleads our cause with the Father; and our eternal king who governs us by his Word and Spirit, and who guards and keeps us in the freedom he has won for us."

On the basis of this official, saving work of Christ as our Prophet, Priest and King, the catechism, again following the Scriptures, immediately ties His role and office with that of each Christian believer. "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." Thus each believer in Christ is being renewed in the image of God to again know, love and serve Him.

### **The Christian's Similar Office**

Knowing Christ as his Prophet, each Christian is also called to be a prophet to "confess Christ before men." Our Lord, "the light of the world" (John 8:12), also tells His followers, "You are the light of the world" (Luke 5:14). At the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost the Apostle Peter had to explain, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy'" (Acts 2:16, 17). Each Christian is called to be God's prophet in this world. That does not mean to be a prophet in the popular sense of predicting the future, but in the broader, more basic sense of "speaking for God." Since Pentecost this is not the role of only a few exceptional people, but the "office" of each believer. Each Christian, reconciled to God to live with Him as His child, is now called to serve Him as His priest. We become, as the Apostle Peter wrote, "a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5, 9). Similarly, the believer is saved to "live and reign with Christ" as king, called to share in the labors, battles and triumphs of His kingdom. Christ "loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father" (Rev. 1:6; cf. 5:10). "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

What we need to stress in all this is that these things are written not only about a few leaders or people in special positions, but about every Christian. This is what every believer in Christ is called to become. Whether you spend your days in a shop or office, school or house, or on a farm, whether you are a student, laborer or retiree, this is what Christ saves you to be. This is the too generally forgotten "office of the believer," our Lord's "calling" to become a prophet, priest, and king for and with Him.

## God's "Calling"

Georgia Harkness in her book *John Calvin, the Man and His Ethics*, following Max Weber, pointed out that in the Reformation, "calling" (Latin "vocation") began to be used "in the sense of a life-task," stating that this was "a new concept—the religious significance of one's daily task." She observed further that Calvin went beyond Luther in saying that one must not serve God only in his vocation but also by his vocation (pp. 181, 182). Later she quoted Calvin's comments that "Every individual's line of life, therefore, is as it were, a post assigned him by the Lord." Consequently, "there will be no occupation so mean and sordid (provided we follow our vocation) as not to appear truly respectable, and be deemed highly important in the sight of God" (p. 211).

This double use of "calling" in the sense of the Lord's calling "to a godly life" and to an occupation is not really new. It is really a return to and application of what the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24, "Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called...." The "calling" of the Lord

to salvation through faith in Him becomes for every believer a call to His service as his daily business. We must be awakened to realize that the call of each believer to be the Lord's prophet, priest and king elevates him or her to such a position that it makes other differences in position or circumstances relatively unimportant. "Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it, but if you can be made free, rather use it. For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men." Thus every Christian's role and work is recognized as God's "calling," and we are admonished. "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve" (Col. 3:23, 24).

Let us give this often overlooked "high calling" of each believer in Christ some further attention in coming articles, considering its place in the church, in Christian missions and in our duties in the world.

This article may be summarized in the following diagram:

### The Office of the Christian Believer What Is Man Created and Saved to Be and Do?

Man Created In God's "Image"  
(Gen. 1:26-28 (cf. Gen. 9:6; Jas. 3:9; I Cor. 11:7)

Fallen Man  
(Gen. 3: Rom. 5:12-21 esp. 19; cf. I Cor. 15:21,22)

Christ (Hebrew "Messiah", "the anointed" [Ex.30:22-33])  
John 1:41;29-34  
Acts 10:38  
Luke 4:18  
cf. Isa. 61:1

The "Christian"  
Named after "Christ"  
(Acts 11:26) because  
"anointed" with the  
Holy Spirit, to be  
restored to knowledge,  
holiness and  
righteousness. (Col. 3:10;  
Eph. 4:24)

1. A "Prophet" To know and speak of and for God.

1. Deluded by the "father of lies", the devil.  
Eph. 2:2,3; 4:17-19  
John 8:44

1. The Prophet to teach men to know God again. (Deut. 18: cf. Acts 3:22-26) John 1:18; 17:3; I John 5:20, 21 (Heb. 1:1,2)

1. Prophet  
Acts 1:8; 2:17 ff.  
(cf. Num. 11:25-29,  
Joel 2:28,29) To know and speak for God.

2. A "Priest" To love and live in the friendship of God.

2. An enemy, estranged from and hostile to God, loving what he ought not.  
Col. 1:21  
Titus 3:3

2. The Priest to bring us back to God  
Heb. 9:11,24 ff; 10:1 ff. I Pet. 3:18

2. Priest  
to love and worship God  
Heb. 13:15,16;  
Rev. 1:6; 5:10.

3. A "King" To serve and rule for and with God.  
Gen. 1:28; 2:15; cf. Ps. 8:3-9

3. The devil's slave and victim.  
John 8:44  
(Ps. 14:1-3; 53:1-4;  
Isaiah 59:2-8)  
Romans 3:9-18

3. The King to rule and protect,  
Luke 1:32,33  
Ps. 1; 8; cf. Heb. 2,  
restoring to proper status and action.

3. King  
to share in the service, struggle, victory and rule of His Kingdom. I Pet. 2:5,9 (cf. Ex. 19:5,6)  
Rom. 12:1,2  
II Tim. 2:1-3,12;  
3:14-17; 4:7,8; Rev.  
1:5,6; 5:9,10; 20:4,6  
(cf. Dan. 7:13,14,18)  
Ps. 8; Heb. 2:3 ff.

# DE KOSTER ON Report 44

Since his retirement from editing the denominational Banner, Dr. Lester De Koster, has spoken extensively on church developments. On October 22 he addressed the large Mass Meeting of the Southwest Rural League of men's societies at the Beverly Church in Wyoming, Michigan on the subject, "Report 44: Where Are We Now?"

