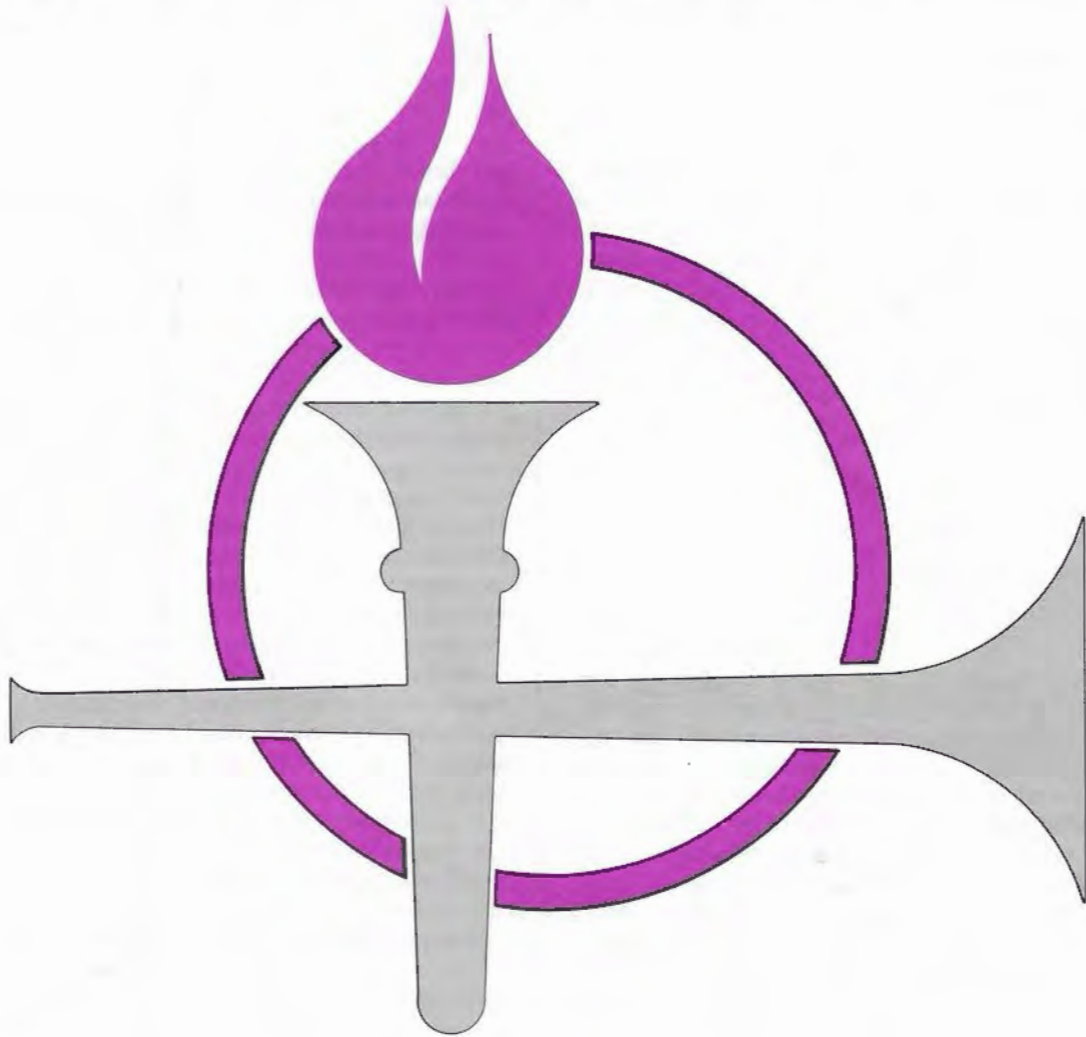


THE OUTLOOK

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

MARCH 1986



A CREATION CREED
WHITHER THE CHURCH?
PLANS OF THE CONCERNED
UNITY AND SEPARATION

Rethinking Missions Today⁽³⁾

Bassam M. Madany

Evangelical Christian missions are coming under criticism today for having failed to properly "contextualize" the Christian message so as to make it more acceptable to the receivers. Two previous articles have shown how that criticism ignores much of the long history of those missions and that it fails to do justice to the real theological differences between Christianity and the non-Christian religions such as Islam. Pretending that there is little difference will not help to convert people

III THE BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

It is when we view the modern contextualization movement among the neo-evangelicals from the Biblical perspective that we become especially alarmed. One fails to see how the major Biblical themes which deal with the mission of the church in the New Testament age have been taken into consideration. Furthermore, one notices upon the reading of the literature of the contextualization movement, the impact of the theologies of the World Council of Churches. Just as one takes notice of the eclectic nature of the WCC teachings and pronouncements, so one finds the same thing occurring among the proponents of the new missiology. More emphasis on "incarnational" theology and less emphasis on preaching and proclamation. There is more preoccupation with secondary issues such as forms of worship, fasting and the timing of baptism than a genuine desire to understand the true nature of Islam and the Biblical guidelines for missions among Muslims. The guide of the new approach, as stated earlier in this paper, is not so much the Bible as the new discipline of cultural anthropology.

In this third part of my paper, I plan to deal with two main passages of Scripture which have tremendous implications for missions: Romans 10 and I Corinthians 1 and 2.

Romans 10

In Romans 10, Paul deals with the main reason for the failure of the Old Testament people of God in reaching their destiny. "They are zealous for God, but their zeal is

not based on knowledge. Since they do not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness" (Romans 10:2b, 3 NIV).

Paul does not deny the general principle revealed in the Old Testament that "The man who does these things will live by them" (Leviticus 18:5 NIV). The Jews of Paul's days believed that they could be saved by doing the requirements of the law. The Muslims believe that God is pleased with them when they live in accordance with the Shari'a (Law). As we have noticed in the second part of this paper, in Islam salvation takes place under the auspices of revelation. While Paul did not deny the truth of Leviticus 18:5, he taught that there was no human being who could attain salvation by doing the law. God revealed another way which was suitable to the fallen state of man. Paul does not theologize as if no doctrine of redemption had been revealed. He quotes at length from the 30th chapter of Deuteronomy. Moses points to a righteousness which is given to the repentant sinner by God's grace. The instrument or means to give this gift to us is the saving Word of God. Personifying the "righteousness that is by faith" Paul writes:

Do not say in your heart, 'who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down) or, 'Who will descend into the deep?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? 'The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,' that is the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:6-9 NIV).

It is evident from these words of Paul that he puts the emphasis on both content and proclamation. Through this activity of the church, the saving Word of God comes so close to the hearers that it is as near to them as their own heart and mouth. Of course, the saving message must be appropriated. It must be believed and confessed. Paul is giving us in this chapter a very important teaching about missionary activity. He summarizes the teaching of this section of his Letter to the Romans by saying in verse 17: "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." Paul is dealing here with what is commonly known as the instrumental

cause of our salvation. Saving faith, regardless of the cultural background of the hearer, comes into being in an atmosphere where Christ is proclaimed. This is not meant to aggrandize the role of the apostle or the messenger of the gospel. This is simply the God-ordained way of missions across the ages, in all lands and among all cultures.

1 Corinthians 1 and 2

When we come to the teachings of Paul in I Corinthians 1 and 2, we meet the same high regard for the doctrine of proclamation. In doing his work as an apostle and pastor and in correcting doctrinal errors, Paul called the church of Corinth back to the fundamentals of the faith. He stated his thesis both negatively and positively. "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the Gospel, not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power" (I Cor. 1:17 NIV).

In elaborating this thesis in the remaining verses of chapter 1 and in chapter 2, Paul equally emphasized the contents of the proclamation and the appropriate method which was compatible with the message. His agenda after his conversion was simple: The preaching of the cross of Christ. Why was Paul concerned equally about message and method? He was aware of the fact that the content of the message: Jesus Christ and Him crucified, required a methodology which gave all the glory to the triune God and not to man. The faith of the converts must be anchored in the power of God and not in the wisdom of man.

Paul teaches us in a passionate way the importance of guarding the integrity of the Christian faith when propagating it. He must have been tempted to compromise in order to make the message more acceptable to the hearers. He knew very well that the presuppositions of the Greeks precluded any belief in the crucial doctrine of the resurrection of the Christ. Furthermore, Jewish tradition was not for the doctrine of a suffering and dying Messiah. But Paul did not compromise. This is what he said: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God" (I Cor. 1:18 NIV).

When applying these words to the situation in the Muslim world, we have to realize that the message of the cross is foolishness to the followers of Muhammad. The gospel of the cross is denied both on Quranic and doctrinal grounds. According to Islam, Allah (God) did not and could not have permitted the Messiah to be killed by the Jews. But we must recognize that Muslims throughout history have not always been totally consistent with the teachings of their faith. The legalism of Sunni (orthodox) Islam has pushed many to look for peace with God in the way of Sufism (mysticism). Also, suffering and redemption are not foreign to the minds of the Shi'ite Muslims. Neither should we forget in our missionary work that Muslims are never sure about their standing with their creator on the day of Judgment. All these factors must be taken into consideration when we present the gospel to them as well as when we elaborate missionary principles for work among them. But the fundamental reason why we must proclaim without compromise the word of the cross is that God has ordained it to be the means of grace for the salvation of all those who put their trust in the crucified and risen Messiah.

In our reflection on the first two chapters of I Corinthians, we also notice that Paul deals with the utter failure of man to find his way in the universe by relying on his own wisdom. "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its

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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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wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe" (I Cor. 1:21 NIV). The implication of this apostolic teaching is tremendous. In God's sovereign disposition, he has ordained that all humanly originated attempts to find him must fail, and they cannot but fail since man's heart is totally darkened by sin. The only God-ordained way of salvation is through the preaching of the gospel. This great emphasis on proclamation may sound rather out of place in an age when dialogue is becoming very fashionable and when all kinds of gimmicks are being used to bring about conversions. And yet the words of Paul are very clear: "*God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.*" We cannot avoid the offense of the word of the cross. The contextualization which the Muslims require of us to make our message really acceptable to them is nothing less than unconditional surrender. It is rather naive on the part of the many missiologists who are flying the banner of "contextualization" in missions to Muslims to think that the followers of Islam will settle for anything less than the Islamization of the Christian messenger!

Paul's concern was always the utter necessity of being faithful to the received gospel. His mind was focused on the message. This does not mean that he neglected what today is called cross-cultural communication. As a native of the Mediterranean world, Paul was at home in several cultural milieus. He spoke the language of the people and gave not only the gospel message but himself with the message. He became all things to all men that he might win some. But he never compromised on the fundamentals. His main concern was always God-directed. Or as he put it in the second chapter of I Corinthians:

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony of God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power (vv. 1,2,4,5).

The faith which Paul spoke about in these verses was not simply the orthodox or apostolic teaching about the Messiah, but it was equally that personal faith which was evoked and created by the Holy Spirit. This is why the human instrument or channel was deemphasized by Paul. He wanted the faith of the converts to rest not on men's wisdom, but on God's power. It was such an important subject for the apostle that he kept on discussing the crucial importance of a proper methodology. The unique role of the Holy Spirit must be maintained in any teaching about missions. Unless and until the Spirit of God touches the hearts of those listening to the proclamation of the gospel, the words of the missionary remain fruitless. As Paul put it:

This is what we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in words taught us by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned (vv. 13,14).

Needless to say, the apostle ended his teaching about the importance of the message and the proper method which must deliver the message with a special emphasis on the unique

role of the Holy Spirit. He alone is the author of conversion. Regardless of the cultural or ethnic background of any human being, and no matter how hard we try to bring the message to His attention, the work of the Holy Spirit remains indispensable for his or her conversion.

Today's Opportunity

Today, the mission of the universal church is at the crossroads. Unlike the early years of this century when it was rather easy to distinguish between liberal and Bible-believing and orthodox missionaries, the lines are rather blurred in our times. The Liberationists quote Scripture in order to re-interpret the meaning of salvation and desire to clothe their ideology with the mantle of the gospel. Neo-evangelical missiologists who are especially concerned about the challenge of Islam, are eager to stress that they do not want to part company with the historic Christian tradition. However, our examination of their claims from the historical, theological and Biblical perspectives has shown us that their map for a successful missionary endeavor among Muslims cannot stand the test. If we follow in their footsteps, we are not showing fidelity to the tremendous missionary heritage of the ancient church or of the specifically Protestant era of missions during the last two centuries.

