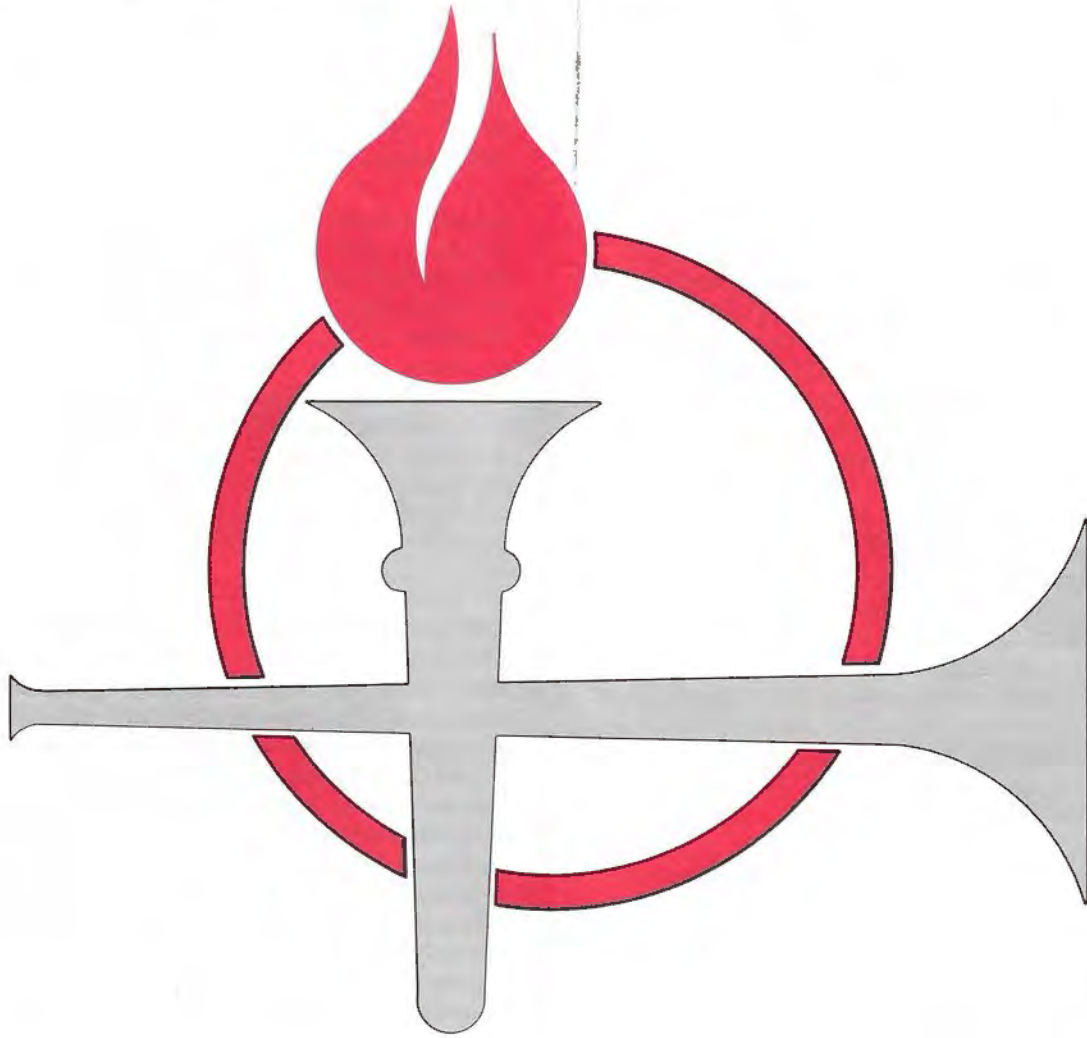


THE OUTLOOK

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

JUNE 1986



BUREAUCRACY IN THE C.R.C.
CHRISTIAN REFORMED SYNOD AGENDA
PREPARING FOR CHRIST'S RETURN

Carrying Each Others Burdens

John Blankespoor

"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2).

Paul's letter to the Galatians was prompted by inroads made into the new Christian churches by people called Judaizers. They were Jewish people in the church who insisted that Gentile converts to the Christian faith had to submit to the Jewish rite of circumcision and respect certain ritual distinctions between pure and impure foods.

Principally, according to Paul, this meant that they taught that the New Testament church was still under all of the Old Testament laws. The New Testament church, of course, does recognize the principles of the law in the life of every Christian, but not in this legalistic sense. The law no longer condemns, because Christ has made atonement for His people. In that sense we are no longer under the law. In this verse of chapter six, Paul says that we are to live by the principle of love. To do this you must bear each other's burdens, because that is the requirement of true love.

The apostle speaks of burdens. Physically burdens are often carried on our shoulders. Burdens can be so heavy that they make us stoop over as we trudge along. This reminds me of the burdened Christian in Pilgrim's Progress. Paul is speaking here, too, of burdens that may weigh heavily upon the mind and soul of Christians.

What are some of these burdens? We may think of the burden of sin, sin in general, but also special sins. Luther felt that weight when he struggled with the question of how a sinner can become right with and before God. But even after we have become Christians our continuing sins can still be a burden to us.

There are, however, also many other burdens, due to physical as well as spiritual problems. Christian parents can be burdened by problems with wayward children. Christians can be burdened with all kinds of

anxieties, fears, and other such problems. Widows and widowers often have heavy burdens. And if you do not have many burdens yourself, you can be sure that there are some people close to you who do, your neighbors, members of your church whom you know, or even members of your own family.

There are also often "secret" burdens, known only to the person himself or just a few close friends. There are many burdened people in every church. Last, but not least, the general anemic condition of the church is a burden to every conscientious member.

We must "carry each other's burdens," says Paul. This suggests carrying something heavy in our hands. When someone comes along and "gives a hand," what a help and relief that can be! Thus we must try to help other people carry their burdens. How must and can we do this? By showing an interest in them, showing that we care and are concerned about them. We must try to live along with them with a sympathetic mind and heart. It can greatly relieve burdened Christians to know that other people care for and love them.

"Carrying each other's burdens" means that we are to be "good listeners." Let others, after you have shown interest in them, unburden their souls to you. That means that they are asking you to help carry their load.

"Carrying each other's burdens" can also be done with financial help, with work, and even a letter or a card, with a visit, or a telephone call. Show them that you have an interest in them and care about them. Let them know that you are praying for them.

This is the work of pastors, elders and deacons, but also of all members of the church, no one excluded.

It is important that burdened Christians try to carry burdens of other troubled Christians. Never must we be so involved in ourselves and concerned only about ourselves that there's no room or interest or time for other people, our fellow-members of the family of God.

Often burdened people can understand much better than others the needs the burdened have. Those bearing common burdens may greatly help each other in the communion of the saints.

The sad truth is that there is too little of this spiritual exercise among God's people. Many burdened saints are passed by, forgotten or neglected. Many Christians don't even know the burdens of their fellow Christians. There are some very independent people of God who live only in their own little world.

All of us are too selfish, often thinking only about ourselves. Most of us are so busy that we don't have time for other people, even burdened fellow-Christians. All of us may properly ask ourselves, or others, who the burdened people around us and in our congregations are. There are many people who feel lonely even in the crowd of the church, also in your church. Friends are not real friends unless they know something about each other's burdens and share them.

In carrying each other's burdens, what must be our motive? Paul says here that when we carry each other's burdens we are fulfilling the law of Christ — the law of love.

The Scriptures teach that we owe love to one another. This is a debt, just as when we owe other people money. God has shown us and given us such great love in Jesus Christ that He saves us. Belonging to this Christ, we now possess something of that love by the Spirit and, therefore, must show that love in carrying each other's burdens.

This is contrary to our sinful nature. By nature, we don't love each other. The very opposite is true. I can't help but think of what I once read about the Greeks of Paul's day. Their philosophy was radically different from the Christians' emphasis of love to the neighbor. Their ideal was proud self-sufficiency. Man must live within himself and unto himself. Everything in the pagan concept centered around self. There was no special duty towards the weak, the oppressed, the sick, the suffering and the poor. The only kind of love they knew was the kind in which we strive to acquire, to gain. The idea of loving those in need, of helping and giving was foolishness to the Greeks. Their ethics were purely egocentric. The Gospel was foolishness to them.

True love gives — in more than words, also in action. True love lives on giving without asking for returns. A good example of this is the love of a mother for her child. She gives and gives without waiting for return tokens of love. All Christians should have more of that kind of love. All Christians must carry each other's burdens simply because they love each other. True love in our hearts must compel us to so love each other. Then the pastor doesn't pay a visit simply because he feels he has to go, or the elder make a call only because that burdened member is in his district — the love of Christ compels them to do so.

May our souls be flooded with this marvelous love of Christ, our wonderful Savior.

THE OUTLOOK



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

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Bureaucracy in the Church

ITS CAUSE — ITS CURE

Lester DeKoster

A bureau is a unit created by a community to serve certain specific needs. Such a bureau can be called a board or an agency or a department, all meaning the same thing, namely an entity made and maintained to serve the whole.

In the CRC we call our bureaus by various names: committees, boards, agencies. Usually our bureaus consist of two elements: 1) a board or committee theoretically supervising the work of, 2) an executive and staff.

When does a bureau — which can be a good thing — become a bureaucracy — which is a bad thing?

The answer is: when a bureau starts to serve itself, that is when it comes to aim as much (or more) at its own perpetuation as at its service of the whole. A bureau has become a bureaucracy when it becomes an end in itself and tends to take its own path. And a bureaucrat is an executive or staff member who likes it that way.

There is a kind of natural law about bureaucracies: they tend to grow. Not only that, but because of it they tend always to cost more to maintain. Size of staff and budget is, for the bureaucracy, a measure of worth; and growth in both a measure of accomplishment.