## The Hermeneutics of Obedience

Concerning the intended meeting, a retired Illinois minister had observed, "Why do you waste your time? There's nothing in the CRC to bring to life." Such a gloomy assessment the speaker did not accept. At this juncture humility requires that we stand in awe before a Book. Of that Bible, the Word of God, he observed that "We have to stand under this Book in order to understand it," advocating what he called the "hermeneutics of obedience." Such an approach to it is not popular among scholars. To that Book, foreign languages are not the key, for Augustine and Aquinas did not read the Bible in these original languages. The Bible clearly teaches those who are humble all that we need to know to obey it. This fact Reformed doctrine called "the perspicuity of Scripture." The Bible is so plain that no one has any excuse to disobey. We grow in our understanding of it as we grow in obedience to it, although, as an English preacher observed, there are high mountains of mystery in every part of the Bible, some of which we will not climb until we have "crossed the Jordan." Although we may not know, for example, why the gospels differ in the way they tell of events, in confronting these differences our obedience is tested. The Lord gives insight, as we grow to need it, into all of His Word. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable"—not for speculation, but—"for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). This is the only hermeneutics that holds out the hope of understanding. God has not made us dependent for light on some professor's spectacles—the very idea of that is blasphemy.

## The Report's Beginnings in the Dutch Churches and Ecumenical Synod

The last thing that the CRC needed in 1972 was a synodical study on the nature and extent of Biblical authority (Report Number 44 in the Synod Agenda). Ordinary people did not want it, but some others did, we suspect, for their own interests. The issue was relayed to us by the Reformed Ecumenical Synod—for which we pay much, but receive nothing—which is neither a synod, nor ecumenical, nor Reformed, but which has been a useful tool to those who want to funnel troubling reports to our members. The Dutch Reformed Churches (GKN) initiated the discussion in 1963, referring it to our and other churches via the RES, and the CRC in 1969 appointed a committee to make the desired study. De Koster admitted having "a strange feeling" about the GKN's urgent request for advice, since his observation in ten years of editing our churches' Banner was that the GKN does not want and would never take advice from us—rather for about five years their delegates have been patting us on the head assuring us that some day we would "grow up and understand the problems which they are facing so courageously." (He observed that he had heard so many of their delegates' annual speeches that he could have written them himself and saved their travel money!) The fact was that some among us wanted this study for their own reasons, as a kind of "blank check" to cover views they did not dare to advance on their own! The resulting report gives all one could want, on one hand, and, on the other, muddies everything. Beginning with the Belgic Confession on the Bible, it ends with "cultural conditions," making all sorts of concessions to theological speculation. As a guide to the churches, it has been a total failure.

We need trained ministers like Calvin and the Puritan preachers who drew all their light from the Scriptures—Calvin made every sermon a text sermon. For three centuries Reformed churches were so formed and flourished, but in later years, as scholarship multiplied to "a tower of Babel" of theories, and the lesson of obedience was forgotten, those churches have dwindled until they amount to less than ever before.

## Flunking the Test of Biblical Loyalty

Three years ago when the speaker was asked to debate about Report 44, he was reminded that this had never been adopted as the official position of the church, although it was often alleged or assumed to be that. This report was not the cause and origin of the denomination's problems. It was rather a symptom of the churches' drift from their moorings in the Reformed heritage of the Scriptures. God always tests the loyalty of His churches. He chose to use the RES for a channel for the Dutch churches (GKN) to test the loyalty of our churches to the Scriptures. Our synod in 1972 flunked the test by not rejecting Report 44, and no synod since then has corrected that failure. Later we flunked a similar test in 1973 when the synod accepted a report on office and ordination which "flies in the face of the Reformed understanding of church office in every respect." Now we have had a decade of more such synodical fumbling with questions about women in church office. It is good news that God loves us enough to test us, but it is bad news that we must wonder how long He will keep it up.

Christ came to "bear witness to the truth," and His church is called to do the same. Our Belgic Confession lists the three Biblical "marks" of the church. The churches' adversary has tried to undermine especially the first of these, the authority of God's Word, by today's criticism and hermeneutics, much of which originated in Europe. That movement was welcomed after World War II in the Dutch churches (GKN) who posed the question to us, "What do you think of the nature and extent of the Bible's authority? Will you hold to it or compromise it?" That test question, our churches flunked with an answer in the synod report that speaks with a double tongue. That same double tongue appears in the later reports on women in church office. God rejects such double tongues. Recall how James had to denounce such duplicity. Our committee wanted to echo the Belgic Confession and at the same time have academic freedom. Thus the Board could defend John Stek's views and the AACs could defend its ideas with appeals to the provisions for academic freedom.

## The Test of "Alive-85"

The speaker saw another example of flunking such tests in the fact that many of our local churches saw nothing wrong in supporting the recent "Alive-85" campaign. Was that campaign not an insult to the Christian Reformed pulpit? We confess that faith is a gift of the Spirit, conveyed by the Word preached (Rom. 10:17), which should proceed in the churches under consistory supervision. In that way the elect are brought to saving faith, which is shown to be real by the works that follow. But such a ("revival") campaign poses the questions, "Are you sure that this is the only way? Is it doing the job? Should we not add an itinerant evangelist with a different accent?—and perhaps some soft music and repeated invitations, to produce faith? Isn't this about as far from a Reformed understanding of the church as one could get?"

The speaker recalled a Sunday School card distributed long ago in the Zeeland church, portraying Uzzah who held out his hand to steady the ark.

He only wanted to give the Lord a little help, but was struck dead for his improper help. De Koster never forgot the lesson, and the Biblical reminder of his mother that "To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:22). We may not play lightly with the Lord's designated methods of saving souls. Don't say, "A little help is OK."

Our churches have flunked repeated tests, but the Lord has not stopped testing us. We must reaffirm the Biblical heritage of the churches and seek the Reformation and renewal of the church through the Word of God.\*

## Seeking Church Reformation

An occasional critical observation might be raised about some points in this impressive address. The apparent dismissal of the study of Biblical languages because Augustine did not know them may be questioned. Although obedience to the Word is indispensable, we must not in the spirit of today's activism, in any way make obedience an alternative to faith. While the Bible warns, "Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves," it also insists on "the obedience of faith" (Rom. 16:26) and the need to know what and Whom we believe (Eph. 1:17ff.; 5:17). Paul welcomed some imperfect gospel preaching (Phil. 1:10) despite its faulty motivation.