In conclusion, I would like to submit for reflection and discussion the following theses:

1. The Christian mission to Muslims has a bright future — as long as it is carried on in the time-honored apostolic tradition, i.e., with emphasis on the centrality of the preaching of the Word of God.
2. The present situation in the Muslim world is unique. Since 1800, it has been undergoing radical changes due to the end of the isolation of its masses from the currents of world thoughts. It is therefore uniquely open to the impact of the Christian message.
3. The advent of mass communications is bringing the gospel to many areas of the Muslim world which had never heard its redeeming message. Young Muslims are very eager to learn about the contents of the Christian Scriptures. This provides us with a golden opportunity to present the claims of Christ.
4. The Muslim diaspora (dispersion) in the West presents a unique opportunity for mission work. The uniqueness of the Muslims' presence, neither as conquerors nor as conquered, but as guests and immigrants, is a new situation which has no parallel in history.
5. A reading of Muslim literature written by open-minded writers and of listeners' letters who are responding to gospel proclamation, indicates that the Lord is moving by His Word and Spirit. He is creating hunger and thirst among the Muslim masses for a message which can be found only in the authentic gospel. Our hope is re-kindled and we believe that the best days for missions among Muslims are ahead of us. Muslims will be converted through Christian testimony and through the preaching of Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

This paper is based on the presentation of Rev. Bassam M. Madany at a Caucus on Missions to Muslims held at Four Brooks Conference Center near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on July 9-11, 1985. Rev. Mr. 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 intimately acquainted with the Muslim world.

ABSENCE OF EVIDENCE

Aaldert Mennega

Occasionally we run into a catchy observation about some detail of our experience that has far-reaching implications. I ran into one of these last year in one of my courses. The statement read, "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence."

This saying was applied to the fossil record, indicating that when we do not find a particular organism as a fossil in certain earth layers, this does not necessarily mean that such an organism did not exist at that time.

A good example of this is the coelacanth fish. This is a large fish, about 5 feet long, which had been known from the fossil record only in layers which according to the evolutionists' geologic time table dates back to 70 million years. From then on this fish was said to be extinct, because no fossil record had been found of it in more recent earth layers.

Now it is interesting that in 1938 fishermen caught a live coelacanth fish off the coast of Madagascar. What a surprise! And what must scientists do with such an unexpected find? What is a possible explanation for the presence of this fish, thought to be extinct for so long? Where had it been all this time? One thought might be that this fish spontaneously generated in 1938 from the elements of the ocean. This is, of course, to be rejected at once, because the theory of spontaneous generation, which was held from the days of Aristotle, had been laid to rest for good by Pasteur, Redi and Spallanzani in the 1700's.

A more reasonable explanation would be that this fish has been living right along, and was not at all extinct during those so-called 70 million years. It was indeed absent from the known fossil record, but it was not absent from the earth. It was living, but not fossilized in layers closer to the earth's surface.

Thus we see that there is some scientific truth in the saying that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Or in other words, when we do not find fossil evidence of an organism, we can not therefore conclude that it was not living at the time those earth layers were laid down. This is a strong indication that we have to deal with these phenomena with great caution.

Another striking aspect of this so-called "living fossil" is that it is morphologically indistinguishable from those fossil specimens which are said to be at least 70 million years old. Structurally they look the same. The question then comes to mind immediately why this species of fish would not have evolved in some way or other over all those millions of years, as the evolutionistic theories would demand. The answer sometimes given to this is that this fish is an extreme example of evolutionary conservatism, suggesting that this organism

remained the same throughout the time of its long existence through some evolutionary force. Giving this phenomenon such a name, of course, does not really explain its prolonged absence in the geologic column. But the fish does demonstrate the constancy of species.

That species are not static, or completely unchangeable, we know from observation. But we also know that one species has not actually been observed to change into another. Such a transition no one has been able to demonstrate, and the idea is therefore purely speculative. We do observe that usually there is a certain amount of variation within a species, due to mutations of genes, or due to the normal exchange of parental genes. But the extent of variation is very limited, because every time a mutation occurs there is a change in DNA, and consequently an interference with the full functional operation of the cells of the organism. But an organism can sustain only just so many mutations, and beyond that will no longer be viable, because it can no longer carry out all its metabolic functions. This has been demonstrated in experiments with fruit flies as well as plants.

And the coelacanth fish probably does not go back in time as far as 70 million years in the first place. If this fish was present during those more recent 70 million years while being missing from the geologic time table, there is no reason to think that it would not also be present for 70 to 100 million years before the time span that it is found in the fossil record. It is probably more scientific, and closer to the truth, to say that the coelacanth fish was present all the time, even though it was not found in certain earth layers. It was there since the time of creation when God called it into being with all the other fishes, as the Genesis record tells us. And that probably fairly recently.

We do not make scientific deductions from the Genesis account, of course, but that authoritative document does tell us that God created the fishes. Our finding of this living fossil coelacanth fish is quite compatible with that account, while the evolutionist's geologic time table is seriously called into question by these facts. How can we still believe in his claim of 70 million years?

We need due caution when interpreting the data, and when the data contradict our theories, we should look for new explanations which will explain all the available data better. We must rely on the presence of evidence, and not on its absence.

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

NEEDED:

A CREATION CREED

David A. Kloosterman

The time has come for the evangelical Christian church in general, and the Christian Reformed Church in particular, to more carefully define and profess the Biblical doctrines of the creation of man and the Fall. We must draw a line in affirming and defending the doctrine that Adam and Eve were real, historical persons miraculously created by Almighty God. We must affirm and defend the doctrine that the Genesis record of the Fall is an account of actual historical events.

Current Need to Confess God's Creation

Some will no doubt say, "Why should we press these divisive issues? Suppose a person understands the Genesis account figuratively rather than literally — that doesn't mean that he's not saved." And this is true. But to acknowledge that such a person can still be a Christian is not to say that such a misunderstanding of Scripture is without serious and far-reaching consequences; nor is it to say that a faithful church can remain indifferent to the matter. Indeed, the current uncritical embracing of evolutionary theory and corresponding mythologization of Genesis represent a serious challenge to the Christian faith.

First of all, there is the question of hermeneutics. If we are to allow for an historical-critical approach to Genesis 1-11, on what basis are we going to deny its application to the accounts of the virgin birth or the resurrection? As Harold Lindsell asserts in *The Battle for the Bible*: "...once the historical-critical methodology is accepted, it takes one farther down the road, far beyond inerrancy in its simple stage. It has in it all of the seeds that lead toward apostasy. This point cannot be emphasized too strongly."

Secondly, apart from the hermeneutical implications, the theological implications of the mythologization of Genesis are by no means inconsiderable. If man has evolved from the apes, then how is he essentially different from the animals? If the creation of man was mediated through the process of natural selection, then is not man the result of death rather than death the result of man's sin? And is not then the very reality and nature of sin called into question? If man is presently in his natural state and there was never an historical Fall, then may not Question 6 of the Heidelberg Catechism ("Did God, then, create man so wicked and perverse?") be answered "Yes!"?

"But," some will object, "Our present forms of unity state the Biblical doctrines of the creation and fall of man; we don't need another creed." I have sympathy with this argument, but I think the strength of the present challenge requires an additional creed written specifically to meet it. This sort of situation has happened before. Although the Arian heresy was addressed by the Nicene Creed in A.D. 325, it nevertheless was necessary for the church to define the doctrine of the Trinity even more sharply against this same heresy some three centuries later when (it is believed) the Athanasian Creed was written. Likewise, the doctrines of TULIP may all be found in the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, yet the Synod of Dort felt compelled to set forth these doctrines more completely in response to the errors of Arminianism. And it must be remembered that this "line-drawing" was done in the context of controversy and division in the church. Our present creeds do not devote much attention to the doctrines of man's origin and fall simply because these doctrines were not at issue in the past.

The time has come, however, in which these doctrines are being seriously challenged. That this is also the case in the Christian Reformed Church is not hard to see despite the deceptive cloaks of semantics used by some of the challengers.

Present Compromises

For instance, the proposed "Contemporary Testimony" (to be presented to Synod in 1986 for final approval), though written to meet the challenges and dangers presented to the church by modern secular society, is woefully inadequate in its confession of the church's faith regarding man's origins. Its broad, general statements and careful vagueness blur rather than more sharply define the church's doctrine in this area. In commenting on its "Testimony," the committee writes: "The confession that this world belongs to God is opposed by the world view of evolutionism. Whereas the church has agreed with Christian scholars and scientists that development takes place within the created order, evolutionism teaches the independence and autonomy of natural forces (*Acts of Synod 1983*, p. 423) . . ." Note that this states that the church agrees with evolution, it's just evolutionism

which we are at odds with. The committee attempts to allay our fears by stating "Human beings are not mere products of a naturalistic evolutionary process. . . ." But why the words *mere* and *naturalistic*? Are they implying that we may be products of a theistic evolutionary process, or that perhaps we are products of a naturalistic evolutionary process but that's not all we are? The committee comments further that Christians "do not need to be afraid to revise previous formulations or understandings of God's dealings with this world or of the manner in which God unlocks the wealth of his created order. . . ." My translation: we don't have to be afraid to throw the traditional exegesis of Genesis out the window or to embrace evolutionary theory.

Many more examples may be cited. A prominent Calvin College history professor dismisses the creationists' hermeneutical scruples as being largely the result of cultural and historical influences (cf. *The Banner*, Jan. 14, 1985, p. 27). Two professors of geology at Calvin favor the view that man's physical nature has evolved from the apes (cf. *The Banner*, Nov. 12, 1984, pp. 10-12; *The Outlook*, Dec. 1985, p. 17). Many have grave doubts also as to what sort of doctrine concerning the origin of man and the Fall is presently being taught in Calvin Seminary (cg. *Acts of Synod 1984*, Overture 31, pp. 445-450).

Confess Neither Less Nor More Than God Revealed

Need I go on? The time to speak, I say, has come. Yet there is one more point I want to stress, and that is that we must *carefully* define and profess these doctrines. As the Canons of Dort state: "Finally, this Synod exhorts all their brethren in the gospel of Christ . . . to abstain from all those phrases which exceed the limits necessary to be observed in ascertaining the genuine sense of the Holy Scriptures. . . ." Just as we must make our stand against those who would take away from Scripture, so we must be careful that nothing be added to it. In articulating the Biblical doctrine of creation we must recognize that there are certain questions which the Scriptures leave unanswered. This calls for careful exegetical work by faithful Biblical scholars. We will not discover which questions the Bible answers and which it does not by turning first to science and then distorting Scripture to fit currently popular theories. Rather, the doctrine of creation is an article of faith for Christians (Heb. 11:3) grounded in a special revelation so sure that, as our Lord says, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matt. 24:35). Yet it is my belief that an obedient approach to Scripture will reveal there is an area for responsible Christian discussion within specific Biblical limits.

But what are these limits? Many in leadership positions in the church are loath to say. Frequently, Christian scientists who look to theologians for help in interpreting the Bible find that the theologians are deferring to the scientists. It has become not uncommon to find instances of Christian scientists allowing less room for theories of theistic evolution than their theologian counterparts. Though I think he walks the very edge of this limit, I am thankful that Calvin geology professor Davis Young is bold to recognize that "the doctrine of the evolution of man is unscriptural and should be opposed (*Christianity and the Age of the Earth*, p. 66)." On this question of limits, I think Francis Schaeffer is especially helpful:

I will now mention two limits that seem to me to be absolute. The first is that the word *bara* insists that at

the original creation, at the creation of conscious life, and at the creation of man there was specific discontinuity with what preceded. One other limitation is that Adam was historic and was the first man, and that Eve was made from Adam. (*The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, V. 2, p. 136).

It is extremely expedient for the church to emphasize even such basic limits as these in this age of wandering from the Word. Indeed, I believe that if the Christian Reformed Church is to stay within the limits of Scripture in its profession of the doctrine of creation, at the very least it must be served by faithful leaders obedient to the Word who diligently work to establish specifically what the limits are.

Mr. Kloosterman, a graduate of Calvin College, is an analytical chemist and a church school teacher and consistory member living at 3610 Konkle, Kalamazoo, MI 49001.

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Whither the Christian Reformed Church?

Rev. Henry Vander Kam

Past Development

The Christian Reformed Church has been known for many years as one of the strongest Reformed churches in this country. From a very small beginning of four small congregations in 1857 it grew into a sizeable denomination. It did not rival the size of many of the other denominations in our land, but of the Reformed bodies it was one of the largest. It was a church which took its confessions seriously. It knew what it meant to be a church of Jesus Christ in the midst of this world. The churches were filled two, or even three times, every Sunday. Church attendance was not a problem. Why? One of the main reasons was that the Scriptures were opened on the Lord's Day and the Catechism was faithfully preached. True exegetical preaching is also very practical, because the Scriptures are able to speak to the heart of a person better than any man is ever able to do. There was a deep loyalty to the church. There was a real confidence in all the institutions and agencies of this church.