There is another sort of natural law about bureaucracies: the more they grow, the less willing they are to let the parent body know exactly what they are doing. Indeed, it is an almost sure mark of a bureaucracy that it is determined not to divulge many details of its operations nor of its expenditures. Yet it looks to the parent body to dole out support by custom or through blind loyalty, especially when stimulated by a stream of propaganda. Indeed, the bureaucrat assumes growing financial support as his prerogative, something to which he is entitled merely by existing.

Now, I think that the CRC has become bureaucracy-ridden.

And it is my experience that our bureaucracies are highly successful at using our denominational boards as channels and our synods as tools to provide them with ever-increasing funds, to rubber-stamp projects and programs not too carefully spelled out, and, when useful, to protect the bureaucrats from close scrutiny by the membership of the denomination.

The techniques bureaucrats use to manipulate synods — which are supposed to represent the constituency in relation to the bureaucracy — would be an interesting managerial, or psychological or sociological study, one which has fascinated me for many years.



The rise of bureaucracy in the CRC was foreseen many years ago by one of the pastors for whom the CRC at large entertained the highest respect. He predicted with uncanny accuracy the bureaucratic structure we now endure.

My reference is to Idzerd Van Dellen, sometimes called the "Nestor" of our denomination. Nestor was a legendary Greek hero known for his wisdom.

As an authority on Reformed polity, Reverend Van Dellen published with Reverend H. Keegstra, in Dutch, "the blue book" commentary on our Church Order in 1915. The current version of that commentary, in English, Van Dellen and Monsma, illumines us still.

In 1950, Reverend Van Dellen issued through Baker Book House a small autobiography which he entitled *In God's Crucible*.

Looking back — and ahead — in his eighth decade, our Nestor recalls how he and some others discerned, long before 1950, the trend to bureaucracy in the CRC:

"The Christian Reformed Church at present has strong Boards which are constantly gaining in power. I consider this a great danger. We plainly

see in our American Churches to what this ultimately leads. I remember that at one of our Synods Prof. Dr. Steffans of the Reformed Church was present as an honored guest. We were debating the pro and con of the Board system. The old professor then made a gesture with his cane as if crushing the head of some vicious animal, and said: 'Brethren, kill the Boards. They have done much harm in our Church.'

"When they become strong", Van Dellen goes on to say, "consistories, Classes and even Synods have little to say. Delegates to Synods and General Assemblies declare that Synods become little more than rubber stamps. They have to take it as the Boards have cut and dried it, for the whole machinery would be wrecked if they refused to act in accord with the decisions of the Boards. The Boards, or rather a few persons in whom the power is centralized, finally run the Church. You get your 'bishops' and little 'popes,' though they end their reports to Synod by assuring that body that they are 'humbly submitted, your servant So and So'" (pp. 105-106).

But Van Dellen's warning seems hardly to have been heard, and certainly went unheeded. The CRC has, rather, permitted a whole web of bureaucracies — boards, executives and staffs together — to become exactly what he describes.

If you are skeptical about that, pause and think for a moment of any board or agency or committee of our denomination that comes to mind, presumably working in our names and on our behalf — and at our expense — and ask yourself if you know:

- 1) who its personnel are;
- 2) how many of them there are;
- 3) where they are;
- 4) what you are paying them;
- 5) what they did on this day in our name;
- 6) what they said on this day in our name;
- 7) what their views are on issues that you think crucial to the welfare of the Christian Reformed Church.

If you don't know, that reflects the possibility of bureaucracy.

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Are you thinking that, if you wanted to know any or all of these things about our boards, agencies, committees, etc., it would be an easy matter to find out? That there are surely information officers in all of them appointed for precisely the purpose of keeping the denomination fully informed?

You will discover, to the contrary, that instead of an information office to which one could turn for quick and clear answers, the bureaucracy is apt to have a "development" office supported by your money for the purpose of issuing blurbs professionally designed to extract more money from your pocket. There are, so to speak, two streams flowing between a parent body and its bureaucracies: 1) a stream of financial support from the body to the bureaucrats; and 2) a stream of propaganda from the bureaucrats to the parent body, so much of it sometimes as to shock even the most loyal of supporters.

But lost in the interchange is all but a trickle of the solid information you might expect on issues like those mentioned above.

This is characteristic of bureaucracy.

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Suppose, however, that your concern is a more specific one.

You read or hear this or that and come to pondering any of many rightful curiosities, like these: what is held and taught in the Seminary about Genesis, or in the College about the age of the earth and the historical Adam? Which principles of hermeneutics govern biblical interpretation on both campuses? How much sympathy, and where entertained, is there for Liberation Theology in World Mission or World Relief? Who supervises, and how thoroughly, the Reformed character of what is put on the air by radio and TV, or sent in the mails, or spoken in the classrooms staffed by employees of the CRC? From whence are drawn Home Mission techniques, and how compatible are these with our own heritage? And so on. What return, say, as good steward, are you getting on your support of it all? Yours is indeed the faith; what is their promise?

These legitimate concerns all come to have one thing in common: the discovery that in addition to being shy about distributing information about themselves, bureaucracies are apt to close ranks against efforts to pry loose information about matters that concern you.

Say, for example, that rumor has it that something is amiss in our missions in Mexico. Or you find reason to wonder about what view the editor of *The Banner* has of the Bible.

Or, you are led to ask specifically how a given Seminary professor stands on biblical criticism, or Adam, or women in the pulpit. Or what the travel budget of one agency or another is, and how justified. Or the ratio of overhead to effective expenditure.

You write to the executive of the agency involved. If the reply does not fully satisfy you, you address the board which you think represents you vis-a-vis the agency. What happens?

You likely discover that board and agency are one bureaucracy together. They close ranks to leave you pounding at a closed door. Far from being eager to keep you well-informed, the board or committee which is supposed to be overseeing the agency in the name of the Church, seems quite willing to keep you in the dark.

This is bureaucracy.

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And if you are naive enough to remember that employees of the Church do sign the Form of Subscription pledging themselves not only willing but eager to respond to queries, you are likely to hear that bureaucrats are much too busy to find time to answer questions.

This is bureaucracy.

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Let's try another perspective.

Suppose that as a member in good standing in the CRC, you would like to make some comment on these or other matters to synod — your synod — meeting in Grand Rapids next June.

You decide that you have a right to address the broadest body — not the highest body; we should keep that distinction clear — in our Church. (The highest body in our polity is the local consistory; there is the seat of original authority.)

You choose to communicate your views by way of a letter.

You soon learn that before your letter got out of your typewriter the tentacles of bureaucracy were already raised to keep it from the floor of synod. Nor will it appear in the agenda. This, of course, in the name of good order.

Yet you know that our bureaucracies have full and free access to synods. They spread self-serving reports, characterized more by warmth than light on the kinds of questions mentioned above, across agenda pages printed at our expense, with opportunity to supplement these at will before synods convene. And as these reports are discussed, representatives of the bureaucracies have free access to the floor to say as much as they like.

The scales are weighted in favor of bureaucracy. Its voice drowns out your own before you are even heard.

It obviously is a pretty weak bureaucrat who does not learn rather soon how to use synods for his own purposes, as Reverend Van Dellen points out.

This is bureaucracy in action.

Ah, you have an idea?

You will travel to Grand Rapids in June, attend all the sessions of that synod, and in due season ask the right to be heard on the floor?

You probably are not surprised to discover that such behavior is ruled out on the grounds, again, of good order (good order for whom, you may wonder). After all, while public bodies often open their floors to the voice of citizens who attend board, or council, or commission meetings, church bureaucracies keep a tighter grip on ecclesiastical affairs.

The principle seems to be this: synods are elective bodies, and the floor is reserved for those duly chosen to represent classes, and through them consistories, and through them . . . you. You are thus represented on the floor, but may not speak yourself. Why not? Because you are not an elected delegate.

Perhaps that appeals to you as sound parliamentary practice? Until you discover that there's a whole group of persons who, like you, are not elected delegates either, but who can always take the floor at synod. These are members of the Seminary faculty. They are not elected delegates, but they have leave to speak on whatever, and whenever, and as often as they like when synods are in session.

The scales tip more and more in favor of bureaucracy.

Indeed, this, one might say, is bureaucracy on display.

While in Grand Rapids you may learn of an even more bureaucratic twist as concerns the synod elected to represent you. It is this:

After the classical naming of delegates, but before the new synod convenes, there is a unique meeting in Grand Rapids. The officers of last year's synod join the Stated Clerk in organizing the upcoming synod. This they do by dividing the delegates to this year's synod among the several advisory committees who handle all of synod's business, setting an agenda for each advisory committee, and naming both the chairman and reporter for these committees plus a Seminary faculty advisor to each.

You will reflect that all this is done by persons who are not, any more than you are, elected delegates to the forthcoming synod.

This is, you will come to thinking, bureaucracy incarnate.

The CRC is, I repeat, bureaucracy-ridden.

It remains to ask:

1. What's wrong with that?
2. How did we acquire ours?
3. What, if anything, can be done about it?

Dr. Lester De Koster, former Calvin College professor and editor of the churches' *The Banner*, lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Luther and Calvin

In the January 18 *Reformatie*, H. Van Veen called attention to and briefly summarized an extraordinarily interesting study of this subject by Professor W. Van't Spijker.¹ The work of Van't Spijker was a careful investigation to determine in how far John Calvin was

a pupil of Martin Luther who went on independently to formulate the Christian doctrines, and in how far he diverged from Luther. While Lutheran scholars tended to stress the differences between the two Reformers, Calvinists tended to stress similarities. Calvin was generally recognized as a faithful pupil of Luther. Peter Meinhold even considered Calvin the greatest and only pupil who really understood the master's deepest intention and expressed it, standing as it were, "on the shoulders of Luther" and completing his work, as Luther, in his historical circumstances, had been unable to do it (p.6). Van't Spijker finds plenty of evidence that Luther's influence on Calvin was extensive and permanent.