Such occasional critical observations do not in any way invalidate the speaker's main thesis that "Report 44," by attempting to combine contradictions regarding the Bible's authority, has become a favorite tool to destroy our churches' doctrinal defenses against the heresies that are destroying the Netherlands' churches which proposed its formula. The growing miseries of our churches, as they are being steadily nudged by their official editors, committees, and educators in the direction taken by the apostate churches at home and abroad, are demonstrating the rightness of De Koster's evaluation. Let us be thankful that voices are being raised in a number of quarters to alert our churches to the way they are being officially misled. A report tells of a large well-attended meeting on September 20 in Denver, at which Dr. W. Robert Godfrey, Christian Reformed professor at Westminster Seminary at Escondido, California, spoke much as he did a few months ago in Calvin College's auditorium at Grand Rapids, about the denominational course (July-August Outlook). There is a very recent report of a projected similar meeting at Edmonton, Alberta, where Rev. Richard Venema is to speak. We hear of similar meetings being planned and occurring in other places. The widely publicized Missouri Lutheran swing back to confessional orthodoxy almost two decades ago was preceded and promoted by such meetings in their churches' areas. Let us pray that the current efforts to awaken our churches to what is happening to their Biblical faith may help those who are seeking to salvage as much as possible from the increasing debacle, and lead us back to a church that will be honest and unambiguous in seeking to believe, preach and do God's Word.

PDJ

\*Tapes of the entire address may be obtained from Mr. Robert E. Smits, Box 29, Grandville, MI 49418 at \$3.00 each.

# the Acts

Henry VanderKam

## PHILIP AND THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

### Lesson 9

### Acts 8:25-40

After the episode recorded in the first part of this chapter, Peter and John stay in this city of Samaria for an apparently short time. But, while here, they testify and speak the word of the Lord. They then return to Jerusalem to resume their work with the church there. They seem to take some time in going back to Jerusalem, stopping in many of the villages of the Samaritans and proclaiming the gospel.

Samaria is somewhat of a "halfway station" between the gentile world and the Jews. Notice how great the emphasis is on the preaching in the towns of Samaria so early in the history of the Christian church. The apostles are indeed following the orders Jesus gave them in Acts 1:8. Suddenly the Samaritans do not seem to have the dreaded quality which the Jews had always ascribed to them. Our Lord Himself had not hesitated to speak to a woman of Samaria (John 4). The disciples must not call unclean that which their Lord has chosen. He also has His people here.

#### A Mission in the Desert

But, the previous verse is only the connecting link to that which follows in this chapter. We have heard of large numbers being brought to the faith: 3000 at Pentecost, 5000 some time later, but there is also room in the gospel preaching for the individual. It surely is true that the more people we are able to reach with the gospel the better; but the Lord now sends Philip on an entirely different mission. By the word of an angel he now sends him south of Jerusalem to the road leading to Gaza, one of the main cities of the Philistines in the days of David, a road which is desert. This is hardly the place in which we would look for a mission field. There were other roads which led to Gaza, but he must go to the loneliest of them. Don't object that there are no people here. God will see to that. Philip is called to be obedient to the command which he receives and he must leave the results in the hands of the Lord of the harvest. How do we find mission fields? Is it only by counting the number

of people in a place or the number of prospective believers? Then Philip would not have gone to the desert road that leads to Gaza!

#### To an "Outsider"

The godly evangelist, Philip, obeys the command he has received. On this road awaits an experience for him which he will never forget and which will have far-reaching results. Although it is a desert road, there is a carriage driving along this road. It is not a common carriage, but one which speaks of the great wealth and power of its occupant. The man who is riding this carriage is an Ethiopian, a native from one of the African countries which we now call the Sudan. The Psalmist had written: "Ethiopia shall haste to stretch out her hands unto God" (Psalm 68:31). How could the gospel come to such a distant land in so short a time? The Lord has His own methods. This man was a eunuch, one who was not allowed to come into the assembly of Jehovah (Deut. 23:1). Yet, that is the kind of person with whom the gospel first comes into contact (f. Isa. 56:3-5). Besides this, here is a man of great authority under queen Candace. This seems to have been the name of all the queens of Ethiopia as Pharaoh was the name of every ruler in Egypt. He was the finance minister of Candace, which may mean that he controlled her fortune or that he controlled all monetary affairs of the land, because these two things were often not differentiated. At least, here is a man of great wealth, of high position and of great ability. When Ethiopia stretched forth her hand to God, she did it by means of a man of stature.

#### Through the Bible

This man had been in Jerusalem to worship. He was not a Jew, but he was a proselyte. He had come to the knowledge of the Jewish religion and had accepted it. It was worth a long trip to Jerusalem for him. He did this even though he was not allowed in the sacred places! Again, to show that he was a man of means, he had his own scroll of at least one of the books of the Old Testament! He was reading the prophecy of Isaiah. Had he already read Isaiah 56:3 "...neither

let the eunuch say, Behold I am a dry tree?" This would have spoken to his heart. He is reading aloud.

The Spirit (note: not an angel) now tells Philip to join himself to this chariot. No doubt it means, come close to the carriage so that you will be able to talk to the occupant. Philip can hear the man read from the book of Isaiah in the Greek language. We have here a rather strange situation. This simple evangelist, on foot, catching up with and then trying to keep up with this chariot, this elegant carriage, and seeking to strike up a conversation with the man in the carriage. How do you approach such a person? But, the opening is evident. Philip is acquainted with the words which he hears this man read. The question is: does he understand what he is reading? That is exactly the question which Philip asks him. The answer is blunt if not brusque. He readily admits that he does not understand the words he is reading. How can I understand, he asks, unless someone shall guide me? He is not too proud to receive instruction from a man who seems to be far inferior to him in many ways. He asks Philip to come and ride with him in this beautiful carriage! They are both going the same way!

### Prophecy Leads to Christ

There could have been many passages in Isaiah's prophecy which this man would not understand but which also would not give Philip the opportunity to bring Jesus Christ into the picture as well as this one does. He is reading from the 53rd chapter of Isaiah about the suffering servant of Jehovah. Is the prophet speaking about himself or is he speaking about someone else? This is a good question. It is the kind of question every thinking man would ask who was not acquainted with the New Testament. The Old Testament is a conundrum unless we have the key of the New Testament. The Jews of today still ask the same question as this Ethiopian Eunuch does and believe they have the answer when they say that the prophet is speaking of himself!