Because of the above, the church grew. Although much of the growth was the result of immigration, the church extension of those years should not be minimized. It seemed that everything the church did flourished and prospered. The members and leaders of the church realized their responsibility for the teaching of its children and young people and a union of Christian schools was established which might well be the envy of other denominations. In spite of the tremendous cost, Christian elementary schools, Christian high schools and Christian colleges were established. The cause of missions was not neglected, as some have charged. For the size of the denomination and its immigrant background, it did a great deal for missions both at home and abroad. The Back-to-God Hour began very small — one station in Grand Rapids — and today it reaches virtually every part of the globe. God has been good to the Christian Reformed Church! I thank my God daily that He has allowed me to work in this church practically all of my adult life!

But, the reader may have noticed that I have repeatedly used the past tense in the previous paragraphs. Sad to say, this was necessary, because things have changed. This is no profound statement, because there is always change in this world in which we live. Only the truth of God does not change because He does not change.

Current Decline

Certainly we are aware of the fact that the church attendance, especially at the second Sunday service, has fallen off dramatically in recent years. Although there are still some churches whose attendance, even at the second service is fine, their number becomes smaller every year. What is the reason? No doubt there are many reasons. But, if the strong exegetical preaching of a former day drew the people to the church services, is it possible that weaker preaching of today does *not* attract them? One hears more and more that the catechism is no longer preached regularly in many Christian Reformed Churches. The church in a former generation did not have to compete with television, but we should also remember that the fourth commandment is much older than the oldest television program!

Those who hold office in vacant churches will understand me well when I say that they have a very difficult time in calling a minister and that they have difficulties which did not face former generations. The two main questions in former days were: a) Is he eligible) and b) Is he competent? Today the main question is: Where does he stand on the issues in the church today? Don't tell these elders and deacons that everyone of the ministers is in "good and regular standing!"

To our regret, it must also be stated that some of our institutions and agencies no longer claim the confidence of many of our people. This is a fact, and their love for these causes then diminishes. These are serious matters. We do not come to these conclusions lightly, but must also face the realities.

When this decline began is difficult to say. Did it begin in 1952, in 1959, in 1970, in 1972, in 1973 or in 1984? No doubt all of these dates will seem important in the future, but we are still too close to these dates to have the proper perspective to evaluate that. Historians will have to give us more definitive answers later in the history of our denomination.

Causes of Decline

When the question is asked: What caused the decline to become evident? I think the answer is not difficult to find.

In the estimation of this writer, the report on "The Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority" of 1972 and the report on "Office and Ordination" of 1973, laid the groundwork for today's problems. Therefore, when I say that the evidence for the decline in the Chr. Ref. Church is the question of Women in Office, I do not mean that *that* is the disease, but that it is the *symptom* of something more deep-seated. While the majority of our people did not understand all the ramifications of the two reports (of 1972 and '73) mentioned, the matter of "Women in Office" they understand very well!

For about fifteen years we have debated this issue. The issue did not come "out of the bosom" of our church; it came to us by way of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. It was a problem in the Netherlands and the Dutch churches moved the Reformed Ecumenical Synod of 1968 to act on this matter. It had never surfaced in our churches before this. We allowed others to write our agenda for us for fifteen years! No less than five study committees dealt with this matter. In 1978 the Synod already approved the concept, but the implementation had to wait till 1979, because changes in the Church Order were involved and these must wait one year for ratification. Even so, there were already 38 churches which had ordained women as deacons before 1981!

We are now faced with the issue: what must our reaction be? One could weep because of the changed direction the church has taken in a comparatively short time. One who loves the church and has given his life to that church, is deeply wounded if he sees her go in the wrong way. There are many who say: "Leave well enough alone." "Don't rock the boat." "You will only have your name blackened if you speak against it." However, is this a responsible stance to take? To ask the question is to answer it. The time for platitudes is past. To bemoan the situation as it is today and then go right along with it is of no avail. Those who believe that it will not hurt them in their particular place of work are hiding their heads in the sand. They have also adopted a congregational form of church government. We must have something to transmit to the generations which shall follow us. A prophetic word must be spoken at the proper time.

The Correcting Word

What is this *prophetic word* which must be spoken? It is simply this, as I informed Synod in a minority report in 1981: that we believe that it is contrary to Scripture to ordain women to office! It is also contrary to Article 30 of the Belgic Confession. Synod itself admitted that it is contrary to the Church Order — witness the changes which had to be made in the Church Order to accommodate women in the office of deacon. Article 29 of the Church Order states that "Decisions of ecclesiastical assemblies shall be reached only upon due consideration. The decisions of the assemblies shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved that they conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order" (Cf. Article on "Settled and Binding" in the *Outlook*, May 1984). Our fathers gave us many checks and balances. This is one of them. If the church Order must be changed or modified to make room for certain pronouncements of Synod, we have an autocratic or hierarchical Synod! It then virtually becomes a dictatorship. The principles by which the decisions of Synod are to be judged are then removed! We are dealing with a dogmatics problem and with a church government problem. These two often go together in the history of the church.

Again I ask: "what must our reaction be?" There are many who have expressed their concerns about this matter for the last fifteen years and their concerns became greater as the day seemed to approach when the Synod would finally agree to the ordination of women as deacons. However, natural as that concern was, it is not enough to be concerned. A brother in Canada wrote me not long ago that there were approximately 700,000 members in the *Gereformeerde Kerken* in the Netherlands in 1944. About 550,000 of these, he said, were *verontrust* (concerned). Approximately 100,000 left the church to follow Drs. Schilder and Greijdanus. What happened to the other 450,000? I suppose that most of those will go back to the *Hervormde Kerk* in 1986. Abraham Kuyper led the people out of this church in 1886 and now, exactly one hundred years later, they have come full circle and are going back from where their fathers came. One can be "concerned" until the last day... but that will not save the church!

Dr. K. Dijk, the veteran theologian of the G.K.N., wrote a little book in 1965 "*Koerswijziging in onze kerken!*" ("Change of direction in our churches!"). He speaks as a man who is deeply concerned for the churches of which he is a member and office-bearer. Surely, there are many fine things still to be found in these churches, he says, but their direction is wrong regarding many issues. He complains about the preaching in their churches. No longer are there theme and divisions. He complains of the church attendance and the knowledge of the nature of the church. He sees laxity in discipline and no longer faithful and regular catechism preaching. He warns against overturning the position taken by their Synod in 1926 against Dr. Geelkerken, who doubted the historicity of the first chapters of Genesis. He warns against joining the World Council of Churches. After this book was written, his warnings were not heeded, but the Synod reinstated Dr. Geelkerken (posthumously) and joined the World Council of Churches. When I read this man's book and heard him cry his heart out, I asked... "Where were you when the prophetic word had to be spoken?" He agreed to the deposition of his colleagues, Schilder and Greijdanus in 1944! The word of one man... spoken at the right time, can often have great effect.

From Offering to Tax

No decision of Synod stands by itself. If it is a decision of some importance, it will affect various other matters. We have had the "quota" system for years and it has served the church well. I have been a member and officer of more than one board which had to make its budget and then present it to Synod with the request for the needed quota. There was a time when we had both quotas and "assessments." This went on until 1940. At that time Synod decided that the term "assessment" was not a proper ecclesiastical term. It reminded too much of the word "taxation." The church doesn't "tax"! Already at the Synod of 1985 the matter of quota payment was challenged by a couple who did not want to give to an institution which taught that having women in office was perfectly proper. Synod turned down the appeal of this couple and made it very clear that this "quota" had to be paid by them or by others for them! Synod 1940 said — they are all "quotas"; Synod 1985 said in effect: these quotas must be regarded as "assessments"! Someone immediately protested this action as causing someone to give against his

will. Is this not a conscience matter? Is there not such a thing as corporate responsibility? May I give to an institution or agency of which I am convinced that it is teaching or implementing teachings which are unbiblical? Don't make someone else pay for that which I do not wish to support, lest he trample on my conscience!

Persisting in Error

Synod of 1984 had approved of the ordaining of women to the office of deacon. A cry went up from the church! Is this not the reason for 40-50 overtures dealing with this matter to the Synod of 1985? Have you ever seen anything like that? Twelve classes objected to that decision of 1984 and another thirty three consistories did likewise. What did Synod do with these appeals or overtures? I have been told by several delegates to this past Synod that they were disposed of within thirty minutes! Some now say: We must keep bringing overtures to Synod until it listens. This is not only foolishness; it is also contrary to our own rules. Synod is not to be bothered with the same issue again and again unless new material is produced.

As I mentioned before, important decisions of Synod do not stand by themselves, but have other ramifications. There is still a lot more in the pipeline. The ordination of women to all the offices in the church is not an impossibility, to put it mildly. Already there are several women students at Calvin Seminary who are planning to enter the ministry in the Christian Reformed Church. One of them has preached for several months, as was made public this past summer. Let us also learn from history. In 1968 the GKN ordained their first women deacons. Four years later, when we lived there for some time, they already had women in the elder's and minister's offices. To make predictions is always dangerous, but, I would predict (conservatively) that we will have women in all the offices in the church within five years!

Other things which give reason for concern — children at communion. This has not been adopted, but it was already considered important enough to justify appointment of a committee to study it. The liturgical dance matter was also turned down by Synod 1985. Is this the last we will hear of this matter? Very few will believe that we are finished with it. How about our ecumenical movement? Some wish to steer us into union with the RCA and some also would like to see us become members of the World Council of Churches. Is it our ecumenical duty to go in these directions? I don't like to use the term, but the more "liberal" element in the church has "won" in regard to the matter of Women in Office. They might become a little bolder now regarding some of the above mentioned matters.

Who Is Splitting the Church?

The accusation is sometimes made that the more "conservative" group is splitting the church. I have been asked in public and various times in private whether or not I was splitting the church by going to no less than six areas of the church the past year to speak against Women in Office. My reply? Of course not! I would never split the church. That is a serious matter. That church is the body of Christ! But, do not accuse those of splitting the church who hold to the historical interpretation of the Scriptures; who believe all the articles of the Belgic Confession; and who hold to the Church Order! The danger does not come from this source. I have

thought about this matter for a long time and I hesitate to say it, but it must be said: THE SYNOD OF 1984 SPLIT THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH! Splitting the church is not something future, it is past tense — *it has already happened!* Polarization can only last so long. A process has been at work for a long time. The Synod of 1984 accomplished the fact and the Synod of 1985 underscored it! No pastoral letter signed by the officers of the 1985 Synod can remedy this situation. This letter speaks of the "divisive spirit" present in the church. It deeply regrets this. So do I. Are these decisions (regarding Women in Office) going to help restore peace and trust among us? No, they were the reasons for the disturbance of peace and trust.

Consult for Action

What should we do? I believe it would be well for those who oppose Women in Office to call together a Convention of those who are of like mind. I am fully aware of the fact that one of the Calvin Seminary professors has already written, when speaking of a convention, "whatever that means." I believe that such a Convention, which is not itself an ecclesiastical body, ought to appoint a committee to sit down with the leaders of the other opinion (this may be the whole Synodical Interim Committee, the President of the Seminary, the Editor of the *Banner* et al) and talk over our differences and what is to be done about it. Come to a unified position as much as this is possible and avoid all acrimony. I don't want to leave the church; neither do I want to be robbed of the church I have tried to serve to the best of my ability!

We must work for the welfare of the church! We must have a heritage to transmit to our children and grandchildren.

Others may have a different view of what ought to be done. These suggestions are welcome. The welfare of the church is at stake — we may not hide our heads in the sand!

BANNER OF TRUTH CONFERENCE

The 8th Ministers and Elders Conference sponsored by Banner of Truth will be held at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan on May 27-30, 1986. The Conference theme is "The Spiritual Life and Labors of Gospel Ministers." Speakers include, Dr. O. Palmer Robertson, Pastor Ernest C. Reisinger, Pastor Robert P. Martin, Pastor Albert N. Martin, Pastor Charles W. Krahe, Pastor Glen C. Knecht, and Pastor Allen C. Guelzo. For registration information contact the Conference Secretary, Banner of Truth, P.O. Box 621, Carlisle, PA 17013.