Calvin's letters indicate that he and Luther apparently never met. The only letter Calvin wrote to Luther, expressing his deep respect for him, never reached Luther because Melancthon (a mutual friend) did not dare to deliver it (p.8)! Although Calvin continued to have this deep respect for Luther, he did not follow him slavishly and regretted Luther's arrogance and vehemence. Yet Calvin said that even if Luther would call him a devil, he would still consider Luther worthy of honor as an outstanding servant of the Lord (p.10)! In the growing conflict about the Lord's Supper Calvin tended to favor Luther rather than the Swiss Reformed leaders, Zwingli and Oecolampadius, whom Luther charged with reducing the Supper to a mere sign. Luther, in turn, gave evidence of mildness toward Calvin and appreciation of some of his writings (p.9), and is reported to have said that if Zwingli and Oecolampadius had expressed themselves as Calvin had done no long controversy would have been necessary (p.11).² As the conflict about the Supper intensified, despite differences, Calvin felt that he was more faithful to Luther's line of thought than some of the hostile Lutheran followers, whom he charged with "aping" rather than imitating their master (pp. 14,10).

Luther's influence is found to be clearly apparent in much of Calvin's work. The first edition of the Institutes was patterned in form and contents after Luther's *Smaller Catechism*, as both deal with Law, Creed, Prayer and Sacraments. In later editions, as Calvin reworked and refined his earlier writing, he showed how that Gospel doctrine that Luther had pointed out must be progressively more carefully and clearly expressed. He saw his role as a similar to that of Luther's (and his) friend, Melancthon, in reworking and refining the evangelical doctrine preached by Luther. We must not (like the Lutheran, Westphal) stop where Luther, the guide, led us, but proceed further in the same path (p.23). We need to progress in the more careful study of God's Word.

Calvin repeatedly defended Luther's writings against Roman Catholic attacks. Van't Spijker finds Calvin's belief in Predestination similar to Luther's. Faced with the question of why some believe the gospel and others do not, Luther traced this back to the secret counsel and will of God, believing in a double predestination. Calvin was his pupil in this also, but further developed the Biblical teaching and defense of this doctrine. Regarding the Lord's Supper, Calvin stressed and more extensively developed the doctrine of the Holy Spirit's work in uniting us with Christ.

Although Calvin felt himself in principle close to Luther, other Calvinists and Lutherans felt that he was mistaken, as the two traditions of the Reformation tended to divide and diverge.

This little study of Calvin's attitude toward Luther, besides illuminating Reformation history, may be helpful to us as we face some comparable problems. An accelerating breakdown of faith and morals, of worship and order, within our churches as well as around them, begins increasingly to resemble that which four centuries ago drove our Reformed fathers to protest in the Protestant Reformation. At the bottom of the multitude of distressing problems, now as then, there was a neglect (and sometimes perversion) of the Word of God and its doctrines which were supposed to unite and motivate Christians under what we still call "forms of unity." In our plight we are being forced, like those fathers, to relearn from the Word of God what we must believe and do, and to refuse to follow or support those who reject that guide as out-of-date. Loyalty to the Lord's Word drives us inevitably towards separation from those who reject it (Acts 19:9; 18:6,7; 2 Cor. 6:24-7:1). In that difficult situation it is just as urgent that we work and pray for as close a unity as possible, within and across traditional lines, with all those who love the Lord and His Word. Among the Reformers, especially Calvin provided a remarkable example of doing exactly that. More than his colleagues we see him attempt to bridge national, cultural and personal obstacles, "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). Undoubtedly this attitude contributed greatly to his influence in many countries and churches as he became the Bible teacher of the Reformation and his Institutes became its textbook. His school, established in Swiss Geneva, drew students from all Europe and England, demonstrating as well as teaching, that differences of birth, race and culture were unimportant to those who sought to know and serve our Lord and His Word. That lesson is one of those that today's Christians may profitably learn from him. P.D.J.

1. *De Reformatie* is a weekly among the (Liberated) Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. The book reviewed is Professor W. Van't Spijker's *Luther en Calvin, De invloed van Luther op Calvin blijkens de Institutie, Apeldoornse Studies: N. 20, Kampen 1985, (40pp.)*. The writer is a professor at the seminary of the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, which are affiliated with the Free Reformed Churches in the US and Canada.

2. In 1529 Luther met with the Swiss Reformers in an extended conference at Marburg in effort to resolve their differences regarding the Lord's Supper. In the long debate Luther stressed the Lord's words, "This is my body." Zwingli and his friends stressed the Lord's answer to the question in John 6:52, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" "The Spirit gives life: the flesh counts for nothing. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life" (v.63). Near the end of the long debate, which sometimes became heated, Zwingli asked Luther to forgive his bitterness, saying, "I have always desired your friendship a great deal, and I want it still (with tears in his eyes). There are no others in Italy and France I would rather see." Luther replied, "Call upon God that you may receive understanding." Oecolampadius retorted, "Call upon him yourself, for you need it just as much as we!" (*Great Debates of the Reformation*, Donald J. Ziegler, p. 105). Thus Christians like ourselves struggled with the difficulties of seeking church unity.

CHRISTIAN REFORMED

SYNOD AGENDA

Peter De Jong

Two months before the annual denominational synod is to meet the agenda of materials with which it must deal have been published, to be made available to all who hold special church offices. As usual, the *OUTLOOK* surveys this (496-page) book.

Back-to-God Broadcasting

The first of the reports gives account of the denominational broadcasts "in nine languages, reaching practically the entire world." The agency makes a point of the fact that although it endeavors to use the newest and best electronic facilities available, it aims to bring exactly the same message of "Christ crucified" that was brought by the Apostle Paul.

In addition to its domestic and foreign English-language radio and TV programs, it has for 28 years been sending out the gospel in Arabic. Rev. Victor Atallah, Orthodox Presbyterian missionary in Cyprus, has been working with listeners to the broadcasts of Rev. Bassam Madany, especially the many who respond from Egypt. A Spanish language broadcast, directed by Rev. Juan Boonstra, uses 237 radio stations. It is paralleled by a Portuguese broadcast directed by Rev. Celsino Gama in Brazil. A Chinese outreach over seven stations, headed by Rev. Isaac Jen, features evangelistic sermons and study programs designed to train house-church leaders in that most populous country in the world. It has an office in Hong Kong. Its responses have multiplied four times in two years. French broadcasts of Rev. Aaron Kayayan have received a remarkable response in African countries. A Reformed church begun in Zaire less than two years ago, assisted by a missionary of the Eureka Classis Reformed Church in the US, Rev. Paul Treick, now consists "of upwards of seventeen congregations and

possibly of as many as 15,000 people who have responded to the French ministry" (p. 20). Our broadcasts also continue in Japanese, Indonesian, and most recently, in Russian. The Committee seeks a per family average contribution ("quota") of \$54.30 plus \$17.70 for its TV outreach.

Calvin College and Seminary

The Calvin Board reports 238 students enrolled in the seminary and 4,053 in the college. It has withdrawn its earlier proposal for a denominational student aid fund because of the volume of adverse reaction from the denomination, citing the objections that the proposal (1) would usurp local authority, (2) mean another denominational quota, and (3) did not meet the needs of students at other Reformed seminaries and pre-seminary students (p. 27). The board seeks a 5% quota increase, plus an additional amount to finance a seminary "multicultural education program." In the *OUTLOOK* we have from time to time pointed out that the current "multicultural" fad, in principle contradicts the gospel's removal of such ethnic differences between Christians, and promotes the kind of "discrimination" it is supposed to be removing.

The seminary administration has to train and recommend students for approval as candidates for the churches pastoral ministry. We are informed that among the applicants for such candidacy this year is Mr. Clayton Libolt. It should be recalled that Mr. Libolt applied for candidacy in 1981, and was recommended by the seminary faculty and Board. There was "significant opposition" in both bodies, however, and in a public interview before the synod he was unwilling to give unambiguous answers to questions about the fall, and to state that Adam was a historical person, and that there were a real serpent, a real tree, and a

real speaking voice. He was denied candidacy after revealing these defective views about the Bible (*OUTLOOK*, Aug. 1981, p. 7; Jan. 1982, p. 17). Subsequently he, in an Aug. 23, 1982 *Banner* article, restated his conviction that "Genesis 1-3 cannot be read straightforwardly as history." On Nov. 4, 1982, speaking at Calvin Seminary "On Reading Genesis," he suggested that the Fall be taken as a mere story to illustrate man's development from childhood to adulthood. He denied that there was any qualitative difference between the Bible and other books and he approved a portrayal of God's law as a false invention of Moses (*OUTLOOK*, Jan. 1983, p. 6). As he again applies for candidacy, the seminary faculty, board and synod will have to determine whether his views have become more orthodox, whether the denomination has now departed far enough from its confessions to (like Classis Lake Erie, which continued to defend and license him—*Acts* 1982, pp. 604, 605; 1986 *Yearbook*, p. 427) tolerate the heretical views he expressed, or whether they will maintain the position stipulated by the synod in 1982. The Synod then declared that "adherence to the confessions, as required by the Form of Subscription, includes those utterances of the confession that affirm the historical factuality of events recorded in Genesis 1-3" and instructed "the Board of Trustees and all assemblies which deal with admission to the ministry of the Word to require of the candidates a clear statement of commitment to the confessions including those utterances of the confessions that affirm the historical factuality of the events recorded in Genesis 1-3" (*Acts* 1982, pp. 107-108).