### Christ Crucified

We are here dealing with the heart of the gospel. The One of whom the prophet speaks was "led as a sheep to the slaughter." By this death he has accomplished a great deal. Thereby the humiliation is taken away and who will be able to measure the full effect of His sacrifice?

Not only the Jews but also many of the Biblical critics conclude that the prophet could only speak of himself. He had suffered a great deal and sought to bear it as well as possible. Is this all there is to it?

Despite the enormous economic differences between the two, the Eunuch has invited the right man to come to sit next to him. No doubt this Ethiopian has brought sacrifices and gifts to Jerusalem. He is about to hear of the greatest sacrifice ever made and the greatest gift ever given. The text offers a beautiful opening for Philip to preach Jesus to him. Jesus is the one of whom the prophet is speaking! The gospel has come. All the prophecies of the Old Testament have taken on new meaning. We must not conclude that the whole conversation of Philip with this Ethiopian is recorded here. Believing the gospel would take

much more than the few words which are here recorded. All of the gospel preaching Philip did on that day to this Ethiopian can be reduced to this: he preached to him Jesus! What more is there? This includes all that the Savior has come to do and it says Who He is. Only upon the true preaching of the whole counsel of God is faith instilled in the hearts of those who hear it. Philip starts with the passage from Isaiah 53 which the man was reading, but he does not limit himself to this particular section. This Ethiopian hears the whole gospel, and the whole Old Testament comes to stand in a new light.

### Baptism

This is also borne out in what follows. Although it is a desert way, they come to a place where there is water. Philip must have told him about baptism! This is what this man wants. He wants to be a member of the body of Jesus Christ. He asks why he should not be baptized right now! Isn't this a little too soon? Verse 37 is not found in the best manuscripts and is therefore also omitted from most of our English versions. Let it be omitted! It makes very little difference. Very likely it was found on the margin of old manuscripts and so later found its way into the text itself. But, the thought of the words found in verse 37 is clearly true. Philip does not object to the baptism of this man. He must have received a clear profession of his faith before he would do this. Note: the Apostles did not have to be called to administer baptism to this individual as they had been called to give the Holy Spirit to the Samaritans who believed, as is recorded in the first part of this chapter. Both Philip and the Ethiopian enter the water and Philip baptizes him.

The Spirit then removes Philip from that place. We are not told how, but we are reminded of the way in which the Lord moved Elijah from one place to another. Then we read something very strange: "and the eunuch saw him no more, for he went on his way rejoicing." That is the reason he didn't see him anymore! He wasn't looking for him! He had a joy like he never had before. This was enough for him. This man can go back to his own country and spread the good news of salvation there. When Ethiopia stretches out her hand unto God, her hands are filled. This man has found his Lord. The gospel preacher may have gone; Jesus remains with him.

Philip is next found in Azotus, the old city of Ashdod, also a city of the Philistines in the time of David. This is not the place where he is to stay but he passes through the land until he comes to Caesarea. That is the place where we will meet him later. Wherever he goes, he, of course, preaches the gospel. What have these enemies of the cross done! They have been instrumental in sowing the seed of the gospel everywhere.

### Questions for discussion:

1. What is the significance of the fact that this deacon, Philip, was used more as an evangelist than as a deacon?
2. What should guide us in picking a mission field?
3. How could a man from Ethiopia be acquainted with the religion of Israel?

4. Do we often read whole chapters of the prophets without knowing or understanding what we are reading? What should be done about this?
5. When should an adult be baptized? Do we wait too long or do we often admit one too quickly?
6. Is there much significance in the absence of verse 37 in some texts?
7. Could the gospel have spread so fast without persecution? ☺

## THE CONVERSION OF SAUL

### Lesson 10

### Acts 9:1-19

Perhaps the most important event in the life of the early church is that which is recorded in these verses. The Biblical writer considers it so important that he refers to it no less than three times in the book of Acts — here, in chapter 22 and again in chapter 26. The man who had done more harm to the church than anyone else is met by the Savior of the church. He who "breathed in" threatening and slaughter, i.e., it is his life's breath, is to be turned about completely. The man who possessed a fanatical zeal against the believers will later use that same burning zeal for them. The Lord singles out a man, not only of great ability, but a man who will not stop at anything to accomplish his purposes. This man is not a citizen of Laodicea!

#### The Persecutor

We first read of this Saul of Tarsus at the time of the martyr death of Stephen. He agreed with the chief priests that Stephen should be put to death. He thought he was doing God service by persecuting those who followed "that Nazarene." He has not changed his views concerning that "Way" when this chapter opens. He is not satisfied to rid Jerusalem of the followers of Jesus, but asks the chief priests for permission to persecute even those who have fled to Damascus, to extradite them and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial. They readily assent to this request. They have found in this Saul of Tarsus the kind of man which they need to stamp out Christianity at its birth. Why is he so venomous in his view of the Christians? This man has a great zeal for the God of his fathers and for the revelation which He had given in former days. He is well acquainted with the Torah, the law of God. He adores that law! He is firmly convinced that the Christians are opposing the God of Israel and the law which He has given. That being the case, he must stamp out all traces of this "so called" religion. Others may be satisfied to allow it to live on because they believe these people are harmless. Not so Saul! His zeal for his God will not allow him to leave these "heretics" unmolested. They must be removed from the earth. If Jerusalem is rid of them, and it isn't, go to neighboring Syria and bring them back from there so that they may not be able to continue their teaching and proselytizing.

The uncommon zeal of this man is even shown in the time when his conversion occurs. He nears Damascus about "noon," he says in chapter 22. Now, nobody travels about noon in that part of the world because of the brutal heat at that time of the day. But, his mission may not be delayed! He has to make haste

and drives himself as well as all those with him even through the hottest part of the day. It would have taken him a few days to travel from Jerusalem to Damascus. Any change of mind now that he has time to think it over? None. He had heard the confession of Stephen and had seen the peace on the face of that martyr when he was about to die, but it takes more than that to change his mind. He is as ruthless now as he was when he started. Christianity must be blotted out!