Women Deacons

CHURCH POLITY AND HERMENEUTICS⁽²⁾

Frederika Pronk

B. THE DIACONATE IN THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

1. Deacons in the Early Church

The diaconate as such is explicated in the earliest Christian sources outside the New Testament in *The First Letter of Clement* (pre 96-A.D.), *The Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Didache*, and in Clement's *Epistle to the Corinthians*, where the diaconate is considered to be an office and the deacon is listed among the leaders of the church. To them was entrusted the care of the poor, orphans, widows and the visitation of the sick and they also acted as assistants to the bishops. In the Western church they were permitted to baptize and preach. Though subordinate to the presbyters, the deacons frequently stood in close relations with the bishop, and exerted a greater influence. Hence they not rarely looked upon ordination to the presbyterate as a degradation.⁴⁶ There is evidence that sometimes they were allowed to vote in their own name at provincial and consistorial synods.⁴⁷

A synodical study report says, "we see that the deacons played a vibrant and many-faceted role in the life of the early church. They are regarded in the earliest sources as belonging to the major offices of ministries of the church, even though it is apparent that their role very soon evolved into being the bishop's assistant."⁴⁸

2. Deaconesses

The earliest extra-canonical literature referring to deaconesses is by Pliny who wrote: "I have judged it necessary to obtain information by torture from two serving women (ancillae) called by them 'deaconesses' (ministrae)."⁴⁹ Deaconesses or servants of the church are mentioned first in the *Didascalia Apostolorum*. They were charged with a ministry to women because of social conventions and acted as a sort of liaison between the bishop and women seeking his counsel. Deaconesses were by no means a universal entity, since if no deaconesses were present, any woman could serve to assist women in the anointing which preceded baptism. The *Didascalia* states they could not baptize, nor teach, "except for advice she was invited to give a neophyte leaving the baptismal waters."⁵⁰

A special form for consecration of deaconesses has come down to us from the *Apostolic Constitution* which has this beautiful prayer: "Eternal God, Father of our Lord Jesus

Christ, Creator of man and woman, who didst fill Miriam and Deborah and Hannah and Huldah with the Spirit, and didst not disdain to suffer thine only-begotten Son to be born of a woman; who also in the tabernacle and the temple didst appoint women keepers of thine holy gate: look down now upon this thine handmaid, who is designated to the office of deacon, and grant her the Holy Ghost. . . ."⁵¹ Although deaconesses were consecrated to office, there has always been a dispute whether the deaconesses belonged to the laity or clergy, since their tasks were separated from deacons.

In the West they were shorn of their clerical character by a prohibition of ordination passed by the Gallic councils in the fifth and sixth centuries. With the rise of monasticism during the Middle Ages women found an avenue of service through monastic orders. "The adoption of the care of the poor and sick by the state, and the cessation of adult baptisms and of the custom of immersion . . . made female assistance less helpful."⁵²

3. The Middle Ages

In the Western church the diaconate steadily declined in importance, until during the Middle Ages it simply became a stepping-stone to the priesthood.⁵³ At the Council of Trent (1563) the Roman Catholic church advocated a diaconate which included a ministry of material and spiritual assistance to the needy and allowed deacons to act as assistants to bishops. With the sharp demarcation between clergy and laity the diaconate simply became a rung on the ladder to priesthood in a hierarchical clergy system. Vatican II reactivated the importance of this office in its original intention.⁵⁴

4. Non-Reformed Churches

In the Anglican system deacons usually assisted priests in worship by assisting and administering the sacraments, teaching and even preaching. Administering alms was part of their official duties.

Lutheranism down played the diaconate until the nineteenth century, since the administration of diaconal services was carried out by the civil government. Pietism revived the diaconate, and was very influential in the development of the diaconate as a parachurch, professional service organization, so that both deacons and deaconesses functioned as employees of the church, a christian organization, or the state. The Kaisersworth movement, associated with its

founder Theodor Fliedner, spurred the deaconess movement and contributed to a similar nineteenth century movement in major American Lutheran bodies, Mennonites, Episcopalians and Methodists.⁵⁵

Early Baptist confessions recognized only two offices. The office of pastor, bishop, elder or teacher was considered one and open only to males. The office of deacon was open to both men and women, but had little status. They served tables, assisted at liturgical functions and carried out some benevolent tasks. Today in Baptist churches there is usually one elder-minister, assisted by a board of deacons, who act mainly as church administrators. Where deaconesses still exist, they are usually organized into separate boards, engaged in practical service.⁵⁶

The history of non-Reformed churches shows a diversity in the way the diaconate has been viewed. The conclusion that we can draw is that until the twentieth century, usually where men occupied the office of deacon they were considered part of the ruling body. Where women functioned as deacons or deaconesses they either were separate from that of male deacons or their work was distinguished as that of deaconess, a separate ministry, apart from the offices of the church.

5. Reformation Churches

The views of the Reformers must be seen against the background of the social and political developments of the age, where the state played an influential role in church life. Luther let the state keep this role. Calvin affirmed early Christian church practice by restoring the dimensions of mercy as an integral part of the office of deacon. In Geneva the diaconate was recognized as an office but deacons were kept outside the church council which consisted of elders and pastors. Calvin recognized two kinds of deacons: deacons who distribute the alms and those "who had devoted themselves to the care of the poor and sick. Of this sort were the widows whom Paul mentions to Timothy (I Tim. 5:9-10). Women could fill no other public office than to devote themselves to the care of the poor."⁵⁷ A recent study, based on original documents, gives evidence of a large-scale welfare fund for poor Protestant refugees from Roman Catholic France founded during the era of John Calvin and "run by the deacons of the Reformed Church of Geneva."⁵⁸ The records show that "this was an office of the Church, mentioned in the Bible, and the injunctions about deacons in the early Church were applied to their sixteenth-century counterparts."⁵⁹ Women, often the wives of the deacons, played a large part in the operation of this ministry, called "the Bourse française." "So, although the diaconate was a man's role in Reformation Geneva, there were a goodly number of women involved in the 'Bourse'."⁶⁰

6. Dutch Reformed Churches

Church historians generally agree that the Dutch Reformed tradition was shaped by several lines of the Reformation. On the one hand there was the influence of the French and Walloon Reformed churches which has entered into the Belgic Confession, Articles 30-32. Here deacons are put on par with elders as part of the government of the Church. "We believe that this true Church must be governed by that spiritual policy which our Lord has taught us in His Word; namely, that there must be ministers or pastors to preach the word of God and to administer the sacraments; also elders

and deacons, who, together with the pastors, form the council of the Church..."⁶¹ The French and Walloon churches did not enjoy civil approval and support. There was only one kind of deacon; they were elected like the elders and formed part of the consistory, and as such were delegated to the broader assemblies. Their main task was to care for the needy, but they also catechized, conducted worship services, and performed weddings. Alongside this diaconate, apparently without consistorial representation, were deaconesses who lived communally.⁶²

The influence of Johannes a Lasco's form of church government among refugees in London can be seen upon the Dutch Reformed churches in the practice of excluding deacons from the church council. There was a restricted consistory, consisting of elders and ministers, and a general consistory which included also deacons.⁶³ Deacons were basically helpers of the poor and were not part of the consistory.

This separation of the deacon's office from that of the others is present in the Convent of Wesel of 1568. Chaired by Datheen, one of the nineteen statements follows Calvin by instituting two sorts of deacons in larger localities: one for gathering and distribution of alms and one to "care for the sick, the wounded." Such persons must be endowed "with the gift of comforting and a better than average knowledge of the word."⁶⁴ Older women of proven ability and reputation could be appointed to be deacons. It should be noted that although women were admitted to the diaconate, they were excluded, together with all male deacons, from the consistory. Furthermore, Wesel had no binding authority on the Dutch churches and had an advisory character only.

A later Synod, that of Emden in 1571, included the deacons in the consistory. Clarification was asked about this decision at the Synod of Dordrecht in 1574, which provided for separate meetings and made a provision for places where there were few elders so deacons might be admitted to the consistory. This qualification was adopted by several more Dutch synods and finally became part of the Church Order adopted by the Synod of Dort (1618-19) in Articles 37 and 40.⁶⁵

It should be remembered that the Dutch Reformed Church was a national church and was always involved with the state. At the Synod of Dort (1574) there were complaints that the church could not take care of the poor both within and without the church because the civil government did not give the church its share of the income of property held in common by church and state. Says Bouwman: "From the beginning the Reformed did not keep the diaconate pure, and because of financial entanglements, occupied a dependent position regarding the state."⁶⁶ Its position as state church kept the Reformed Church from properly exercising the diaconate. In contrast with the Lutherans, however, it always struggled to maintain a Biblical practice of the diaconate.⁶⁷

Deaconesses functioned as part of the ministry of the Reformed Church in Amsterdam, where in 1556 they operated a home for the aged and orphans and did house visitation, reporting to the deacons; they were under the supervision of the consistory. Voetius, often named in connection with the Synod of Dort (1618-19), discussed the work of women in his *Politica Ecclesiastica* and encouraged a type of women's ministry as an auxiliary to deacons, either chosen by the consistory or by the deacons. Their work should consist in ministering to the poor, sick, needy and children, and work which could not be carried out with propriety by the deacons. "He advised that they be charged by a com-

mittee which should then avoid any appearance of seeming to ordain them."⁶⁸

7. Presbyterian Churches

Churches standing in the Presbyterian tradition have never mixed the eldership with the diaconate. Deacons do not take part in the administration or governing functions of the church. Therefore, to admit women to the diaconate never presented the complication that Dutch Reformed churches faced. "There have been deaconesses for a long time but women deacons (with the same functions as men deacons) are a more recent phenomenon in the Church."⁶⁹

8. Women Deacons Today

The grounds given for opening the office of deacon in the CRC in 1978 is "the historical precedent (Synod of Wezel, 1568)."⁷⁰ Synod 1978 declared "there is historical precedent for this in the Reformed tradition (see Calvin's *Institutes*, Book IV, Chapter 3, Section 9, and the Synod of Wezel, 1568)."⁷¹ As we have seen, women who functioned in the diaconate never functioned in an office in the same way as men, or if there is some evidence they did, their work was distinguished from that of male deacons and they were never part of the governing council of the church.

In fact, the overwhelming evidence points to the fact that women were excluded from any ecclesiastical office which involved ordination. When a commission appointed by the Anglican Church in 1962 examined the question of women's ordination, one of its arguments for excluding women from "Holy Orders" was that "it would be contrary to the tradition of the Church from the time of the apostles."⁷² An authoritative commentary on the CRC New Revised Church Order of 1965 taught that "the induction of women into the ministry and the other ecclesiastical offices is an innovation of more recent date."⁷³ Yet, Monsma did recommend that women be involved in church work and "occupy a place of Christian leadership."⁷⁴

If there is anything that we can learn from the diaconate as it functioned in Scripture and the history of the Christian church it is that women were actively involved in the diaconate, howbeit not in an ordained office. This Scriptural and Reformational principle needs to be reapplied to today's social conditions.

46. Philip Schaff. *History of the Christian Church, Vol. III* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, May 1977), p. 259.

47. Quoted in "Synodical Studies on Women in Office and Decisions Pertaining to the Office of Deacon" in Acts of Synod 1981, from The Indian Journal of Theology, Vol. 9) 1960, 59-66, p. 63), p. 501.

48. Acts of Synod 1981, p. 502.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 501.

50. Roger Cryson. *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1976), p. 43.

51. Schaff. *History of the Christian Church*, p. 260.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 262.

53. J.D. Douglas, Gen. Ed. *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, s.v. "Deacon" by J.W. Charley (Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 285.

54. Acts of Synod 1981, p. 503.

55. The Deaconess, *World Council of Churches Studies No. 4* (World Council of Churches, Geneva, Switzerland, 1966), pp. 58-63.

56. Acts of Synod 1981, pp. 503-4.

57. Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion, Vol. 2*; John T. McNeill, Ed., *Ford Lewis Battles, Transl.* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), IV, iii, 9, p. 1061.

58. Jeannine Evelyn Olson. *The Bourse Francaise: Deacons and Social Welfare in Calvin's Geneva* (Ph. D. Thesis: Stanford Univ., 1980), p. 1.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

61. *Ecumenical Creeds & Reformed Confessions* (Board of Publications of the Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1979), p. 78.

62. Acts of Synod 1981, p. 506.

63. Prof. P. Biesterveld et al. *Het Diaconaat* (Hilversum: J.H. Witzel, 1907), pp. 138-39.

64. P. Biesterveld, Dr. H.H. Kuyper. *Ecclesiastical Manual*, Richard DeRidder, transl. (Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1982), p. 33.

65. *The Psalter* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. P. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1927), *Church Order, Articles 37, 40*, pp. 91-2.

66. Dr. H. Bouwman. *Het Ambt Der Diakenen* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1907), pp. 40-41; translation F.P.

67. Biesterveld et al. *Het Diaconaat*, p. 167.

68. Peter Y. De Jong. *The Ministry of Mercy Today* (Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506: Baker Book House, 1952), p. 248.