Publications

The publications board briefly traces its history up to its current expansion program. It notes its "steady shift away from the traditional 'church agency' model for financing" toward becoming "a Christian publishing company that is governed by the church and is supported financially by the sale of its products." As such, it is "attuned to customer needs" in determining what and what not to publish (p.34). (And we need to bear in mind that a substantial majority of those customers are not within the denomination—p.39). The claim of being almost self-supporting overlooks the fact that its fielding is not paid for by its sales, but by church quotas.

The report highlights the board's effort to publish a new *Psalter Hymnal* next year. In connection with that project our April, 1986 *OUTLOOK* called attention to its decision (ignoring all church order requirements for changing the churches' creeds) to have its Liturgical Committee hastily revise the Heidelberg Catechism. Was the Board ever authorized to tamper with the creeds? The report now states that "A third part of the present *Psalter Hymnal*, 'Doctrinal Standards... was not even mentioned in the synodical mandate, although synod clearly expected that this section would again be included... for committees assigned to produce new translations of the Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort were urged to complete their work soon so that approved versions could be included..." (p.43). The unauthorized catechism revision (approved only by the Publication Board's

executive committee and not even the whole board) is now submitted to the synod as a suggestion (!) "that the synod consider updating the language used in the Heidelberg Catechism so as to make it conform to the standards of vernacular (nonarchaic) and inclusive language that have been used in revising the Psalms and hymns and the liturgical forms" (pp.44,45). Among the grounds for the recommendation is "c). The changes suggested are judged not to alter the essential meaning of the catechism." The wording of those changes does not even appear in the *Agenda* being sent to the churches, but is said to be included in a "separately prepared *Agenda Supplement*" (p.71)! What those changes are can be learned from a special CRC *Publications Report* (#3) containing "Proposed Psalms Hymns and Bible Songs for the Psalter Hymnal" of which a copy has been sent to each church. Its Appendix B contains the creed revisions. There we notice that the Catechism question and answer 6 is altered from "Did God create man so wicked and perverse? No. God created man good... so that he might truly know God his creator, love him with all his heart,..." to "Did God create us so wicked and perverse? No. God created us good... so that we might truly know God our creator, love him with all our hearts." Similarly, answer 9 is altered from "God created man with the ability to keep the law. Man, however, tempted by the devil, ... robbed himself and his descendents of these gifts" to "God created our first parents with the ability to keep the law. They, however, tempted by the devil, ... robbed themselves and us of these gifts." Notice that in the (feminist) effort to eliminate masculine language the evident allusion to the creation of Adam is replaced by the dubious statement that "God created us good" and that Adam's representative role in the fall is replaced by that of "our first parents." Does that elimination of Biblical covenant doctrine (Rom. 5:19) not "alter the essential meaning of the catechism"? Consider another of the revisions. Although one of the language considerations prompting the changes is said to be making the number and person of pronouns more consistent, we notice in question and answers 110 and 111 that there is an inconsistent switch from singular to plural in order to avoid masculine forms. The feminist prejudice obviously takes precedence over consistency of language. The *Agenda* really raises the question: Will the... synod endorse this irresponsible and illegal, sexist revision of the (recently revised) Heidelberg Catechism?

It should also be noted that the Board has similarly revised the Apostle's Creed and Nicene Creed and "respectfully suggests that synod consider updating the language" used in them. Some of the changes indeed remove "archaisms." "Sitteth" becomes "is seated," "thence" becomes "there," "proceedeth" becomes "proceeds," and "spake" becomes "spoke." Other changes are more significant: In "for us men and for our salvation" removal of "men" and the following "for" is suggested. "Remission" is changed to "forgiveness." When "according to the Scriptures", which seems to echo the Biblical text of 1 Cor. 15:4 even in the NIV, is changed to "fulfilling the Scriptures" there is a significant change of meaning.

Whether the change is an improvement may be debated—but it should be debated rather than slipped past the synod without the delegates, much less the whole church, noticing what is being done! Is this the way we now change fundamental creeds? Need anyone be surprised that a growing number of our over 300,000 church members seem to be losing confidence in their denomination when a few people in a subcommittee are permitted to change the confession of faith they will make each Sunday without as much as telling the churches what they are doing?

Missions

The Home Missions report states in an early paragraph, "Many Christian Reformed people are concerned that their church remain a true manifestation of the church of Christ. . . People who work hard to keep the church strong and pray that God will preserve the church should also pray that God will add to the church, and should themselves engage vigorously in the task of bringing the gospel to others" (p.87). It calls attention to our denominational growth rate of less than 1 percent. Then, expressing some of the more doubtful and controversial preoccupations of the administration, it suggests a need for getting more "women and multiracial persons" in the board (which is elected by classes to represent them, not to serve the desires of the board). Isn't it possible that pursuing the anti-discrimination fad is helping to kill our growth rate? Evidently reflecting a parallel bureaucratic trend, the "secretaries" are now to become "directors." The report lists areas and personnel in home missions. It stresses "its commitment to promote the multiracial character of the denomination" to which "nearly 50% of the fields budget" is devoted (p.98). Here again we confront the racism we, as Christians, are supposed to be trying to eliminate! A little later it highlights its "New Church Development Among Blacks" which "envisions the development of a new autonomous black congregation within the CRC" with a "long range goal" of "the spawning of other new black churches in the same general area" (p.100). This begins to look like promoting an ecclesiastical "apartheid!" A little later, after citing the way "North America's foremost church consultant" characterized its "Evangelism and Worship Workshop" as "the best on the market," it ruefully concedes, "unfortunately, all this activity has not yet translated into significant growth for the denomination" (p.102) and notes a pervasive decline in denominational loyalty.

Our World Missions and World Relief are undergoing a major shakeup in the process of being placed under one new "superboard," the Christian Reformed Board of World Ministries. Having two agencies (for missions and relief) representing the same churches working independently with differing policies in the same places with the same people was an intolerable arrangement that had to be corrected. Placing them under one board now raises inevitable problems, but the report at one point remarks, "The difficult days are over and we already see greater harmony because of closer cooperation" (p.125). In the placement of the two activities under one board involving new constitu-

tions the missions organization expresses to the synod its concern that the new combined organization is already not properly stressing the "Centrality of the Proclamation of the Word" as the synod had instructed it to do (p.126). Although the preamble of the new constitution states "In this task the announcement and proclamation of the Word has the central place", the mandates of the board, the mission and the relief organization "do not make any reference to the centrality of the proclamation of the Word." It seeks to remedy this crucial deficiency by amendments. The point properly raised by the missions administration touches what is likely the most threatening characteristic of this massive reorganization, the threat that in the multiplication of subsidiary activities the bringing of the Lord's gospel gets crowded to the side or out, as it has often been throughout the history of missions. When even in the early structuring of the constitution this central concern is being overlooked, some drastic correction is needed to save the enterprise.

The brief survey of our mission fields reveals that there were 120 missionaries living in Africa. In Nigeria, our older field now reports nearly 70,000 baptized members, over 150,000 people attending church in more than 50 congregations and 425 worship centers. The later, Tiv church now has over 100 congregations, over 2,100 worship centers and about 275,000 attendants. In the older area 18 pastors are being trained at the TCNN (the union seminary championed by Dr. H. Boer) and Veenstra Seminary, 400 students are enrolled in continuing education and 250 future church leaders are being trained at Smith Bible College and three Bible schools. Among the Tiv, the Reformed Theological College of Nigeria established by the Tiv church (to which the Reformed Fellowship has given some help from its beginning) now has 60 students and Benue Bible Institute has 80. That church operates hundreds of primary schools, 37 secondary schools, and one teachers' college, and is trying to set up a Christian liberal arts college. These activities are being carried out by the churches there with our missionaries taking a dwindling part in them. Our mission had 8 fields and projects in Latin America during 1985 involving 78 missionaries (including their wives). In the growing work in the Dominican Republic our missionaries now work with about 160 groups with an average attendance of about 6,000 people and about 200 leaders in training. About a thousand students are getting a basic education in fourteen Christian schools. The Mexican work still suffers from the church split to which our mission troubles contributed. In Japan 8 missionaries are developing churches in 13 places; in the Philippines we are represented by 18 regular missionaries (single or with families), and in Taiwan and Hong Kong by six.

The World Relief programs (now being placed under one board with world missions) are concerned with relief of extraordinary need and with development. Especially in the case of the latter, the Board tries to avoid creating continuing dependency. The reports show that many of our activities are channeled through a variety of other churches and agencies. Some of the programs and promotion lead one to wonder about

what social, economic and political involvements they entail. When we read of seeking to enlighten our members about social issues such as refugee policy, battling poverty and Central America (p.148) and of the Canadian branch's efforts to "seek ways to change the system of repression and violence" and its membership in the Interchurch Committee on Human Rights in Latin America (p.153) we sense the misguided church involvement in promoting socialist revolution that characterizes most of the Liberal churches of our time.

Especially striking in the reports of this now-being-combined committee is the fact that both are having to complain about a drastic reduction of (quota) support by the churches, the mission agency indicating a shortage that could reach 23% and the relief organization mentioning having to borrow \$400,000 from the bank. The mission report "requests synod's assistance in making internal and external changes to regain the confidence of the churches which is necessary for continued and increased financial support of [mission] ministries" (p.130). This is undoubtedly the synod's (and our) problem. We must and will support missionaries whom we have reason to believe are faithfully bringing the gospel, but we may not support those who consider it part of their mission to promote aberrations from the gospel such as socialist revolution.