#### The Lord's Confrontation

But, Jesus meets him! Right at noon, when the sun is the brightest and the hottest, he sees a dazzling light and is enveloped in it. He is not able to remain on his feet but falls down on the ground. Then he hears a voice which addresses him by name. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" He is persecuting the Christians! This voice says that he is persecuting "Me!" He is persecuting One individual! In amazement he cries out: Who art thou, Lord? Someone is speaking to him from heaven, from whence this bright light comes. This One is Lord. No doubt about it — but, Who? He has thought that the followers of Jesus were going contrary to all that he holds dear and they did this because the One Whom they followed has misled them. The One who is speaking to him out of the light identifies Himself with those whom he is persecuting! Therefore the important question is: Who art thou, Lord? The answer comes immediately, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." He is not dead! He is not the heretic Saul thought Him to be because He is now speaking from the heavens in this bright light. Saul wanted to erase the name of Jesus from the consciousness of Israel as well as those who followed Him. This casts an entirely different light on the whole matter. Notice how Jesus is in complete control, as He always is. You go into the city of Damascus and there you will receive further instructions. Saul has intended to enter the city triumphantly and drive fear into the hearts of all those who follow Jesus of Nazareth. Now he is going to be led into the city while someone else holds his hand, because he has been stricken blind. What a difference! What a change! And, nothing more than a bright light shone around him and he has had a very brief conversation with One whom he was not even able to see. Those who were with him heard the voice, but they saw no one — Saul didn't either. There has always been much speculation on just what took place. Why did it affect Saul differently from the men who were with him? We must stick to that which Luke tells us. When Saul gets up he is blind — helpless! They take him into the city of Damascus and the Lord lets him sit there stark blind for three days. In all that time Saul neither ate nor drank. He is too busy with his thoughts!

#### Ananias' Commission

Now the Lord is setting things in motion to relieve Saul of his blindness and to prepare him for his future work. God speaks to a certain Ananias, of whom nothing else is known. This man is a believer in Jesus Christ. In almost Old Testament form, the Lord approaches this man in a vision. He at once responds

to the call of his Lord. His orders are: You go to a certain street, to a certain house, and ask for a man named Saul! Do not be afraid because he is praying. One doesn't have to be afraid of a praying man, regardless what has been heard of him. He has been rendered harmless. This Saul of Tarsus has also received a vision and in that vision he has seen a man by the name of Ananias come to restore his sight! The Lord speaks to both — the blind man and the one who will come to heal him. Perhaps these visions were seen at the same time. He is in control!

This mandate astounds Ananias. He is always ready to carry out the orders which he receives from his Lord, but this is asking the virtually impossible! This man is too dangerous. "I have heard how he has wasted the church in Jerusalem and that he has authority from the chief priests to capture all the believers in Damascus." His notoriety has preceded him. Perhaps the communications of those days left much to be desired, but the believers here in Damascus know all about this ruthless man who is coming to arrest them. The attitude of Ananias is understandable. The fact that the Lord has said that this Saul is praying is apparently not enough to remove his misgivings. To go alone to see this enemy of the church! Ananias reacts somewhat as Moses, Elijah and Jeremiah did earlier.

But, orders are orders! The Lord says to Ananias: Go! (No more objections). I have chosen this man. He is a chosen vessel to me. I will pour the gifts into this vessel and they shall be poured out again in great measure. The Apostles are still at Jerusalem. Peter and John returned there after they had been with Philip in Samaria. This man will bear My name before the gentiles and before the kings of the earth and before My people Israel. This man will have a tremendous task to do. Although he does not yet know it, I have already determined that that will be his life's task. I will show him how many things he will have to suffer for my name's sake. He will indeed carry the gospel to the gentiles. He will stand before Felix, Festus, Agrippa and Nero. He will also bring My word to Israel. He will begin his work in every place in the synagogue of the Jews. This Saul of Tarsus who was going to make the believers suffer will suffer more than many others for my name's sake. This man's name will be the most important in the rest of the New Testament history!

### **The Encounter With Saul**

Ananias has no more to say. He goes to find this persecutor. He does not ask for a confession of sins! He simply lays his hands on him and addresses him: Brother Saul! How things have changed! Only a short time ago he trembled at the sound of his name. Now he calls him: Brother!

He informs him that the same Jesus who had dashed him to the ground near the gates of Damascus has sent him to restore his sight and that he may be filled with the Holy Spirit. The same One who took his sight away will restore it. The Holy Spirit will also visit him and fill him. The Lord had waited so long to confront this man, allowing him to come all the way to Damascus — the believers in Damascus become more

fearful the closer he comes — but, when he is about to enter the city, Jesus meets him. He now meets him again through the instrumentality of this sincere believer, Ananias.

As the hands of this disciple are laid on him, something like scales fall from Saul's eyes and his sight is restored. What will this "seeing" Saul now do? Is the conversion genuine? No doubt about it. He is baptized at once. He receives the sign and seal of God's promises. He, the former persecutor, is initiated into the Christian church. Now he need no longer refrain from taking food and drink and he stays with the disciples in Damascus! If this man could be converted, anyone can!

### **Questions for discussion:**

1. Why do persecutors of the church so hate the believers?
2. Rome apparently turned its face when the priests gave permission to arrest believers in a foreign land. Why does Saul even persecute these?
3. Doesn't the Lord make it "difficult" for Himself by the kind He chooses?
4. Why is this man later such an asset to the church?
5. Do you understand Ananias' hesitancy? Does the Lord sometimes ask more than we can offer?
6. Isn't it amazing that this man who was a "fanatic" against the church now becomes a "fanatic" for the church? How do you explain this?
7. Do we often find such "honesty" on the part of persecutors as Saul displays when he is faced by Jesus Christ? \*

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# **S.W.I.M. 25 YEARS LATER Is the Church Better Off?**

**Ivan Mulder**

The question asked 25 years ago was, "What could happen to our church if... S.W.I.M. would catch fire and get started throughout the denomination?" Taking a quick look back over what has happened since the summer of 1960, makes the above question almost seem rhetorical. Ten young people from Northwest Iowa, piloted the project in Salt Lake City, Utah, under the direction of the Rev. Nicholas Vogelzang. Since that summer, thousands<sup>2</sup> of young people have participated in the program, throughout the North

American continent. Of course, the Christian Reformed Denomination is better off because of SUMMER WORKSHOP IN MINISTRIES. Or is it?