69. Acts and Reports of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, 1968, pp. 156-57.

70. Acts of Synod 1984, p. 654.

71. Acts of Synod 1978, p. 104.

72. *The Deaconess*, p. 157.

73. Martin Monsma. *The New Revised Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1967), p. 26.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

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WHO AM I ?

Glenn P. Palmer

I sent greetings to Timothy via Paul's second letter to him. You will probably not immediately recognize my obscure name, but it is much more famous in the comic strip *Peanuts*. A quick perusal of II Timothy shows that I am

I have two sisters and seven brothers. Usually my brothers are not named, but my sisters and I are, perhaps because of our beauty. "Nowhere in the land were there found women as beautiful!" (In the U.S. my name is better known as maker of a pancake mix and of an imitation maple syrup.) My name is _____.

Footnote: 2 Tim. 4:21; Job 42:13-15.

Peter's Denial of His Lord

John Blankespoor

"Then he began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them 'I don't know the man.' Immediately a rooster crowed . . . And he went outside and wept bitterly" (Matt. 26:74, 75).

Evidently in the early hours of Friday morning all this took place. By nine o'clock Jesus would be on the cross. Shortly before this the events in Gethsemane had taken place, and the disciples had forsaken Him. Apparently John and Peter found each other again in the darkness and together followed the procession from a distance as Jesus was taken to the high priest.

Apparently the geographical setting was that of a court. In the middle east a court was shaped like a circle or horse-shoe. At the opening there was a gate. Today people can drive into one with small cars. Inside the court people would often keep themselves warm on a cool night with a fire. On the outer side of the court there were buildings with a walk in front of them. The office of Caiaphas, the high priest, may have been in such a building.

Three times Peter was confronted with the question whether he was one of the followers of Jesus. Hardly had he passed through the gate when a young girl (a slave girl perhaps) looked him over and suspected that he must have been one of Jesus' followers. She asked the question, however, in such a way that she expected a negative answer. He surely couldn't be one of them? And a negative answer she got. By this time Peter must have begun feeling uneasy in these surroundings. But he stayed. He wanted to see what would happen to Jesus, his Master. Soon another girl confronted him with the same matter. But she made a positive statement, saying that this fellow was also one of them. Again Peter denied it, this time with an oath, stating also that he didn't even know the man. But Peter persisted in staying. As he was warming himself by the fire we read that that group of men "labeled" him as one of Jesus' disciples. It was then that Peter denied it with a loud speech, using a curse and an oath, to emphasize what he said. He implied that he had never known Jesus, had never had any contact with Him. His "oath" suggests calling upon God as a witness, that God could curse him if he was not speaking the truth.

This was Peter, one of the twelve and one of the inner circle of three. This was Peter who previously had confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. This was the Peter who had been with and lived with Jesus as the Son of God, and learned to love Him dearly.

• • •

"How could Peter have done such a thing?" we ask. Why did he do it? Let us be careful that we do not pass judgment upon this terrible deed with a self-righteous attitude.

Was Peter such a coward that he committed this terrible sin? Wasn't he a man of his word when he said that he would never forsake Jesus? He, no doubt, deeply loved the Lord. Why else would he and John have followed the procession? Previously he had also shown that he was a man of his word. When in the garden he cut off Malchus' ear he, no doubt, had in mind to split the man's head in two, killing him. Peter was ready to lay his own life on the line. But how must we then explain this almost unbelievable, sinful deed?

The basic answer to all these questions is that Peter was offended in Jesus. What does that mean? To be offended means that you "stumble" over something and fall into sin. What was the stumbling-block for Peter here? It really was the cross. Jesus gave Himself to be arrested and crucified. He did not resist this. Instead He willingly went this way. Scripture explains it in saying that "as a lamb went to the slaughter, so He opened not His mouth" (Isa. 53:7).

With this thought in mind let us look at the narrative once again, and take notice of the sequence of events. Matthew mentions the first denial of Peter. Then he "changes the subject" by calling our attention to what was happening to Jesus. He tells us how the court even sought false testimonies against Jesus. Also how the high priest tore his clothes when Jesus confessed that He was the Son of God. Not one word, however, did Jesus speak in His own defense. Thereupon people spit in His face and struck Him with their fists. All laws of decorum and proper conduct in court trials are ignored and flagrantly transgressed. Peter saw this, perhaps at a distance. Was this his Savior? Why didn't He defend

Himself at least in some way? He said absolutely nothing in His own defense. Is this the promised Messiah? Is this the king that will occupy the throne of David? Is this a king?

Peter stumbled and fell deeply into sin. This kind of Savior he could not confess before men. And as a result he denied his master in the worst possible way, with cursing and using an oath.

G O S

Jesus, who no doubt heard Peter, keenly felt the meaning of this action. How much worse all this was than even what occurred in the garden of Gethsemane? There Peter had by fleeing chosen for himself. Here he took a stand against Jesus. In the garden he and the others didn't say anything, but here he cursed and swore. In Gethsemane he said by implication, "I did know Him, but am leaving Him now." But here he said that he had never known Christ.

There is more. Peter denied it all with an *oath*. The Jews were apparently always ready to use oaths. Jesus was not. He came to establish a kingdom in which there would be truth and righteousness. In this kingdom God is present. Therefore, we don't need oaths in the kingdom. Here the principle is, let your yes be yes and your no, no. Jesus had taught that oaths in the kingdom were something of sinful flesh. Oaths simply don't belong here. Jesus hated the lie. And oaths are necessary exactly because people do lie. We must see then, that Peter, with the use of his oaths, threw to the wind the teachings of Jesus on this matter; this Jesus must have suffered deeply.

From the record it appears that Jesus was led from Caiaphas just at the time when Peter was swearing these oaths, so that the Lord heard it all. Was this a mere coincidence so that just at this time, a matter perhaps of only one minute, Jesus heard and saw Peter? Of course not. And what did the Lord do when He heard and saw this His disciple? We read first of all that the cock crew. Did this also just happen? We must conclude that the Lord made this rooster crow just at this time. He who walked on the water, and raised the dead could also make roosters crow. And then the Lord turned around and looked at Peter. How easily the Lord could have ignored it all or turned the other way. Instead, there was that irresistible glance of love that penetrated Peter's soul. In those eyes he likely read the love that came from Jesus' heart, which said to him: "Peter, I still love you." We can be sure that Peter never to his dying day forgot this glance of love from the eyes and heart of his Savior.

He was the "man of sorrows, acquainted with grief," but also a Savior who even at that time showed a love that would never let go of His own.

The procession and trial continued. Those around the fire may have kept on warming themselves and talking about the important event of the night. But none of them had seen what Peter had seen, or "heard" that Gospel of ocean-deep love.

Peter could take it no more. He had to leave. We know nothing of the details that followed. Where Peter went we do not know, but we do know that he "went out and wept bitterly." With deepest sorrow, he relived in his own mind and soul, what he had done and said. If only he could have talked to Jesus once more to confess his wrong. But this opportunity was not given him. Jesus, as far as Peter was concerned, was gone, having died on the cross.

G O S

Peter and Judas both committed terrible sins. Jesus mentioned what both of them would do before they committed the deeds. Both were offended in Jesus. There was one big difference, however. Judas' act was premeditated; Peter's was not.

Luke tells us that Jesus knew that Satan had desired to have Peter. He wanted to "sift him," like wheat is sifted, so that Peter would fall into sin, never to return. But the Lord was also in control, as He had been with Job long ago. Jesus prayed for Peter that his faith would not fail. That meant that the Lord wanted Peter's faith to come through, in sorrow and confession of sin. Such prayers never go unanswered. Peter was rescued and saved from the clutches of the merciless devil. We don't read that Jesus prayed for Judas, even though He knew what Judas was going to do. Why did He pray for Peter? The only answer can be His elective love. Both made themselves worthy of everlasting damnation. But the love of God rescued and saved Peter.

We have all "sinned and come short of the glory of God," also by denying and being ashamed of our Lord. For us, too, the way out is one of sincere confession of sin, faith and a life of gratitude. But remember that it was and is the love of Christ that moves us to repentance and faith. For Peter that love was so strong, that even when it added immeasurably to His suffering, He did not let go of Peter. That love continues for His people. "Though we oft have sinned against Him, still His love and grace abide."

What a love and what a Savior we have!

TIV SEMINARY LIBRARY

The Reformed Fellowship and the OUTLOOK have from its beginning encouraged and tried to give support to the Reformed Theological College of Nigeria. This seminary, established some years ago by the Tiv Church seeks to give distinctly Reformed training to its own and other church leaders for the rapidly growing churches of that part of the world. The school continues to grow in size and in the level of education it is providing. Our Fellowship early set aside a fund to provide books for its library. Especially through the generosity of Mr. Herman Baker and Baker Book House we were able to obtain these at much less than retail cost and arrange for their shipment. Since the last political upheaval in that area, shipment of books has been greatly delayed, sometimes taking over a year. Late last fall another substantial order was sent, and we hope to send more orders as we receive information from the school on what is needed.

Editor

the Acts

Henry VanderKam

PETER AT THE HOME OF CORNELIUS

Lesson 13

Acts 10:24-48

The early church counted mass conversions when 3000 came to the faith at one time, and that number increases to 5000. But, it also included a ministry to the individual, as in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. Now we are shown a whole family, or an extended family, coming to the faith.

The Gospel from Jew to Gentile

The connection with the preceding events is clear. The men of the household of Cornelius have come to the house where Peter is staying and he invites them in because it is too late in the day to begin their journey to Caesarea. This fact that he invites these gentiles into the home where he is staying, is already the beginning of the crumbling of the wall of partition between the Jews and the gentiles. The following morning they begin their trip to see Cornelius. Several men of Joppa accompany the Apostle. Was this for safety? Or was it to have witnesses of the great things which were about to happen? The following day they arrive at Caesarea. What a welcome the Apostle receives at the home of this gentile centurion! Cornelius has called his family and close friends together to listen to that which this man of God will have to tell them. He himself greets Peter. This officer of Rome is now in the presence of an officer of the Lamb and he falls down on his knees to worship him. What a respect this shows for the office of Peter! Although the centurion may not fall on his knees before generals of the Roman army, he does this before the Apostle of Jesus Christ. He is looking for something great and he will receive it too, but this honor goes too far, and Peter tells him to rise because, though he is an Apostle, he is only a man. We find similar incidents in Rev. 19:10 and 22:9-10 where the Apostle falls down before an angel. We must worship God alone. No man, regardless of station, or even an angel is worthy to be worshipped.

As Peter sees the situation in this house of Cornelius with so many people present, he first puts things in proper perspective. It is not lawful for a Jew to come into the home of one "of another nation." (He uses a mild term and does not call them heathen or gentiles. He had invited the ambassadors of Cornelius into the house where he was staying in Joppa and is now compounding the problem by going into the house of one of another nation. Israel was a people set apart. All of their ceremonies pointed to this fact. The scholars among the Jews had made these laws even stricter than the Old Testament intended. These ceremonies have fallen away with the coming of Jesus Christ, but, it is difficult for these Jewish members of the early church to realize this change and to

become accustomed to the new ways!) Peter informs his hearers that something has happened to him which has changed his outlook. God has revealed to him that he is not to call any man common or unclean. (That vessel with all manner of animals and creeping things in it and the instruction he receives upon seeing this vessel have made a profound impression on Peter. Because he has had this experience he did not hesitate to come.) "Now tell me," he says, "why you have sent for me." First he clears the air as to the relationship between Jew and gentile, and now asks the purpose of this invitation.

The Prepared Congregation

Cornelius informs him that he was in prayer at 3:00 in the afternoon four days ago, "and a *man* stood before me in brilliant clothing who told me that my prayers had been heard and that my almsgiving had been noticed in the sight of God." This is a clear approval of the man's way of life. But, that is not enough. Therefore, he must send for Peter who is in Joppa and he is given the address. It is so good that Peter has come at once. Seldom has a religious meeting been so well prepared. The people have come together to hear the word of the Lord from the mouth of Peter. Cornelius is able to pray, and he does; he is able to give alms, and he does; but there is much more which he does not know. This Apostle must come to instruct him in the way of life, in the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are here together *eagerly* awaiting the word of grace which will come from Peter's lips. An attentive audience is assured.

Peter's Sermon

Peter begins to speak. While the whole speech may not be recorded; we are given the highlights. Peter speaks of four things. First he briefly reviews the works of Jesus. He then tells them about His death and resurrection. Thirdly, he announces the future judgment and Christ as Judge. Fourthly, he in agreement with the instruction of the prophets, leads hearers to faith in Jesus for remission of sins in agreement with the instruction of the prophets.