The world relief statistics on pp.154,155 are worth pondering. They show a reduction of the coming budget from 7.3 million to 6.5 million dollars, but that the combined US and Canadian "administration" items of \$536 thousand are not reduced at all. In the \$6.5 million reduced budget, addition of listed items shows that well over a million dollars still go for "fundraising," "diaconal development" in the US and Canada and "administration." This does not include another item of about \$100,000 for "hunger education." We can and do give for programs we have reason to believe feed the hungry, but can anyone be blamed for not similarly giving for mere "hunger education"? We are informed that a number of midwestern churches include many farmers who are going bankrupt. Is it surprising that these churches and their members are failing to meet quotas that cover administrative salaries which run as high as \$67,865 (p.241)? (To these must be added unlisted fringe benefits which when they were still reported included items such as 9% "vacation" bonus.) The mission administration has abundant reason to suggest some "internal and external changes to regain the confidence of the churches."

Fund for Needy Churches

The Fund for Needy Churches report proposes some further restrictions on denominational support for small churches (p.172ff.).

Interchurch Relations

This report asks the synod "to clarify its instruction," identifying issues it wants discussed with the Reformed Church in America (p.183). Discussions with the reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN) continue. Although the discussions of differences are

friendly, there is no indication of any return of those churches toward orthodoxy in faith and morals. Simultaneous assemblies of a number of conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches are again scheduled to be held in 1987 at Calvin College. The Committee has for some time tried to have us join the (Liberal) World Alliance of Reformed Churches. Until the synod decides the matter in 1988 it continues to send observers to that body. It is also considering our rejoining the National Association of Evangelicals which we left many years ago. The crisis in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod is reported to be worsening, because of the Liberalism of the Dutch churches (GKN) and the arguments with the South African churches about racism. The loss of conservative member churches and the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa's suspension of membership and withholding of funds have brought serious financial problems to the RES. Two RES documents are offered for synod approval. The first, a testimony on human rights, (pp.196-199) is a pompous, wordy and vague statement which never defines the rights it advocates and contains generalizations which cannot stand up under scrutiny. Phrased in universal terms, its pleas for reconciliation seem obnoxious to our Lord's statement, "I came not to send peace but a sword" (Mt. 10:34) and to His distinctions of believer from unbeliever. To indiscriminately condemn capitalism and communism in favor of pluralism appears as foolish as it is useless. Must we defend the "rights" of all religions including the Muslim Fundamentalist's religious "right" to persecute under his laws? The following Declaration of Human Rights (pp.200,201) is at least more specific, though it also raises questions. Do all have a "right to vote"? Most countries have never had and do not today have it and our children do not. Criminals in prisons are properly deprived of certain civil rights. Are all of these proclaimed "rights" Biblical teachings or mere modern social theories, which because they are only that provoke useless controversy?

Creeds and "Contemporary Testimony"

A special committee now resubmits its 1985 careful translation of the Canons of Dort for final approval by the synod (pp.285 ff.).

The Contemporary Testimony Committee also submits its latest recent revision (containing over 200 changes from the previous 1983 document which was circulated among the churches) seeking synod approval. Creeds have historically been formulated to clearly confess Biblical truth and distinguish it from and defend it against threatening errors. In our time, however, creeds are sometimes formulated for an opposite purpose, to cover and protect popular errors by vagueness and ambiguity. Regrettably, this document seems to fall into the latter class. Even its name and purpose has from the beginning been ambiguous. It was admittedly not called a creed in order to gain easier acceptance, yet is being widely promoted and used to displace the Catechism. Written in poetic form, it was so vague and imprecise that it from the beginning needed a "commentary" to explain and defend what it intended to say! In spite of being called "con-

temporary" it does not attempt to exclude some of the most popular and threatening errors of our time. Dr. C.P. Venema in the March 3 *Christian Renewal* observed that regarding the authority of the Scriptures, the nature of social justice, evolutionism, contemporary feminism, worship and neo-Pentecostalism it seemed deliberately vague, and that it was so unclear on gospel fundamentals "that there is no compelling reason why a universalist could not embrace it as a statement of his own faith." One of its writers pointed out in a *Banner* article a while ago how in dealing with homosexuality it had been carefully formulated in deference to homosexuals. The staff of *Christian Renewal* in its Feb. 17 issue suggested that the many objections to the Testimony may be better understood in the light of the fact that a clear majority, five out of the nine members of the Testimony committee "share a perspective influenced over the years by the Institute for Christian Studies" (the Toronto AACCS school). Perhaps this may help to account for its refusal to speak clearly where church confessions should and its inclination to express unconvincing opinions on matters in which a church has neither calling nor competence. Two classes' overtures (11 and 12) oppose and would delay its acceptance. The churches might be better rid of this unsatisfactory substitute for a creed.

Children at the Lord's Supper

Because agitation has arisen to have children participate in the Lord's Supper (a practice promoted in the Liberal World Council of Churches, and correspondingly, in the Dutch Reformed Churches (GKN) as well as others) some of our churches have introduced it and a study committee was appointed. Its report (pp.346 ff.) concludes that "The biblical requirement for meaningful participation in the Lord's Supper is faith that discerns, remembers, and proclaims the body of Christ while partaking" (p.365) and that "Consistories properly supervise the Lord's Supper only when they require a profession of faith on the part of all who partake" (p.366). Reacting against what is probably a too common practice of not making or expecting a confession of faith until the age of 20 or later, the committee seeks to promote much earlier confession and communion—following the tradition of Calvin and the early Reformed churches who thought it appropriate at age ten to fourteen. Some members of the committee would make this much earlier; A. Helder in a minority report, arguing for the age of seven and for participation before a confession of faith, and Russel Maatman in another minority report, arguing that they should be included at any age because they are in the covenant.

What we see evidently beclouding the issue and, to some extent the report, appears to be confusion about the covenant and especially Abraham Kuyper's old "presumptive regeneration" theory. That notion seems to have figured significantly in the current apostasy of the Dutch churches as it was taken to mean (as Maatman too argues) that conversion is unnecessary in the covenant and church. This is held despite our Lord's and Paul's emphatic, contrary teaching to covenant — and church members — (Mt. 18:32; John 3:3; 2 Cor. 5:20-6:1).

Assuming that all baptised children are already believers and no longer requiring a confession of faith before the Supper breaks down what is left of church discipline. It has contributed to that in the Netherlands and may be expected to do the same here. We must indeed stress God's covenant promises to believers and their children implied in their baptism, but we must beware of perverting those encouragements to faith into the soul — and church — destroying heresy that repentance and faith are unnecessary to the baptized. The report and its subject deserve the wider study by the churches that the committee recommends (and that overture 10 requests).

Alcoholism

Fifty pages of the Agenda are devoted to a discussion of drinking and drug abuse, a current problem that undoubtedly needs more attention than our churches often give to it. The report, although somewhat repetitious, contains many helpful explanations and suggestions. Membership of the committee obviously included specialists in the field as well as theologians. It is soon apparent, however, that while the product reveals the perspectives of both, it is the doctors who are in charge. If the Bible interferes with the latest dictum of the professional, the Bible will have to give way. That appears to be a main weakness of the report. We early and often hear the cliché, "Alcoholism is a disease" (See esp. pp.386ff.). We are told that while the alcoholic "is morally culpable for the behavior he manifests as a consequence of his drinking, he is not morally culpable for the development of the disease alcoholism" (p.390). The axiom is repeated that an alcoholic always remains an alcoholic (p.395), despite the Apostle's statement to former drunkards, "Such were some of you: but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11).

Of an alcoholic minister's lying, we are told "such denial and deception are symptoms of the disease and therefore, should not be construed as deliberate deceit" (p.416). "It is . . . recommended that an afflicted pastor or employee's job security, status, or position, as well as normal promotional opportunities, and salary increases will not be jeopardized, altered, or frozen because of an alcohol — drug-related diagnosis, intervention, or a successfully completed treatment." Only if the individual resists treatment does the report suggest suspension from office. While we have to extend Christian consideration and help, is this doing justice to a church? The report recommends the AA organization without qualification although its treatment "steps are stated in specifically nonreligious terms". Although some AA organizations may express the Christian convictions of their members, may we give unqualified endorsement to an organization that will define God only as "a Power greater than ourselves"? The report ought to be given some critical study rather than uncritical acceptance of its recommendations.

Overtures

Among the overtures (pp.472 ff.) Classis Holland asks some rule changes in synod procedure in the

appointment and service of advisors to synod committees (Overture 2). Overture 5 asks that to reduce costs, only 4 copies of the synod *Agenda* and *Acts* be given each consistory instead of enough for all consistory members. While consistory members often make little use of their copies, it might be undesirable for the churches to have this material circulated even less than it is. There does seem to be little or no reason for reprinting all of the agenda material in the acts; stopping that duplication would save some costs (and most long reports could be drastically shortened to make them clearer).

Overture 8 seeks to substitute observing World Communion Sunday for "All Nations Heritage" as being more Christian. In view of the Liberal unbelief of many who promote the former, why observe either?

Overture 9 would leave the method of selecting elders and deacons to church discretion. This apparently seeks to open the way for wider use of the lot instead of election. The movement to the lot looks like an unhealthy way to eliminate membership responsibility and put unelected men (and women?) into office.

Overture 13 from California South seeks to revise the second marriage forms before including them in the *Psalter Hymnal* so that they will recognize the Bible's teaching concerning the differing roles of husbands and wives—a good idea for a church that seeks to be faithful to the Bible.

Overture 15 wants a new translation of the ecumenical creeds. We should not concede the word "catholic" to the Roman church, and recently appear to have had quite enough of irresponsible tinkering with the churches' creeds.

Overtures 17 and 18 from individual congregations seek more vigorous action against the South African churches, appealing to our earlier hasty and irresponsible synod decision which threatened them with the charge of heresy—a move to make bad matters worse.

Overture 19 would include Covenant Theology and its implications for Christian Schools, and proper and improper interchurch relations in matters to be discussed with the Reformed Church in America. Our Interchurch Relations Committee has asked for some guidance as to what matters should be brought into this discussion. This overture suggests an appropriate answer.

Overture 20 brings up many objections to song revisions in the new *Psalter Hymnal* and seeks to change the policy embodied in it before it is produced.