The lament of 25 years ago was, "Our young people have had too much done for them, and too little required of them. We have ministered to them, but have not really succeeded in getting them to minister to others."\* In discussions concerning the church, many young people express the fact that they find it difficult to get excited about their religious commitment and activities because their parents seem to be so half-hearted and calloused toward their religious experiences. Christianity is viewed as an "all talk, do nothing religion." For the most part, young people are still not expected to, are not asked to, nor are given opportunity to, take part in church work. So it seems that the situation has really not changed, in spite of S.W.I.M.

Young people are still not being given enough opportunities to work with and experience the claims of the Christian faith. Neither have they been challenged enough to seek ways by which they could embrace the Christian world-and-life-view as their own. The sheer materialism around which our families and neighborhoods are shaped and molded, makes the gospel seem irrelevant. From infancy through adolescence, parents give and give to their children. In the home, and even in the church, the young person's entire experience is on the receiving end—sitting there, taking it in. Seldom are they expected to give something or do anything in return. Church youth leaders are constantly wracking their brains to come up with new "fun times," catering to the world's notion that young people must be continuously pacified with entertainment and good times.

Ideally, parents who embrace Calvinism, give emphasis to gaining a Christian perspective, a world-and-life-view of God's creation and their place in it. In the entire educational process, at home, church and school, their children are confronted with God's Truth and challenged to be prophets, priests and Kings in the world. However, it appears that in reality, the inner-Christian-life and warm religious experience is missing. Our youth do not see enough faith-commitment carried over into action by those who influence them the most.

In the individual's development, the teenage years are the most critical with regard to the need to be committed. It is important for parents to face the fact that their children act or react mostly against the background of parental influence. Parents, out of obedience to God and out of duty to their children owe total dedication, total surrender, total commitment with respect to their profession of Christ. Jesus asks for and accepts nothing less (Mark 12:30).

If parents do not take their Christianity absolutely seriously, why should they expect any more from their children? If the reality of Christian living is missing in the daily home-work-worship-life, children may understandably criticize their parents' hypocrisy. And the blame for a lack of commitment on the part of their youth, is not on the church or school, but squarely, on the home.

Conversely, the Lord has done much for the young people and for His Church through S.W.I.M. As we reminisce, we also celebrate, but as we celebrate, we had better mean business in impressing commitment and dedication of our youth to Jesus Christ. We had better be more serious about our own discipleship, and investigate and innovate ways and means by which we involve our children, first at home, and then in the local church, in doing things out of love and obedience to Christ.

The strategy of S.W.I.M. is to shift the approach from letting the church do something for the youth, to allowing the youth to do something for the church. It is "a project with youth in action for the Lord."\*\* Twenty-five years ago I participated in that pilot project. Since that summer, I have assisted with or directed six such summer projects. S.W.I.M. is one of those unique opportunities that offer young people a taste of discipleship. Besides the glamour and excitement of new places and experiences, there must also be real commitment, dedication and even sacrifice involved. Several weeks of closely scheduled, strenuous activity centered around a church's program gives first-hand experience in what Christ has called us to do. Into those several weeks is crammed more evangelism and practical experience than most home-church members allow themselves to experience in a life-time. If you really want to do something worthwhile for your youth, give them a summer on S.W.I.M. ●

1. The Banner, November 11, 1960, pp. 4-5.

2. An accompanying communication from Rev. N. Vogelzang puts the total number at 9,268!

Mr. Ivan Mulder is a Bible teacher in Pella Christian High School and has served as church elder and clerk.

## SEMINARY STUDENTS EVALUATE Contemporary Testimony

John M. De Koekkoek

No doubt you are already somewhat familiar with the little booklet *Our World Belongs to God—a Contemporary Testimony* (hereafter "CT"). Our Synod and the Board of Publications have made a concerted effort to ensure that copies of the CT might be readily

available to any church or church member that wanted one. Synod granted "provisional approval" for the CT in order that its evaluation might be "in the church," and as it is being used, rather than "in the abstract."

When, in 1983, Synod granted "provisional approval," it also asked that "written response" be solicited and sent in to the CT committee secretary, Professor Robert Recker. Through seminary Professor Recker, Calvin Seminary students were among the first to see the new testimony, and although at the time it generated some lively discussion and even a student editorial or two, relatively few students actually wrote in. While the CT no longer occasions much debate at the seminary, I am happy to be able to report that finally, a good number of students have indeed written in.

About the same time that the CT first came out, a group of conservative seminary students formed an association calling itself the "Reformed Evangelical Forum (REF)." Banding together for mutual support and encouragement, the first major project of this student organization was a thoroughgoing analysis of the CT.

The culmination of a two year effort, the REF "write in" took the rather ambitious form of a full scale revision which included a thirteen page "Rationale" explaining the reasons behind the proposed changes. Since the students followed the original wording of the CT as closely as possible, it is immediately apparent that their chief concern was not the matter of style. Style had been a major student concern in 1983. For example, one student editorial of that year intoned that stylistically the CT was "as dull, as gray, and as flat as a slab of cement." The REF students, however, have chosen a different issue, the more substantive one of theological precision.

The chief concerns of the REF are immediately evident from even a cursory reading of their attached rationale. First of all, these students are concerned that the current version of the CT is weak in regard to the doctrine of Scripture. Second, they sense some confusion as to just "who" is in the Kingdom of God and who is not. Third, there is a concern that sin and God's wrath against it are not dealt with adequately. Fourth, they feel that the doctrines of election and predestination have been "de-emphasized." Finally, they feel that the CT could be much more positive about what believers have become through their victorious Lord.

To be sure, the REF proposal reflects other concerns as well. Apparent throughout its proposal is the REF perception that the CT in its original form tends to follow what many would consider to be a liberal agenda. More to the theological point at hand, it may also be observed that if it is true that the "Kingdom Theology" of the CT is confused (REF concern #2), then it only follows that the CT would also be weak in regard to sin and wrath, election and predestination, and the virtues that Christ accomplishes in believers (concerns 3-5), because it is especially those things which define just who is and who is not in God's Kingdom. In this connection it seems significant that the REF proposal has a decidedly more

evangelistic tone than does the original CT.