Because God is righteous, He is no respecter of persons. Those who fear God and live righteously before Him are acceptable to Him regardless of their national origin. Peter's hearers are familiar with many of the things which Jesus did and said. He is the Word which was sent to the children of Israel. Not only is He the Savior of men but He is also Lord of all. That fact may never be lost from sight. Great blessings come to those who believe in Him but He also asks their complete allegiance. The whole story began with the preaching of John and has gone on uninterruptedly to the present day. Christ was anointed with the Holy Spirit so that

He was able to do all the mighty things which they have seen and heard. He did good and cast out those afflicted with spirit possession. Now, Peter is among those who are witnesses of all the things which took place because he was with Him since the earliest days.

Peter is moved as he relates these various things to those assembled here in the house of Cornelius. This Jesus, Who had brought peace, the people crucified! They hung Him on a tree to show their utter contempt. God, however, raised Him from the dead the third day. This is the gospel of Jesus Christ which these "of another nation" must hear. All of the good news is compressed into the statements that they slew Him and God raised Him from the dead. This is not hearsay! After the resurrection He was not made manifest to all men but only to those whom God had chosen beforehand. These ate and drank with Him after He rose from the grave! They are as certain about the living, resurrected Lord as they could be about any fact in their lives. Those who are witnesses of the life of the resurrected Christ were given the mission to go out with this word everywhere. They are to testify about everything pertaining to Jesus of Nazareth. They must testify that He is coming again as the Judge who will judge the living and the dead on the last day. He is Savior—indeed; He is also Judge! How have Cornelius and those with him in this house come to the faith? No doubt through their association with the Jews, through whom they became familiar with the word of God given in the Old Testament. The Jews must see the relation of the Old Testament to the Person and work of Christ, and so must also these who come from without. All the prophets bear witness to Jesus Christ. This was the reason for their speech, for their lives and work. The more the people study the sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament the more they will realize that these Scriptures have been fulfilled in Christ. The Old Testament speaks of a "forgiveness of sins" but it does not show the people how this is possible. In the preaching of the Christ of the New Testament Scriptures it now becomes clear. He has paid for the sins of man! Now sins can be forgiven. This is gospel — the good news which they must believe.

The Gift of the Spirit and Baptism

When Peter has made known the heart of the gospel to those who are here assembled the Spirit falls on all them that hear. Seemingly the Spirit does not allow Peter to finish the words he has to say, because we read in chapter eleven that the Spirit fell on them when he began to speak. Here is no laying on of hands before the Spirit comes. He (the Spirit) comes before they are baptized. It is well for us to note the order of events here, because much is made of a certain order today. Those who had come from Joppa with Peter are amazed that the Spirit is also given to the gentiles. Peter must speak to them, and they should know the truth. But, to see that all the privileges of this communion with Christ are now theirs too — this is almost too much for these Jews! That the Spirit has indeed been given to these gentiles is made evident by the fact that they begin to speak in tongues and magnify the name of God!

Peter now asks a rhetorical question. Is there anybody who would forbid these people to be baptized? They have the same faith as we. They have received the Spirit as well as we. Notice: Peter considers baptism necessary even though they have already received the Spirit in great measure so that they are able to speak in tongues. He commands others to baptize these people! Christ didn't baptize. Paul baptized very

few (cf. I Cor. 1). Now Peter also shows that he has come first of all to preach the gospel and let others baptize "in the name of Jesus Christ." Then they ask Peter to stay with them for a time. No doubt they want to hear more of the gospel.

What a breakthrough it is that a prominent Roman and his house come to the faith. This gospel can't be stopped! It will conquer the earth!

Questions for discussion:

1. How difficult do you think it was for a man such as Peter to break with all the things he had been taught and follow God's leading?
2. How do we know that the ceremonial law was abolished? Or wasn't it?
3. Why do you think Jesus showed Himself only to His disciples after the resurrection? Wouldn't it have been effective to appear to enemies?
4. What can we learn from Peter's summary of the gospel?
5. Is baptism with the spirit more important than baptism with water?
6. Do you think it was a good thing that Peter had witnesses with him?
7. Why were they not baptized into the name of the Trinity?

PETER'S DEFENSE AND THE RISE OF THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH

Lesson 14

Acts 11

Jewish Objections To Receiving Gentiles

The first part of this chapter deals with Peter's defense of his association with Cornelius. When the news of what has happened in Caesarea reaches the Jews in Jerusalem they are shocked. Their Jewish background and their present faith are threatened. Are they about to lose their identity? Such questions fill the hearts and minds of those who have been brought up in the Jewish religion and have now come to faith in Christ.

Although their attitude is not one which can be commended, it must not be lost from sight that great changes are taking place and that they fear that these changes will not be for the good. It is noteworthy that they do not first stumble at the fact that Peter has baptized several gentiles, but that *he ate with them!* This went contrary to all they had been taught. Is the whole past history now to be proved wrong? Have our fathers always been in the wrong? These Jews seriously hold their religious beliefs and practices.

Showing God's Answer

Peter now reviews all the things which have happened in what is almost a duplication of the account in chapter 10. There are a few differences and even though these differences do not seem to be very important, we should take note of them. In the previous chapter the number of men who accompanied him to the home of Cornelius was not stated. Now we learn that there were six. This number is more than enough to testify to the truth of what Peter tells the Jews. He has plenty of witnesses. In verse 14 there is a more significant difference. The angel had told Cornelius that when Peter came he would "speak unto thee words, whereby thou shalt be saved, thou and all thy house." Peter also defends himself by saying "who was I, that I could withstand God?" We must also notice that Peter is ready to give a reason for his

actions to the church! Peter's readiness to relate all the details concerning the things which have happened in the house of Cornelius satisfies the church. They are now able to rejoice with him that the gentiles have also been included in the salvation which God has made known. Peter is vindicated. Although this problem is not completely solved by means of this episode and will rise again, a giant step has been taken. The church for the time being is satisfied. This will do a great deal for the peace of the church in the coming days.

Further Gentile Evangelism

The rightness of receiving gentile believers in the church having been shown in the case of the Cornelius family, we learn of the further spread of the faith among the gentiles. Great tribulation came upon the church after the death of Stephen. The believers, no longer safe in Jerusalem, scattered abroad. Satan, through the persecution which arose, scatters the believers, but wherever they go they preach the gospel of Jesus Christ! Some go a long distance from Jerusalem — to the great seaport of Phoenicia, to Cyprus, and to the third most important city in the world at that time, Antioch. This too is a seaport even though it lies inland, because there is a waterway connecting it to the sea. It is the typical city of commerce — wicked and immoral. This city will have a very important place in the rest of the history given us in Acts. It becomes a hub from which the gospel is going to go to many other places.

Those who had been scattered abroad at first spoke to the Jews only. The Jews had been scattered throughout the then known world and new refugees naturally associated with them, as they spoke the same language. However, some of them from Cyprus and from Cyrene, men who have lived in the gentile world for a period of time and for whom the Greek was the common language, speak the gospel also to the Greeks in Antioch. There is no "holy" language and the gospel of Jesus Christ is not to be restricted to the ancient people of God. The walls of partition crumble.

The work of this earliest gentile mission is blest beyond their fondest hopes. Many turn to the Lord. What is happening in the world? Christ Jesus is making disciples of the nations. His rule is being extended. The news of the great success of this mission soon reaches to Jerusalem. This church sends out Barnabas to investigate the news and to help them. We do not read of a mandate given this man, but the church is interested in what is going on in Antioch. They do not send one of the Apostles but, instead, a very wise and good man even though he does not have the status of an Apostle.

Helping the New Church

Barnabas is happy to see the progress the gospel has made in this important city. He is here face to face with the grace of God! No man would be able to gain such results. He admonishes them to remain faithful to the Lord. To believe when one is overcome by the emotion of the moment is one thing; to continue faithfully in this profession is another matter. Luke tells us that Barnabas was a good man, not enough in itself, but that he was also filled with the Holy Spirit and had genuine faith. Much people were added unto the Lord, apparently also upon the ministry of Barnabas. His qualifications will do much to satisfy the church at Jerusalem when he reports to them.

Apparently he realizes that the work here in Antioch is too much for him and for those who were here before him. More leadership is required. (The leadership given to this

particular church will, humanly speaking, have much to do with the further success of the gospel in many other regions.) He thinks of Saul of Tarsus. Barnabas was the first to introduce Saul into the ranks of the believers, as he was the first to believe in the genuineness of Saul's conversion (Acts 9:27). This is the man for Antioch! He finds him in his birthplace, Tarsus. Notice that Barnabas calls him—not the church. Saul is ready. We cannot trace Saul's life since his conversion, nor the places where he has been. But, this is not necessary for our purpose. He is about to embark on the greatest missionary career. Both Saul and Barnabas work in the city of Antioch for a whole year. This is much longer than the missionaries usually remained at one place. But, the work here is important. They had the opportunity to teach many people here during that time and lay a good foundation for the church. This also is the place where the followers of Jesus were first called Christians. This name which became so common in the later history of the church, is used only three times in the New Testament. It is derived from the name "Christ" or "anointed one" and indicates that His followers have received His anointing (of H. Catechism, LD 12, Q.32). They might conceivably have been named after the name "Jesus" as an order in the Catholic church has been. However, that name does not fit because we are not saviors! The Lord has, by His providence, seen to it that the proper name would be given His followers.

Barnabas and Saul work well together. Saul will overshadow Barnabas but we observe no indication of jealousy in him. Both of them have one purpose—to build the church of Christ.

Gifts for the Need of Fellow Christians

Prophets come down from Jerusalem to Antioch. This is an office of which we do not read very much in the New Testament. Yet, there had been a resurgence of prophecy especially with the coming of John the Baptist. The prophets which now come from Jerusalem are proclaimers of the word of God (which is the fundamental meaning of the word prophet), but they also foretell the future. Agabus is named here and is also named in 21:10. He foretells the coming of a great famine which will be upon the whole world. He is speaking by the Spirit of God, for he is a true prophet. Luke tells us that this famine came in the days when Claudius was emperor. The prophecy must have been made while his predecessor, Caligula was still emperor. In these small ways Luke, the historian, allows us to determine the time of his writing more exactly.

There is no description given of the coming famine. The people are warned by the word of the prophet so that they may be able to make the proper arrangements for that coming difficult time. Each member of the church, according to his ability, stores up (money and food?) so that relief may be sent to the brethren in Judea. These will be among those who will be the hardest hit. They are already being persecuted and this persecution will intensify. From Judea had come the spiritual food to them; is it too much to ask that they will send material goods to the brethren there?

This relief was sent by the hand of Barnabas and Saul. Saul is receiving early instruction in the importance of benevolence to be practiced by the church of Jesus Christ. How he will emphasize the need of this kind of ministry later (2 Cor. 8:9)! Notice that this relief is not sent to the Apostles, but to the *elders*! Luke has skipped the history of the institution of this office. This is the first time we hear of *elders* in the church. They will assume a very great role in the later

history of the church and their office must be found in every church. Thus the progress of the church is shown us.

Questions for discussion:

1. Why was it difficult for the Jew to welcome gentiles to the faith?
2. Should there have been sufficient confidence in Peter so that he would not have had to make this long defense? Why or why not?
3. Is it safe to say that the evil one is not very wise? Is he foolish?
4. Barnabas was no Apostle. Why send such a man to Antioch?
5. Is there ever room for jealousy among the leaders in the church? Does it occur?
6. Does the failure to foretell the future diminish the present prophetic office? Were Moses and Samuel prophets? Did they foretell the future?

Organization and Plans of the CONCERNED

We are Concerned Members of the Christian Reformed Church. We are concerned — because the authority of God's Word is under subtle attack and submission to it is being eroded. We must remain obedient to God's Word: only that Word defines what Christianity is and commitment to that Word provides safety from being led into error. There are apparently many concerned people in the C.R.C. Perhaps you are one of them. It has been said that a majority of the denomination shares a concern about its recent direction. Some people do not know what to believe and feel themselves and their churches caught in a cross fire of "opinions." Therefore we need to go back to God's Word as our only guide.

Our Origin

Our Group began when 12 C.R.C. pastors met together in February, 1984, to discuss their common concern. Out of that meeting came an inspirational conference held in the Berwyn C.R.C. in Chicago on May 4, 1984. Since then several local conferences and meetings have been hosted in various areas of the denomination.

Recently a decision was made by our board to organize formally, to draw up a constitution and by-laws stating what we stand for and why.