Overture 21 seeks to include the historic older liturgical forms which were scheduled to be discarded, in the new hymnal, arguing that these were supposed to be included and are still widely used—This sounds like a good idea. Their exclusion will likely contribute to grievances of many with the recent denominational course.

Classis Hamilton in Overture 22 seeks to restrict the office of evangelist to men on the basis of the earlier synod's recognition of the headship of the man and its implications for church leadership—another good idea.

Overtures 24-27 deal with the proposed denominational student fund. 3 of the 4 oppose it. Since even

the Calvin Board has decided to drop the matter because of widespread opposition, this may end it unless the synod on the basis of one overture decides otherwise.

Overture 28 would have Wycliffe Bible Translators recommended to receive offerings.

Overture 30 seeks to have quotas placed on a per member rather than per family basis. A subcommittee of the synodical interim committee (pp.244ff.), in response to an earlier overture, recommends keeping the present per family recommendation with some qualifications for differing circumstances. And it should be emphasized that quotas have been recommendations, not taxes, as bureaucratic practice and even the suggested changes seem to imply. (Failing to follow an unwarranted "recommendation" is not "delinquency".) Vernon's Overture 31 seeks to reduce some quotas and freeze others.

Appeal 1 objects to a decision to have a local Christian school taken over by the church and supported by a classis. Number 2 appeals a Toronto decision to approve giving quota moneys to the support of the (AACS) Institute for Christian Studies, since this is a graduate school, not geared to the needs of our church constituency, and has never been allotted a synod quota.

Conclusion

Appeal 3 protests against the opening of the office of deacons to women as contrary to the Scriptures, creeds and Reformed practice and church order.

In this it resembles Zeeland's Overture 23 which asks that the synod reverse the earlier decisions and "declare that only male members of the church are eligible to the office of deacon." It points out at length how last year's decisions had no adequate grounds and violated the requirements of Scripture, creeds and church order.

It is significant that in this synod agenda there are very few overtures and appeals. Where last year there was a flood of some fifty such addresses to the synod on this subject, now there are only two. Does this mean that the churches are acquiescing to the course the synod has chosen? While in some cases they may be doing so, in many others they may and will not. As significant as the falling off of overtures is the equally striking *falling off of quota support for synod-imposed causes*. When the synod decides to run roughshod over the consciences of 50 assemblies, it can hardly expect that those assemblies will address further appeals to a body that has demonstrated that it will not give them the fair hearing required by Scripture, creeds and Church Order. While they will continue to support individuals and programs that they have reason to believe are faithful to the gospel, they can and may not give blind support to individuals and programs that they have no reason to suppose are faithful to it. Although the overtures and appeals are few, they give the coming synod another opportunity to reconsider the denomination's course in dealing with these important matters. Will it turn in a more Biblically Reformed direction, or will it pursue its present course toward more confusion and division?

The Contemporary Testimony

Timothy Turngren

An Article on this subject appeared in our January OUTLOOK (p. 20). It was written by a seminary student after a critical study of this Testimony by a number of the students and it elicited an extraordinary amount of interest and responses from our readers. Now an article by another seminarian sheds further light on this testimony, which is to be considered for approval by the June C.R. Synod.

At Synod this year, the delegates will be asked to approve of the final draft of the Contemporary Testimony, "Our World belongs to God," which the Synodically appointed committee finished in January of this year.

The Testimony had its beginnings in 1971, when Classis Chatham overtook Synod "to replace" the creeds (Acts, 1971 overture 5, p. 109). Synod instead appointed a committee to re-express the Reformed Faith in modern language, thus the title "Contemporary Testimony." The committee itself views the creeds in this manner:

The issues to which the confessions speak have not entirely disappeared, and the truths which they formulate are still valid. But all three of the confessions, even the least crisis-orientated parts of them, reflect an assumption which is now strange to us. . . Our world is different: the modern crisis is the secularization of the society, the modern challenge is the mission of the Church in the world (Acts of Synod, 1979).

So the committee went to work, because

"There are new challenges to our faith, and new insights, especially about the work of the Spirit, and Missions."

(Preface to the 1983 edition)

Now the final edition has been drafted. With over 200 additions to, subtractions from, or substitutions of clauses and words, this final draft can only be called a significantly altered document from the 1983 version. The 42,000 plus copies of the testimony sent out to the churches since 1983 are now obsolete. Since this is so, our church must look carefully before it makes any decision concerning the Testimony.

The Heidelberg Catechism brings a message to those who have been united to Christ. Found in Lord's Day 1, it is the message of comfort. The Testimony, speaking of our faith to the world, brings something else: "We declare with joy and trust" . . . What? "That I am not my own, but belong body and soul, in life and death, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ"? No! It declares:

"Our world belongs to God"

"The future is secure for our world belongs to God"

"God holds a broken and scarred world together and gives us hope"

The Catechism holds out comfort, the testimony holds out hope. Although "hope" is a Biblical theme, we have more than that in Christ.

And what exactly is their new development for missions? What is their "Good News"? Is it that which Paul excitedly preached, "Jesus Christ, and Him crucified"? It is this: ". . . the good news: Our World belongs to God, and he loves it deeply" (para. 44). Is this what the Gospel is about? Is this what Paul and Guido de Bres, author of the Belgic Confession, died for? It is not. They both died confessing that Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, suffered and died on the cross under the holy wrath of God, so that we might be righteous before the Father. This is the Good News, and because we are unconditionally elected and saved, we serve God gladly, out of gratitude. The Testimony says something different, and it does so because of a very disturbing characteristic of the Testimony: it has a weak view of sin.

An example of this is found in para. 57, where we read,

All who have been on the Lord's side will be honored, the fruits of even small acts of obedience will be displayed. But tyrants, oppressors, heretics, and all who deny the Lord will be damned.

Compare the first sentence above, a description of faith, to the Heidelberg's description, found in Q/A 21:

True faith is not only a knowledge and conviction that everything which God reveals in His Word is true; it is also a deep-rooted assurance, created in me by the Holy Spirit through the gospel

that, not only others, but I too have had my sins forgiven, have been made forever right with God, and have been granted salvation.

The second sentence quoted above gives the Testimony's view of sin, describing the reprobate. But notice that the language seems to say that it takes a deliberate, radical act of denial in order to be damned. There is a current theological trend within our denomination which says that only those who hear the message proclaimed and then deny it will be damned. All of the unborn and those who have never heard the message will fall into the ranks of the redeemed. This view is quite different from the orthodox claim "By faith you have been saved"; yet it appears that the contemporary trend has replaced our standard doctrine within the Testimony.

The Testimony says in para. 14 that "Adam and Eve fell for Satan's lie." This present revision puts their actions in a very passive light, as if they were duped into sin. Para. 15 says "apart from grace we prove daily we are sinners," but the Heidelberg Catechism says that even with grace we "daily increase our debt." These statements are made because the Testimony does not take sin or God's wrath upon it seriously.

The effect a weak view of sin has upon the doctrine of divine wrath is seen in para. 19, which now reads:

In his just anger, God did not turn his back on a broken world bent for destruction, he turned his face towards it in love. . . He judged it with a flood (1983 ed. "washed").

This illustrates another of the characteristics of the Testimony, namely, making statements which contain biblical truths, but *not the whole truth*. What is written is partially true: God still continued to love what he had made. But the complete truth found in scripture is that God turned away from a totally wicked earth and destroyed it with a flood. Only Noah found favor in God's eyes. It is concerning this covenant God made with Noah that another half-truth is evident. Para. 21 states:

He covenanted with every creature that seasons would continue, and that such destruction would not come again until the final day.

This statement, again, is partially true. But it would be more accurate to say that God made a covenant with Noah, and through Noah as the head of the covenant, all of creation is blessed. All of creation benefitted from the Noahic covenant, but only Noah, his family, and those animals in the Ark were saved; the rest of creation was condemned. So God turned to Noah in love, but turned away from the rest. As noted above, the final revision did change the wording from "washed" to "judged," yet did not say "destroyed". Certainly such terminology is biblical. But it appears the Testimony believes sin could be washed or judged out of the creation, and that it did not have to be destroyed.

As mentioned earlier, the Catechism says that we serve out of gratitude. But now that the Testimony's weak emphasis on sin has been shown, the results can also be shown: when the necessity for redemption is weak, believers no longer act out of genuine gratitude. This leads the Testimony to state in para. 32:

The spirit thrusts God's people into world-wide missions.

Webster's dictionary defines "thrust" as: "to push or drive with force; shove." The Testimony makes it sound like the Spirit is taking believers and flinging them out to witness to the world against their will. What a difference between this and the Catechism, or Canons II.5!

The committee also claims new insights into the work of the Spirit. Statements made concerning the Spirit include the following:

The Spirit is at work, renewing the creation (para. 2)

The whole creation groans in the birth pangs of a new creation (para. 4)

The work of renewal has always been ascribed to the Holy Spirit; yet such language with its explicit reference to the Spirit renewing creation is foreign to both the creeds and Reformed theology. The authors make such statements because they have failed to distinguish between the general and special operations of the Holy Spirit.

The general operation is the work in which the Spirit "originates, maintains, strengthens, and guides all of life: organic, intellectual, and moral" (Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 426). In creation the Spirit is maintaining the created order, restraining the deteriorating and devastating effects of sin. This "restraining" is one aspect of so-called "common grace".

The special operation of the Spirit is that work in which he convicts a person of sin, applies the benefits of Christ's work, and begins the process of sanctification. This activity is beautifully stated in the Canons of Dort, III, IV, sec. 11. Thus, there is an essential difference between the operation of the Spirit in regards to nature, and that in regards to man. Thus, the term "renewal" must be restricted to the elect, and this is the crucial distinction which the authors have failed to recognize.