It seems that there are two kinds of people in this world: those who think that there is only one kind, and those who think there are two kinds. In his recent book, *Christians and Reformed Today*, CRC minister and professor John Bolt, stresses the importance of having a correct view of "common grace." Even more recently, Calvin College professor Henry Vander Goot (who wrote *Interpreting the Bible in Theology and the Church*, 1984), in an address to the Reformed Fellowship, stressed the importance of one's view of "common grace" for hermeneutics. In light of this resurgent interest it would seem appropriate to ask whether or not the 1983 "Kingdom Theology" of the CT is consistent with synod's 1924 statement on "Common Grace."

As noted earlier, the REF proposal follows the original wording of the CT as closely as possible. Because of this, major differences can depend on the deletion, addition or substitution of a single word. For example, the REF concern about the CT kingdom theology is reflected in the REF's more precise use of the pronouns "we" and "our." In the original CT it is often very difficult to know just when these pronouns refer to Christians, non-Christians, or to humanity in general. The REF proposal takes care of this ambiguity quite handily.

Again, for example, the REF concern that the CT tends to be too soft on sin and sinners while at the same time it tends to be too hard on saints, is reflected in its revisions of "can" and "may." There are major differences between "possibility" and "actuality," . . . between "permission" and "necessity." Especially in a testimony, the difference between "I am a Christian" and "I may be a Christian" may be (and often is) as great as the chasm which separated Lazarus and the rich man. The martyr dies for one statement, the sinner hedges with the other. Need we be reminded that there is a sense in which "common grace" is "no" grace? These fundamental distinctions should not be blurred.

Adding an "according to Scripture" here, and an "in the church" there, the REF went through the CT with a fine-toothed comb, making small changes here and there which accumulate to produce a significant difference. While the end result cannot be precisely what the authors of the CT originally intended, the REF proposal is certainly more precise than the original, and I think it merits our serious attention. Having done what I could to suggest the differences between the original CT and the REF proposal, I freely admit that it was beyond my ability to demonstrate them. The students of the REF invite the readers to judge for themselves: Copies of the side-by-side analysis may be obtained free of charge by writing: The Reformed Evangelical Forum, P. O. Box 68062, Grand Rapids, MI 49506. ●

Mr. John De Koeck is currently a senior at Calvin Theological Seminary. (The Synod has asked that reactions to the Contemporary Testimony be sent to the committee before January 1, 1986. Its secretary is Professor Robert Recker at Calvin Theological Seminary. The committee envisions approval of the Testimony by the 1986 Synod.)

# Rethinking Congregationalism

Since my last article appeared in *Outlook* (Sept. '85) on "Our Impressions of the Netherlands" many readers asked me to spell out exactly what kind of action I was proposing. I consider this a matter of considerable importance and will try to spell out just what kind of action I think we should undertake. As I see it, there has to come a parting of ways. As things have been going in the Christian Reformed Church, it is evident that we are being controlled and led by the Liberal mind away from the Truth as we have been taught it and as the Christian Reformed Church has upheld and confessed it in past years. That Truth, the churches no longer maintain. In spite of many overtures, protests, appeals, letters, articles and also lectures, synod decided to set that all aside and to make a decision that flies in the face of God's Word and our confessions. By doing this it leaves us no choice. It has shown us very clearly that regardless of what is said, written or done, it will no longer bow before the Word of God.

I know all the anger and arguments the above statement elicits, but this is a fact. And we have to face it. The Christian Reformed Church is no longer Christian Reformed. We must part from what is called by that name and continue to be truly Christian Reformed. I state it this way to bring out clearly what I think is fact. We are not withdrawing from the Christian Reformed Church. It has withdrawn from us who want to retain the historic Christian faith. We must contend for that precious heritage and uphold it. Precisely for that reason we cannot continue as members in the Christian Reformed Church. It is very necessary that we come to see that. There is a very deep resentment against what is thought to be a leaving of our beloved denomination. Some even call it, very mistakenly, "Our Mother" to whom we owe so much. I say mistakenly because what Scripture calls "our mother" is the true Church, "the Jerusalem that is above" the very "bride of Christ." No church on earth can rightly claim that title. And any church on

earth that deviates from the Truth and fails to uphold the clear teachings of God's Word in teaching or practice (discipline) fails to be a church that can claim our membership or allegiance.

I sense in the article by Rev. G. Martin on "Rethinking Congregationalism" some of this thinking. I see it as very dangerous thinking in that it makes a fellowship of churches a farce and borders on worship of a denomination. If we are going to be a meaningful fellowship of churches, we must be one in confession and practice. If not, then we are not really a true fellowship. And then one wonders just what value it has to remain in such a fellowship, the more so when it is suggested that we boycott its programs and actions by withholding our monies. As I see it, we are dreaming if we think that we can in that way be a kind of pressure group to bring the Liberal mind back to sound orthodoxy. But more seriously, we may not walk along with those who have set aside the Word of God and are only too influential in lulling many members asleep by blurring their thinking with clever talk and teachings. If we remain, we will lose everything we think we can regain. It is much too late to think we can change the direction our denomination has taken.

In parting ways we should follow what is called "the ecclesiastical way." This requires that concerned members should go to their consistories and request it to consider whether it is not imperative at this time to withdraw from the Christian Reformed Church and to state our reasons for requesting this. Consistories who see what is really going on in the Christian Reformed Church will agree with such requests and will take the necessary steps to separate. If a consistory does not agree it leaves then no choice but that individual members leave, either to join some other fellowship of churches that does uphold the Reformed faith, or to form a congregation with others and then join a church that upholds the historic Christian faith. Or better still, if enough congregations part ways they together could form a fellowship of churches that remains true to the faith and can rightly claim the name Christian Reformed.

I think we need to be aware of what that means. I wish this was not necessary. It will be the cause of some tensions among friends and family members. It will mean making some changes. It will also mean facing frustrations and disappointments. But we must face the facts. They demand action if we would remain true to our covenant God and to our precious heritage. To put it in the words of Abraham Kuyper, "The existence of modernism and orthodoxy in one and the same church may not continue." ("... het samenwonen van modernisme en orthodoxie in een en dezelfde kerk niet mocht voortduren." p. 130 in the book by Ds. A. M. Lindeboom, *Om de Grondslagen van het Christendom*. And in the same book page 131 we read, "... to yield to the evils we do harm to ourselves as well as the church we serve." ("Immers, met toe te geven aan het kwaad benadelen we zowel onszelf als de kerk die we dienen.") We should be apprised of this. If at this point we fail to take action for the sake of peace or unity, will we ever rise above such accommodations and compromises?