Our Purpose

Articles II and III of our constitution state our basis and purpose. Art. II reads: "The basis of this organization is the inspired, infallible and inerrant Scripture, as interpreted and expressed in the three forms of unity, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordt." Article III: The purpose or purposes of this corporation are as follows: "1. To maintain the historic Reformed Character of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. 2. To propagate that Reformed faith. 3. To defend it in opposition to all errors and heresies. 4. To unite the Christian Reformed Church in maintaining and developing a full-orbed obe-

dience to the Scriptures. 5. To encourage and promote respect for her Reformed tradition."

Our immediate plans include a two-day public conference to be held in the First C.R.C. of South Holland, Illinois, on Tuesday and Wednesday, April 29 and 30. This conference is designed to inspire and inform those who wish to join in this common effort to remain faithful to God's Word.

Membership

To reach as many people as possible, our board has written to each consistory of the denomination requesting permission to use its mailing list so that each family may be informed of our existence and purpose and be invited to join with us as "actively" concerned. Anyone who desires to join us may do so by sending a signed statement of agreement with our Articles II and III of the constitution and \$5 membership fee to 3138 Birchwood, Wyoming, Michigan 49508 (Phone (616) 452-7547). For more information you may contact:

at Chatham, Ont.
Mr. Harry Van Gorp
(519) 269-3561

at Denver, Colorado
Gary and Lynn Lenderink
(303) 789-0806

in Northern Alberta
Rev. Cecil Tuininga
(403) 478-5626

at Pella, Iowa
Rev. John Sittima
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in Southern Alberta
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at Winnipeg, Manitoba
Mr. William J. De Vos
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Rev. Richard Venema
(714) 391-1125

at Peterborough, Ont.
Mr. Bernard Stoter
(705) 295-6951

at Chicago
Rev. Audred Spriensma
(312) 333-1012

Our Lord has promised us that He is building His Church. He has promised that His blessing will rest upon a Church that is faithful, and that the gates of hell cannot prevail against that Church. Our Lord never breaks His promise.

Our Greetings in the name of Christ,
Publicity Committee of the Concerned Members
of the C.R.C.

Committed to an inerrant Bible, a Holy Church, and a faithful witness in our time.

The Christian Reformed Church Past, Present and Future April 29, 30

First C.R. Church, South Holland, Illinois

Speakers: Arthur Besteman, W. Robert Godfrey, Nelson Kloosterman, Raymond Sikkema, Henry Vander Goot.

Second Conference sponsored by Committee of Concerned Members. EVERYONE WELCOME.

Write or call Rev. Randal Lankheet
1685 Riley St. Hudsonville, MI 49426
Phone (616) 896-9385 for reservations and
travel information.

GOD'S CALLING

The Office of the Christian Believer⁽⁴⁾

IN MISSIONS

Peter De Jong

It is now nearly 40 years ago that we were recruited to join a few veteran missionaries in seeking to reestablish our denomination's mission in mainland China after the interruption of World War II. There we were two or three foreign families and a couple of single workers confronted with the question of how so few missionaries could ever hope to bring the gospel to the perhaps 3 million Chinese in that area. If this must be regarded as largely or exclusively the work of this handful of foreigners it could obviously never be done. Yet this is the way in which most of us have probably assumed, as much of the Christian Church came to assume, that we should regard the Christian mission. The mission must be carried out by "missionaries" — who else could anyone expect to do it?

The Inspired History and Pattern

Faced with the situation, we need to turn to the Word of God which gives us our missionary orders to learn how the Lord wanted them carried out. The Acts of the Apostles, the Bible's early history of missions (which its opening verse suggests that we properly see as the "Acts of the Lord") begins with His instruction to His followers, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The Lord's little group of followers, facing the overwhelming missionary mandate, not only as we did in a little corner of China, but world-wide, were assured that the Holy Spirit would provide the power to do it.

To whom was that power to be given? Was it given only to a few apostles, or even a few preachers? The account in the next chapter stresses the fact that "all" of the Lord's followers "were filled with the Holy Spirit." The Apostle Peter explained that "this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy . . .'" (vv. 16, 17). Whereas in an earlier time the Holy spirit had enabled some leaders to be God's prophets to speak His Word to the people, now (as Moses in Numbers 11:29 had already anticipated would be desirable) the Holy spirit had been "poured out" in new intimacy and abundance on all of God's people to qualify them to take their places in the Christian mission to all of the peoples of the world. In this New Testament age they are to be no longer like mere "servants" who do not know what their Lord is doing, but are to be his "friends" or "sons" who have an active part in it (John 15:15; Gal. 4:1-7).

The book of Acts goes on to tell how this prediction of the first chapter speedily began to be fulfilled in exactly this way. The church in Jerusalem grew amazingly, first to 3000, and soon to 5000 — but its very success threatened to keep it in Jerusalem, for what convert would want to leave that exciting and phenomenally growing fellowship? In that

fellowship it soon appeared that initiative automatically fell to the chosen apostles. (Even support of the poor increasingly preoccupied their time — and had to be transferred to some assistants or "deacons," to keep them from being diverted from their proper service of the word, Acts 6.)

Then, in the Lord's providence, apparent disaster struck. "On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem," spearheaded by a young man named Saul, "and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria" (Acts 8:1) — the adjoining districts which the Lord had mentioned in His instructions in 1:8! How would the new church weather this sudden storm? "Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went" (v.4). Who was leading in this missionary outreach? Would someone suggest, "the apostles"? The apostles had not scattered with the rest, but evidently remained in Jerusalem (v.1). We read about Philip, the deacon, one of these scattering people, preaching in Samaria. Then in 11:19 this story is continued. "Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord." Now it was not the apostles, but the ordinary believers, who in Jerusalem had been meeting under and profiting by their leadership, who were telling the gospel. At first they naturally spoke to their own kind of people, fellow-Jews. But some of them who apparently had been more accustomed to associate also with non-Jews, began to speak to Greeks "telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord." This was apparently the first sizeable missionary breakthrough into the non-Jewish world, one led not by Christians in any special office or sent out by the church as "missionaries," but by the church members, speaking of or "confessing" their Christian faith to all kinds of people.

This Antioch church did not begin by any decision of church leaders in Jerusalem. Only after the church had already begun, "news of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts." Barnabas, "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith," remained to help this remarkably growing church as "a great number of people were brought to the Lord." Seeing the need of more such help, he remembered Saul, the persecutor who in the meanwhile had been converted and returned to Tarsus. He went there to look for him, "and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch" and "for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with

the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." Skipping over to chapter 13, we then find, not two, but five such "prophets and teachers" working with that church. Thus, as Paul expressed it in Ephesians 4, the Lord gave them "pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" and each part does its work" (vv. 11-16). At that point the Holy Spirit directed that church to send out the two, Barnabas and Saul, who had just experienced and helped this missionary outreach in Antioch to carry the missionary effort elsewhere.

These missionaries who had just been helping a church that was established not by apostles in Jerusalem, but by the testimony of ordinary members in Antioch, encouraged the same kind of membership activity among their converts. A striking demonstration of that appears in Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians, Chapter I: 4ff. He expressed his joy and enthusiasm about that church as it "became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia — your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" We see how what had happened in Antioch was repeated in Thessalonica, in Ephesus, Corinth and wherever else those missionaries went. The church spread so rapidly as the missionary message was being brought and not only or mainly by Barnabas and Paul, but by the growing number of converts to whom they had taught it, speaking working under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in their "office" as believers.

We should observe in this development that it was not a matter of shifting "authority" over and management of the missionary program from the missionaries to the new local church — as it has sometimes been treated in discussions about mission policy — but of from the beginning bringing the gospel so that, as Paul wrote to the Thessalonians (1 Th. 2:13), "when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe." They had been taught from the very first, not to believe and serve the missionary leaders, but the word of the Lord, which the missionaries themselves believed and obeyed.

We may also at this point observe that this kind of membership missionary activity has come to be popularly called "personal witness" or "witnessing." A closer study of the New Testament suggests that this usage of these words is not strictly correct and may be somewhat misleading. The Bible's use of the word "witness" is for an "eyewitness" as he appears in a courtroom to testify to facts as he saw them. His testimony must be to facts, not to his feelings about them (which would be dismissed in a court as irrelevant). In that sense the apostles were such witnesses, but we and all others who receive their testimony are not. We are called in the New Testament not to "witness," but to "confess" which means, literally, "to say the same thing" as the witnesses from whom we received the testimony. The Apostle John pointed out, in the same vein as Paul, that we really receive "the testimony of God, which He has given about his Son Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God

has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (1 John 5:9-11).

Return to the Bible's Pattern

In the later 1800's a Presbyterian missionary in North China, John L. Nevius, became convinced that the way in which the gospel should be brought to the millions of non-Christians was through the activity of the ordinary believers whom missionaries should train from the beginning to become self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating churches. This suggestion was very different from what had become the usual missionary practice of expecting the missionary to provide and manage everything and expecting missions to provide buildings, support and control to churches on the mission fields for a very long time. His suggestions were dismissed by fellow-missionaries in his own field as hopelessly impractical in our times and he was given no support in his efforts to carry them out. About that time (1890) Presbyterians who were beginning a new work in Korea, asked him to meet with them and to outline for them the more Biblical methods he had been promoting. Dr. Nevius' principles were (1) that each Christian "abide in the calling wherein he was called," support himself by his own work, and be a witness for Christ by life and word in his own neighborhood, (2) church methods and machinery be developed only as the church was able to be responsible for them, (3) the church call for full-time work those who seemed best qualified and whom it was able to support, and (4) churches be built in native style by the Christians with their own resources. Crucially important in Nevius' program was his stress on continuing Bible teaching and study seeking to make every believer a student who would be equipped to teach others the gospel (cf. 1 Tim. 2:2). The mission committed itself to the approach suggested by Dr. Nevius and its work in Korea became one of the great missionary successes of all time.

Another missionary in China, Roland Allen, an Episcopalian, considering the missionary task in the light of the Bible, came to a conclusion similar to that of Dr. Nevius and in 1912 published it in his book, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* That remarkable work reads almost as though it were a practical commentary on the way we in our Heidelberg Catechism (XXI,54) confess that Christ "gathers, defends and preserves for Himself, by His Spirit and Word" His church. Allen pointed out that while the Biblical method of Paul was to depend on and stress the work of the Spirit and Word, most missions had been diverted into stressing buildings, subsidies, and auxiliary services such as schools and hospitals. All of these expensive and elaborate foreign "helps," well-intended to support the missionary outreach of gospel, often turned out to inhibit and hinder its real spread. Roland Allen's work which did not get much attention in his time, later came to be recognized as a forerunner of a world-wide rethinking of missionary methods.

Shortly after our missionaries had to leave China upon the Communist take-over, in about 1950, our Christian Reformed mission board and synods studied and reconsidered our missions policies. Our older missions, including that in China, had operated along the lines which Nevius, Allen and others had criticized. Our churches' earliest, and long the largest, such work was that among the Indians of the Southwest. There, I recall that when I once mentioned to a veteran missionary the need to more deeply involve the converts in the missionary effort, his response was that it would be a

long while before we could do that — although the work had been going on for perhaps 40 years! When our churches took responsibilities for a missionary program in Nigeria, a work that had begun under others' sponsorship, they agreed to follow there what was called the "indigenous" method of stressing the activity of converts and their churches and not undertaking to build churches for them and pay local preachers. The amazing development of that work and of the Nigerian churches, in contrast with the problems of other fields under the "older" methods, prompted a reconsideration of the churches' whole mission policy and some changes in it.

A few incidents may help to explain some of the changes which were involved. While we were in China our mission employed evangelists who had previously worked for our mission. The Mission paid them what was even 35 years ago apparently a modest salary of \$40 per month plus housing and some children's allowance, as I recall. The problem that this entailed appears when one considers that at that time a local carpenter was paid the equivalent of about \$8 per month. How could the Chinese carpenters who became Christians hope to undertake the support of the minister whom the mission was paying five times what they earned? A senior missionary remarked that we used to keep these salaries low, thinking that the Chinese church would have to pay them some day, but, since these men would work for the mission for the rest of their lives, why should we not be more generous with them? I believe that it was at the synod of 1950 that the famous Dutch missionary and professor J.H. Bavinck was a visitor seeking some financial help for the Dutch churches to reestablish their Indonesian missions after World War II. It must have been a little disconcerting to him to find the synod talking about making mission churches more self-supporting! I recall asking him how successful the Dutch churches had been in their centuries of work in Indonesia in establishing self-supporting churches. His reply startled me by its frankness. He said that the Japanese had done more toward that than the mission had when they put the missionaries in concentration camps, so that the churches had to become independent! Although the Lord may overrule our efforts in this way, it is hardly a recommendation of a mission program that under it the missionaries must be removed if there is to be an independent church! In missions it becomes more and more evident that too much "help" can become a hindrance.