In speaking of renewal we note another characteristic of the Testimony: *internal contradiction*. The Testimony, on the one hand, says that the creation is being renewed. Yet in para. 57 it says creation is waiting for the purifying fire of judgement. Why would the Spirit renew the earth only to purge it? Passages such as Romans 8:21 and Revelation 21:1 indicate beyond any doubt that the present earth will pass away, being "set free from bondage and decay." Couple these passages with a correct understanding of the operations of the Spirit, and one could not make the statements the Testimony does.

The committee said there are new insights into the work of the Spirit and missions. They also said that the need for the Testimony arose because of the modern challenge of "secularization." But is the church today facing an essentially different crisis than the church of the 16th and 17th centuries? "Secularization" simply means "relating to the worldly or temporal." How is this any different from the time in which the creeds were written? The world then, according to the introduction of *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions*, was

. . . a gentile world, rich in competing philosophies and religions.

Are we not competing with the same kind of world today? And is not our mission the same as then: "Preach Christ, and him crucified"?

The committee claims the creeds no longer speak to the complexity of today's society. But the creeds, especially the Heidelberg Catechism give clear principles from which specifics may be deduced. It would seem that the committee is searching for a detailed instruction manual, not a Testimony. Yet they wrote the Testimony, and now our Synod will be asked to approve of a document which has been significantly altered at a late date, and is pervaded with partial truths and weak doctrinal formulations.

The committee said that apart from stating positions of doctrine, the creeds are antiquated documents. The sad part is that they believe it.

Preparing for Christ's Return

Timothy Monsma

Some of the signs that precede the second coming of Christ will appear not because of Christian effort, but in spite of it. One could mention the great apostasy, the great tribulation, and the unveiling of the Antichrist.

But there are other events which, according to Scripture, must take place before Christ returns, and these events imply at least some Christian activity. One is the conversion of "all Israel" (Romans 11:26). Another event that will precede the second coming is the presentation of the gospel to all nations. In Matthew 24:14 we read: "And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come." The Greek word for "nations" used here is the same word from which we get our word "ethnic."

It appears that the nations Jesus had in mind were not political entities but ethnic groupings, such as the people we have in mind when we speak of the Navajo nation or the Zulu nation. Many years before God had said to Abraham, "In you all the families of the earth

shall be blessed." The Hebrew word for family used here can also be translated "tribe," but not "nation" as a political entity.

The thought that "nation" as used by Christ refers to ethnic groupings is confirmed when we read in Rev. 7:9: "After this I looked, and behold a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes." If the terms "nation" and "tribe" refer to ethnic identity or a common

It is God's plan that at least some individuals from every group of people upon the earth will respond favorably to the Gospel before Christ returns.

This thought determines both the extent and the limits of the work to be accomplished by the Church before our Lord returns. One does not find in the Bible predictions of a general turning to the Lord by the entire human population before the Return. But the Scriptures suggest that the Gospel of the Kingdom will have reached every segment of human society, carried by missionaries and evangelists.

How Have We Fared?

It will soon be 2000 years since our Lord ascended into heaven. How have we fared in bringing the gospel to all nations? Geographically and numerically, there has been significant Christian growth. It is true that during the Middle Ages there was stagnation and even decline in the lands conquered by Muslim armies. But the dawn of the Modern period with the exploration that accompanied it, brought new impetus to the spread of the Gospel. This spread has accelerated during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There are now churches in virtually every country of the world, and Christians from non-western nations have begun to outnumber Western Christians. Many "tribes, tongues, peoples, and nations" have been touched by the Gospel.

Yet it is estimated that about 17,000 groups have not yet responded to the Gospel, and they account for half the population of the world. Mission organizations are cooperating with one another in identifying these groups so that missionaries can be sent to them. The Missions Advanced Research Center (MARC) of World Vision has published several volumes describing such groups.

Although 17,000 seems like a large number, it is not large when one considers that over 100,000 missionaries are active in the world today. It has also been suggested that if every 150 churches (congregations) in the world sends a team of missionaries to each of these 17,000 groups, they will all have a missionary team among them. The United States Center for World Mission, based in Pasadena, California has set the year 2000 as a target for Christians to aim at. The U.S. Center hopes that by then there will be missionaries working among all these remaining groups.

A New Wrinkle

There is, however, a new wrinkle. The "unreached" groups are not stationary. Portions of these groups are breaking off and moving to cities, sometimes even

crossing international borders to do it. For example, when people from Ghana (in West Africa) move to Abidjan, the capital of Ivory Coast, they become a new group, for they are now an English-speaking minority in a largely French-speaking city. They will need to hear the Gospel not in French, but either in English or in one or more of the ethnic languages of Ghana.

Never before has the world seen the universal growth of cities that we are witnessing today. We are told that by 2000 A.D. 50% of the population of developing countries will be living in cities. The *National Geographic* has said: "Third World cities, now home to more than one billion people, will hold nearly four billion residents by 2025" (Aug., 1984, p. 174).

God foresaw the growth of cities worldwide when He inspired the Scripture writers 2000 years ago. Not only do we find in Scripture a contrast between Babylon and Jerusalem; we find New Testament believers described as "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb. 12:22). John encourages them with a vision of "the holy city, even Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2).

In a day when the cities of the Roman Empire were crumbling before the barbarian onslaught, Saint Augustine caught the Bible's message regarding urban life, when he entitled his best known work *The City of God*. This city, he contended is built in the hearts and lives of mankind by God Himself, and will stand, regardless of what happens to cities of stone and mortar.

Problems of unemployment, crime, pollution, and lack of essential services may plague third world cities today that grow faster than the infrastructure can cope. But God is still building His city in the midst of the cities of man. This provides hope for the future.

Institute of Global Urban Studies

The Institute of Global Urban Studies was founded in Pasadena last October in order to assist in bringing the Gospel to the cities of the world. For the present the Institute is focusing on cities of the developing world of Asia, Africa and Latin America. These cities are studied in order to identify people groups within them that have no viable church and therefore need a missionary witness. The information regarding these groups will be made available to all Christian Missions that seriously want to make use of it.

Other supplementary services of the Institute of Global Urban Studies include gathering a list of books and articles written about cities both from the social science and the missionary perspective, forming a library of such materials, conducting seminars as requested in schools, churches, and mission retreats; publishing a quarterly research bulletin called *City Watch*, and serving as a resource agency and consultant for urban missions.

The Institute of Global Urban Studies is governed by a Board of Directors who are committed to the Reformed faith. At the same time it is located on the campus of the United States Center for World Mission and is part of its strategy department. It benefits from interchange with other mission agencies. The work is supported by voluntary contributions and by the offerings of local churches. Please pray with us that the Gospel will penetrate every part of every city and that many will be brought to a saving knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ before He returns.

Dr. Timothy Monsma is a veteran missionary to Nigeria and professor and is now Executive Director of the Institute of Global Urban Studies at Pasadena, California.

WHO AM I?

Glenn P. Palmer

I am a man of contradictory statements; so listen to what was said of me and tell me who I am.

You're a man, aren't you? And Who is like you in Israel? Why didn't you guard your Lord the King? Someone came to destroy your Lord the King. What you have done is not good. As surely as the LORD lives, you and your men deserve to die, because you did not guard your master, the LORD's anointed.

That opening line reminds me of what I said to King Ish-Bosheth.

Am I a dog's head—on Judah's side? This very day I am loyal to the house of your father Saul and to his family and friends. I haven't handed you over

to David. Yet now you accuse me of an offense involving this woman.

Later, Ish-Bosheth's head would be buried in my tomb.

Despite the fact that I hunted David, his son, King Solomon, said that I was better and more upright than General Joab. Despite the fact that I waged war against David, I returned to him his first wife, Michal. Despite the fact that Saul was my cousin, I swore that I would transfer his kingdom to David. Despite the fact that I was only a general, King Ish-Bosheth did not dare to say another word to me, because he was afraid of me. Despite the fact that I killed General Joab's brother, Asahel, at my death and burial King David mourned for me and led the funeral procession. Then he said, "Do you not realize that a prince and a great man has fallen in Israel this day?" Who am I?

1 Sam. 26:2-5,15,16; 2 Sam. 3:8-12,31-32,38; 4:12; 1 Kings 2:32.

Comment and Opinion

by John H. Piersma

NO DISCRIMINATION AGAINST HOMOSEXUALS — “Juicy stories” out of the “old country” (Netherlands) are easy to come by these days. They always shock some of us who identify the Fatherland with godly grandparents. I’ll never forget the first time I heard someone use profane, blasphemous words in the Dutch language. I felt like telling him that anyone knows you might swear in English; you pray in Dutch.

Here’s another of those shocking stories which indicate that some revision of naive notions about the place my forbears left is needed. It is found in a news account (the clipping doesn’t identify which paper). It is entitled “Congregations may not ‘discriminate’ against homosexuals.” We translate:

LUNTEREN — It is hard for homosexual preachers to get a call to a congregation. This situation must come to an end. That is what synodical delegates of the Gereformeerde Kerken (the Dutch denomination) with which the Christian Reformed Church has closest ties, (JHP) have recently decided with a large majority of votes.

Various speakers during the synodical discussion bemoaned the fact that it again appears necessary to devote special attention to discrimination against homosexual pastors. The Synod of Delft already in 1979 sent a letter to the churches asking that homosexuals be granted unimpeded access to the office. Formally, therefore, the matter is regulated. But practically the situation leaves much to be desired.

For that reason Rev. K. Smit of Heemstede placed the matter officially before synod. He asserted that there were instances in which contacts had been made between a congregation and a candidate, that these went well up to the point that it became known that the prospective spiritual leader of the congregation was homosexual. And if the congrega-

tion then hears that two men or two women will be living in the parsonage the vacant congregation often pulls back, even now.