At this point it is good for us to listen to Francis A. Schaeffer in his book, *The Great Evangelical Disaster*, p. 78, where he writes, "The second problem for those who did not leave the liberally controlled denominations is the natural tendency to continually move back the line at which the final stand must be taken." And on page 79, "Evangelicals must be aware of false victories. The liberal denominational power structure knows how to keep Bible-believing Christians off balance. There are many possible false victories they can throw to evangelicals to prevent them from making a clear stand. There are still those who say, 'Don't break up our ranks. Wait a while longer. Wait for this, wait for that.' Always wait, never act." Both books mentioned above are worth reading with a view to what is happening today in the Christian Reformed Church. So many, too many, are saying, "Not yet! When they step further and allow women in the office of elder." I predict that that is coming. Why are we blindfolded to that fact? The stage is set for it. And I predict too, that if the present decision of synod, showing the Liberal mind in action among us, is not ground enough for action now, nothing in the future will be either. We will follow the tragic course of the *Gereformeerde Kerk* in the Netherlands.

Having said this I want to make it as clear as possible that this is not a judgment at all of the many faithful members in our denomination. Rather it is a call to action, an action I see as imperative. I hope this writing will in some way be a spur to such needed action. ●

Cecil Tuininga is a retired Christian Reformed pastor at Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

with it the authority of honest workmanship in the study and liturgical integrity declined, producing at the same time clergy who no longer knew what they were supposed to do and parishioners who became sure that they didn't." PDJ

## CHURCH DISHONESTY

It is time that we recover a measure of honesty and integrity in the CRC. Those virtues are being blatantly disregarded today in several instances. For example:

a) A pastor of the Eastern Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids denies that his congregation has women elders, and wants a retraction from someone who said that. The fact is, however, that Eastern Avenue has had "adjunct" (female) elders for some time, but since the synod of '85 disallowed that, the name was changed to "associate" elders. But women remain elders, and games are played with words in order to get around the Church Order and synod. Talk about dishonesty! And that in the church of Christ!

Meanwhile a student who brings these and other violations of C.O. to light, is placed under "behavioral discipline" by the president of Calvin Seminary. But one hears not a peep of protest from him about the situation in Eastern Avenue, or about the several female students studying at Calvin Seminary for the express purpose of entering the gospel ministry. Where is honesty here?

b) Recently one of the churches in Classis Alberta North delegated a woman deacon to a meeting of Classis, notwithstanding the clear and express stipulations of synod that this was out of order. Fortunately, she was not seated at Classis, though several delegates were ready to do exactly that. A test case? Yes, and it won't be the last one. There are people in our churches who don't care what the synod says — we are going to have women in office come what may. They have no concern for proper order in the church.

But when a member wants to withhold quotas from an agency for which he can no longer give in good conscience, he is admonished and denied his request. Pray tell, where is the consistency? Talk about straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!

Unless we are going to regain a measure of confessional and church-orderly unity within the CRC, we are going to be in for some rough waters. ●

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# The Synod's Pastoral Letter

The 1985 Synod of the Christian Reformed church decided to send a pastoral letter, according to the July 1, 1985 *Banner*, to seek peace. The letter in its first paragraph talks about key issues that cause division in the church, and the synod expresses deep regrets about these divisions. How sincere are these expressions of regret? There is reason for deep regret that the synod has lost sight of the truth contained in the Bible, and has caused the divisions that it regrets. What has the synod done to right the wrongs that caused its regrets?

The second paragraph cites a classic issue in which synod has not righted the wrong. The 1984 synod approved women serving as deacons, a decision clearly in conflict with the Bible's teaching. Did the 1985 synod reverse the 1984 decision? Such a reversal would have shown regret. The synod reaffirmed the 1984 decision, doing this, its letter states, after much prayer and deliberation. Did the synod base its deliberation on what the Bible teaches? The answer is "No." Does the God of heaven listen to such prayer when His Word is not used to make decisions? Again the answer is, "No." The letter would pray that unbiblical teachings restore peace, but peace can only be restored when the synod starts making decisions based on the Word of God.

When Classis Florida asked the *Banner* editor to clarify his position on Articles V and VII of the Belgic Confession (dealing with Biblical authority), the synod ruled this overture out of order. Is the editor of the *Banner* not accountable to the church? On this issue the synod again refused to go back to the Biblical teachings.

Further, in paragraph three the synod urges restraint. Did Jesus exercise restraint when he overthrew the seats of the money-changers in the temple? Should concerned Christians exercise restraint when the authority of the Bible is questioned? They should not be restrained but should fight against the evil that has infiltrated the church. The letter urges pastors to take an active part in the healing and reconciling process.

How can pastors do this when they are largely to blame for the mess the church is in? The last statements of the paragraph express doubts in the minds of the synod, but if the synod would go back to the Bible, the doubts would be removed, because the Bible is crystal-clear on the issues which the synod sees "in a mirror dimly." Then the letter finds comfort in the fact that Jesus is still King of the church. Why acknowledge the kingship of Jesus now? The Spirit will not lead us if we do not abide by Biblical teaching, for He only leads in Truth.

While the Christian Reformed Church has reasons to be thankful, how long will the Lord tolerate our disregard for His Holy Word? The authors of the pastoral letter would do well to read the letters to the churches in Ephesus, Sardis and Laodicea in Revelation 2 and 3.

I would urge all the members who want to liberalize the church to pack up and peddle their liberal ideologies elsewhere, and take the ministers and schools who think as they do with them. Does the form of subscription in which they promised to be faithful not apply today? •

George Kamminga, 281 Knowles Ave., Winnipeg, Man., Canada R2G 1C9.

## WHO AM I?

Glenn P. Palmer

Before the "open season" on unborn children was declared by our supreme court, there was an "open season" against the "unwanted children" of another age. Not being quite so sophisticated as the modern abortionists, people had to wait until the child was born and then kill him. Why him? Because the males were the "unwanted," as far as the king was concerned.

Fortunately for us males, there were two Hebrew women who stood up against the king. They disobeyed him because they "feared God." Because of their disobedience, God blessed them, and many "unwanted" children, including Moses, were born. Praise God. Thanks to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ for saving so many lives. •

Exodus 1:15-21.