Later developments of the churches in Nigeria have continued to demonstrate the soundness of the policies of stressing direct evangelism and the involvement of converts in it from the beginning, and the wisdom of leaving such matters as church buildings and the support of pastors to the churches. The annual reports tell of the hundreds of meeting places and total attendances that are beginning to near twice the total membership of all of our home churches. We may safely say that if we had tried to control and pay for all of such activities as we did in some other places, they could not have occurred! Also from China, which for a third of a century has been virtually cut off from foreign contact so that we did not know what if anything remained of the missionary labors that had ended in communist persecution, recent times have brought the amazing news of an "underground" or "house" church movement, without outside missionary help, involving virtually only the activity of converts in their "office of believer." Their number has been estimated as high as 50 million.

In the 1950s our foreign missions moved toward stressing bringing the gospel and the activity of converts in the office of believer, and tried to avoid being diverted into subsidiary activities. In our time the mushroom-like growth of World Relief and the new effort to merge it with world missions appears to reverse this direction and to threaten our missionary efforts with deeper involvement than ever before with activity which has little direct relationship to the churches' missionary mandate to bring the gospel. This raises issues which should be pursued in a later article.

The Believer's Office in Missions at Home

The believer's office, evidently so strategic in missions in the Bible, and shown to be so crucially important in a number of later missionary efforts, is equally essential in effective evangelism at home. In pastoral experience in a variety of churches, I have noticed that the contacts with people outside which eventually led to their conversion were first made by Christian neighbors or fellow-workers in the routine of living rather than by some special or deliberate campaign. Especially in one decade of work with a church that was growing by such accessions, I learned to defer to, consult with and be ready to help the members who had made such contacts, rather than to attempt as a minister to immediately try to take a leading role in them. One recalls the apostle's characterization of the pastor's and teacher's role as properly "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph. 4:12).

Later Dr. D. James Kennedy, in his 1970 book *Evangelism Explosion* and his seminars in various places, publicized such efforts to recruit and train church members to take their key role in evangelistic outreach. In his book he appeals to the same texts that were cited earlier in this article as the Bible's precedent and guide to such evangelistic efforts by church members. He suggests that "Satan's greatest victory" was selling the people the idea that evangelism is for preachers. He compares it with the notion that fighting wars to defend the country should be left to generals and admirals. Although one may question details of his program, some of the practical suggestions and the rather hasty reception of members, for example, his stress on the members' office and role in evangelism is soundly Biblical and urgently needed.

Not only is the life and work of members directly essential to effective church evangelism. It is also necessary if the work of those involved in special efforts is to be effective. No matter how deep the concern of a minister may be about getting the gospel into the neighborhood, if it is not supported by the interest of members in strangers and new-comers when they appear in church as well as by their own behavior, it can be effectively counteracted. Conversely, the evangelistic concern of members who bring a neighbor along to church may do little good if the minister is more preoccupied with entertaining the people or airing some social, political or ecumenical hobby of his own than bringing the Lord's gospel to them. I have repeatedly encountered people who expressed their interest in one of our churches' radio broadcasts and their corresponding disappointment with a local church which they visited. The well-known preacher, D.M. Lloyd-Jones, on occasion called attention to the fact that the congregation's worship and behavior needed to confirm what was said from the pulpit in a common testimony of God's Word and Spirit. The Apostle Paul in the passages already cited from 1 Thess. 1 as well as others, repeatedly stressed the same point. I have sometimes seen how the exemplary behavior of members brought others to church to see what accounted

for it. Thus the gospel "sounds out" from the congregation during the week as well as on Sundays.

The calling and role of the members in evangelism is also crucially important in the recruiting of some for special services. A survey of our denomination's missionary programs from their beginning highlighted a persistent problem of recruiting through much of that history. The churches were always aware that there was a missionary duty to bring the gospel to all the world, and they showed a readiness from the beginning to support it with their gifts. The critical question that kept baffling them was who was going to do the work. As long as they assumed, as most seemed to do, that missionaries are rare, extraordinary people, they looked in vain for those extraordinary people. When the church is awakened to the fact that the Lord in the New Testament called all believers to a missionary confession of Him in the world, and promised and gave the Holy Spirit, who leads people to faith in Christ, to equip and help them to make such a missionary confession, matters are put on a quite different basis. Then, like believers in the New Testament, when some of them begin to speak and work in this way, their interest and concern in evangelism grows and the Lord provides them with further, sometimes larger, opportunities for such service. Then, like the apostles, (Matt. 9:37-10:5), they learn to see the need and pray to "the Lord of the harvest" to supply it, and He finds plenty of work for them to do!

If the Lord's missionary commission to bring His gospel to all the world is to be properly carried out, it will have to involve all of us who confess His name, acting in the office of believers, as well as the faithfulness of the relatively few who are assigned to special offices. The comprehensive calling and infinitely varied labors of all who believe in Him, in the world in which he has placed them, is the subject for a final article in this series.

(Note)

1. Roland Allen's remarkable book was more concerned about missionary practice than doctrine, and tended to relativize the latter. A 1983 book, *A Roland Allen Reader: The Compulsion of the Spirit*, edited by David Paton and Charles H. Long (by Eerdmans), contains selections of his writings, including those of a later date. It shows how his earlier appeal to the Spirit and Word gives way to a modern critical view of the Word, and leads him eventually to leave his church positions and celebrate the Lord's Supper with his wife at home! Putting Spirit against Word leaves one with no way to distinguish the Spirit from above from those from below (1 John 4:1). Allen's own drift seems to parallel the way others have exploited the "indigenous movement" to promote the modern apostasy. This does not discount the value of Allen's early book. It merely exemplifies the way in which a man (like Solomon) can fall away from earlier wisdom. When men or churches leave the Word of God, they, like the Pharisees, become "blind guides" (Mt. 5:14).

In Memoriam

HARRY VAN DYKEN

1917-1985

Simon Viss

The Van Dyken family moved from Montana to Ripon, California in 1919. Harry was two years of age. By the time he entered Calvin College he had served in the army, married Wilhelmina Van Andel, engaged in farming, served as a deacon, become an electrician and was associated in business with other members of his family.

As time went by, he became more and more convinced that he should enter the ministry. He completed high school by passing equivalency tests. To move to Grand Rapids with his family and enter Calvin as a freshman required conviction, tenacity and mental acumen. And let's not forget the loyal support of his wife.

He graduated from Calvin Seminary in 1954. He served Christian Reformed churches in California, Washington, Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario. His preaching was solidly Reformed. He avoided the novel and the superficial. He strongly believed in the authority of the local consistory. He was not concerned about personal popularity. People knew where he stood. He was an outstanding teacher. And contrary to what one may think, young people were attracted to him.

Harry was not afraid to express his disagreement with certain decisions of Synod and the stand of a number of leaders in the church. Such things as the revision of the Church Order and liturgy, adoption of certain study committee reports and the acceptance by Synod of candidates with questionable views of Scripture troubled him. Finally, these developments got to the point where he could not in good conscience remain in the denomination.

We ask the question: Would it not have been better for him to remain in the denomination and continue his efforts to reverse the downward trend? This question was put to him at a meeting at the time of his last visit to Ripon. This was his answer: "A building is on fire. You are trying to put out the fire with a water hose. Suddenly, someone turns off the water. Then it's a lost cause. When Synod adopted Report 44, the water was turned off. I had no alternative."

He was also asked whether it might not have been wiser for him and his followers to affiliate with another existing Reformed denomination. He answered by saying that he loved the Christian Reformed Church. Its creeds, history and traditions were dear to him. The Orthodox Christian Reformed Church, to him was to be a continuation of the Christian Reformed Church as it used to be. Without being facetious, he felt the church had forsaken him and not the other way around.

As mentioned above, Harry said that when Synod adopted Report 44, they shut off the water and there was no alternative. There is evidence today that the water has not been entirely shut off. As a matter of fact, the valve is opening up, even though it be slightly. And it is, perhaps more than we realize, because Harry had the courage of his convictions. He was not one who defended the Reformed faith on the pulpit but equivocated at classes and synod. His influence is being felt today and, we hope may be felt more in the future. What form this influence will take remains to be seen. At the moment, we don't know whether it will be in the growth of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Church, in our return to a more Reformed stance, a consolidation with other Reformed churches, or in a move toward independentism.

The time may come when we will have to admit that Harry was right and we were wrong.

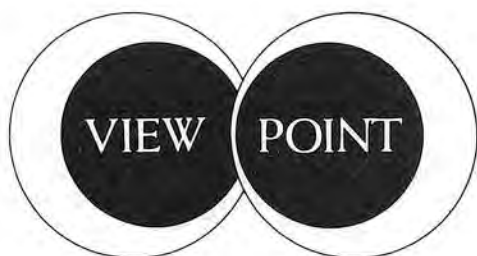
One thing is certain: Christ is the head of His church. We must submit to His rule as He has set it forth in His Word.

Rev. H. Van Dyken was for a long while president of our Reformed Fellowship in Canada.

Rev. Simon Viss is a retired Christian Reformed minister living at Ripon, California.

John Brown
Dora, Iowa 51235

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Biblical Unity and Separation

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We must "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3) with all who trust and obey the Lord and His Word at the same time as we must "have no fellowship" (5:11) with the work of those who reject Him and His Word. That is what both our Lord and His Apostles taught us. His followers are to show their unity in Him, united by His Word (John 17:11, 17, 21ff.) When His followers would make that fellowship too narrow, He said, "whoever is not against us is for us" (Mark 9:40). When others would confuse His work with the devil's, He said, "He who is not with me is against me" (Matt. 12:30). Paul, who urged the (Corinthian and Ephesian) believers to seek unity, also led them to separate from the synagogues that in Corinth and Ephesus rejected the Lord's gospel (Acts 18:7; 19:9).

To find and pursue such a course is at times in the churches' history neither simple nor easy, and we need to pray constantly for the Lord's guidance in our efforts to do so. The Autumn 1985 *Evangelical Library Bulletin* (from England, which we receive in an exchange) contained an extensive biographical sketch of the, to us rather unfamiliar but famous Scotch Presbyterian, Ralph Erskine, who lived from 1685 to 1752. The writer, Kenneth L. Paterson, described him as "a genial and affectionate man who sought harmonious relationships" beyond as well as within the denominational lines. He was reluctantly led or driven in 1737 (followed by his session) to join his older brother

Ebenezer and a few other leaders in their secession (4 years earlier) from the tyrannical state church. "Up to this point," the writer observes, "our story has been one of joy in seeing a humble and careful concern for the glory of God even when this involved" the Secession "... a thrilling story too... of a warm evangelistic Calvinism... glorifying the full grace of God as many were added to the church. But it is at this point that some shadows begin to fall across the sunlit scene." A warm friendship which he had long enjoyed with the famous evangelist, Whitefield, who was still an Episcopalian, began to cool somewhat under pressures for and against the secession. "Crossing the line from Biblical Separation to schism," the writer continues, "led to other sad consequences for the Seceders. Having justifiably separated for the sake of the gospel they had now divided from brothers on the lesser issue of church government. Other secondary issues were now to divide the Seceders themselves" in the ensuing "Burgher" controversy about the "Burgess Oath."

"The sad division had family repercussions. Ebenezer's favorite daughter, 'Ailie' was married to James Scott, who was an Antiburgher. When her husband returned from the Synod which excommunicated the Erskines, she met him at the Manse door with 'Well?' but he was uncomfortably silent. She followed him into his study. 'Well?' she asked again. After a long pause he replied, 'We have excommunicated them.' 'You have excommunicated my father and my uncle! You are my husband, but nevermore shall you be my minister!' Nor was he for she went every Sunday to the Burgher congregation at Jedburgh." Ralph saw a comparable rift between his own sons, three of whom were Secession ministers, over this issue.

Preaching at the opening of the first Burgher Synod, Ralph, examining the reasons for God's judgment, placed among them "Untenderness toward those we left... when we made secession from them, without dealing more kindly with them, praying more for them, and bearing with them, especially such as were friends to the same Reformation cause, though not enlightened in the same manner of witnessing for it." The writer states that, "Such a spirit characterized Ralph for the rest of his fruitful ministry" until his last sermon to his people on the text, "all her paths are peace."

The writer's conclusion also is noteworthy: "What lessons his story carries for our day. No one who studies the history with care can fairly say that the Erskines were wrong in their Secession to which they were forced by a church in which the prevailing party hindered the gospel. But surely, we can see too the danger of justifiable separation hardening into overscrupulous and unnecessary schism. May the Lord give wise minds and warm hearts to face the church situation of our day." P.D.J.