A homosexual student had also registered his complaint with the denominational deputies appointed to maintain the relationship between the church and the theological faculty of the Free University (Amsterdam). The deputies did not feel authorized to deal definitively with this situation.

An amendment proposed by Rev. Smit was needed to bring about change. His motion was adopted. The deputies are now commissioned in consultation with the curators (of the Free University, I presume, JHP) to appoint a blue ribbon committee for consideration of the problems arising from resisted service-possibilities for homosexual pastors. This committee is to report at the next synod.

This story reveals something which continues to impress me — the fact that proponents of such ideas as the acceptability of “alternative sexual preferences” are ready to enforce their convictions upon an often reluctant church. There is something of a radical crusading spirit at work here. And it takes place alongside an obvious unwillingness to take a strong stand on issues of a confessional or doctrinal nature.

It looks as if life will be increasingly difficult for the poor soul who takes seriously such a passage as Romans 1:26, 27, who cannot imagine that some more up-to-date understanding of human nature renders a homosexual relationship acceptable to and within the Christian fellowship.

A GOOD OVERTURE — By the time this appears Synod 1986 of the Christian Reformed Church may well have completed its work. In the interest, however, of keeping what we think is a very serious issue before the minds of our readers we reproduce now a well-

reasoned overture prepared by the Archer Avenue (Chicago) consistory. It reads:

The Archer Avenue Christian Reformed Church overtures Classis Chicago South to overture Synod 1986 as follows:

1. To declare that the stated clerk exceeded his rights and responsibilities when he sent cablegrams to Prime Minister Botha of South Africa expressing "our deep disturbance" and to Mrs. Boesak expressing "our sorrow" at the arrest and detention of Dr. Allan Boesak.

Grounds:

- a. The arrest took place on August 27, 1985 and the cablegrams were sent on August 29, 1985. Clearly, Synod itself was not able to consider this matter in this period.
 - b. The Synodical Interim Committee was not consulted prior to sending these cablegrams.
 - c. An article in *The Banner* of September 30, 1985 reports that in an interview the stated clerk said that it was on the basis of "his belief" (emphasis added) that the Christian Reformed Church should take a stand on Boesak's arrest that he sent the cablegrams.
 - d. The personal beliefs of the stated clerk do not necessarily become the official stand of the Christian Reformed Church, even though many members may agree with that belief.
2. To declare that the Synodical Interim Committee erred when it "approved the work" of the stated clerk in sending these cablegrams.

Ground:

The Synodical Interim Committee is charged with overseeing the work of the stated clerk. When he exceeded his authority, it should not have placed a stamp of approval on his activity.

3. To declare that the stated clerk is to address official correspondence and use his title as a spokesman for the denomination only on such matters as he has been given approval by explicit, official action of Synod or of its duly empowered interim committee.

Ground:

Such a clear statement should help to avoid confusion during similar situations in the future.

w/s president William G. Vis
w/s clerk: Jack Leffring

We applaud the Archer Avenue consistory for presenting this overture. In our opinion one of the greatest dangers threatening any church is the evil of "Rule from the top," or hierarchicalism. It takes obvious form in the churches of the Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions. It comes to a radically opposite and contradictory mode in, say, the churches of the Baptist and congregationalistic tradition, communions which recognize and enforce no real authority except that of the local congregation. In our country with its strong individualistic emphasis, such types of local control are very popular.

Ours (the Reformed community) is a government by duly elected elders and deacons, who form "the coun-

cil of the Church; that by these means the true religion may be preserved, and the true doctrine everywhere propagated, likewise transgressors punished and restrained by spiritual means; also that the poor and distressed may be relieved and comforted, according to their necessities. By these means everything will be carried on in the Church with good order and decency, when faithful men are chosen, according to the rule prescribed by St. Paul in his Epistle to Timothy" (Belgic Confession, Art. XX).

As we have commented earlier, the tendency is to disregard this kind of biblical church government. The world insists on thinking that a church is just another kind of social organization, and that it, too, must have a "boss" or "leader" who runs things and makes the important decisions. It always surprises certain people when you tell them that you cannot speak for all the members of the congregation simply because you are the pastor.

It is high time that all church officers remind themselves that we are not so much "leaders" as "servants" (Matt. 23:11). Not servants of "the people" or "popular opinion" but of the Master (Matt. 23:10).

I hope that I may report soon that Synod 1986 unanimously endorsed the Archer Avenue overture!

"HAVEN FROM THE HELL OF NEW YORK STREETS" — This is the heading of an article (*Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 27, 1985) which deals with the work of Bruce Ritter, Roman Catholic priest who is founder and director of Covenant House in New York City. This is a place of refuge for thousands of young people, victims of the vice and corruption of America's greatest city. Ritter runs similar institutions in Toronto, Ft. Lauderdale, and Houston. He has no trouble finding people to help.

"In the last 20 years we've seen the development of an enormous multi-multi-billion-dollar sex industry. We live in a sex-for-sale society that shows kids it's okay to become sexual objects; it's okay to become the merchandise in the sex industry, of which we are patrons." Those are his words.

Covenant House is, he says, "an intensive care unit for dying children." He has seen children, age 9 to 19, "raped, battered and prostituted from the streets where broken or corrupt runaways" find themselves. He adds that many of these are not so much run-aways as "throw-aways." Their families have dumped them in a day when Paul's words "without natural affection" (Rom. 1:31) are too often confirmed.

It's a gruesome story. Exploitation, abuse, death ("You can't live on the street a long time... Six months is literally forever, and in a year, its over.") are the order of the day. "What happens on the street happens quickly. The distortion of the personality is so profound that it really is irreversible. So many rotten things happen to kids on the street that they lose permanently the ability to relate to anybody else on a profoundly human level... After you've been bought and sold a thousand times, you can't really value yourself very much. You can't wash that away with a shower or a couple of weeks vacation.

Ritter does not shrink back from faulting American society for its "laissez faire" attitude toward and prac-

tice of human sexuality. He bemoans the current lack of moral sensitivity among Americans of this generation. He dares to say such things as:

Everybody who watches a hardcore porno film has to know that they are part of the problem. They are just as responsible for the moral murder of the people who make that film, for the exploitation of the people who make that film, for the absolute degradation of the people who make that film, as the drug addict is responsible for the whole bloody series of murders and police and judicial corruption that is involved in the drug traffic. If you snort cocaine, you are part of that chain, and you cannot walk away from it; and if you're buying these porno films you're part of that chain of corruption and violence and lust and prostitution and profit to organized crime, and you cannot walk away from it.

I'm disgusted at what happened to kids who come in here. I'm disgusted with the fact that tens of millions of Americans will adopt such irresponsible

attitudes toward human sexuality that causes the abuse of these kids.

From the vantage point of where I live (Chicago suburbs) Ritter's description of the world we now occupy seems very accurate. American society today does show increasingly the evidence of alarming corruption.

The thought that I can't quickly erase is this: Why is it that sometimes Christian communions appear more insistent to emphasize this kind alarm with respect to sin when things are relatively less urgent than in times such as ours?

How can we revive the sense of corporate responsibility and guilt Father Ritter by bitter experience has learned while helping the wayward on Times Square? How can we re-learn what the Catechism declares when it asks us to say, "I am prone by nature to hate God and my neighbor?" So that we can take refuge in Him who is the only One who can wash away our sins and give us new life? I think we need a very careful review of such basic biblical Truth so that we might be of some help to people so obviously in need.

Children at the Lord's Supper

Jelle Tuininga

For some years already this question has been under discussion in our circles. If my analysis of the situation is correct, then there was more agitation for admitting children to the Lord's Supper in the late 60's and early 70's than there is at present. Nevertheless, the issue continues to surface in our circles, and I doubt not that sooner or later it will come to the floor of synod, the more so since the synod of the Geref. Kerken has been dealing with it in recent years. In its latest decision that synod decided to allow children at the Lord's Supper, since God's Word neither commands nor forbids it. Certain conditions were attached to this decision, and it will be up to each local consistory to implement (or not implement) it as it sees fit.

We will come back to this decision of the Geref. Kerken later. But first a few things ought to be made clear. It will not do (as has been done) to argue for the legitimacy of "kinder-communie" ("children's com-

munion") on the basis of "children's baptism." One has to keep clearly in mind the difference between the two sacraments. Baptism symbolizes our new birth in Jesus Christ, our initiation or incorporation into the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Baptism into Christ is our Red Sea (through which we pass only once) whereby our children are "ingrafted into the Christian Church, and distinguished from the children of unbelievers" (Belgic Conf. Art 34; Q. & A. 74 of H.C.). In baptism the recipient is passive; he is no more active than he was in his physical birth.

The Lord's Supper, however, is a two-way street, so to speak, in which the new life gets its nourishment (Manna). Here the recipient is not passive, but active: God speaks and he responds. This demands an active response of faith and obedience on the part of the recipient. He is admonished to "take, eat, remember and believe." Every time he goes to the Lord's Supper he "proclaims the Lord's death." That is something

which involves a conscious, believing response on the part of the participant. You might say it involves a confession of faith. And such a confession includes a "sure knowledge" of God's promises, and a "hearty confidence" that sins are forgiven, cf. Q. & A. 21 of H.C. In that sense partaking of the Lord's Supper is a believing response to one's baptism. Seen in this light, I agree with Van Andel when he says that "our profession of faith is very closely linked up with the celebration of the Lord's Supper. They belong together. They are related to each other as a means to an end. To participate in the Lord's Supper is the goal; making profession of faith is only the way to reach this goal" (*Thy Way is My Way*, p. 10). "Without their knowledge" our children share in Adam's condemnation, and so again "without their knowledge" they are received unto grace in Christ through baptism. But it is not "without their knowledge" that they participate in the Lord's Supper and proclaim the Lord's death till He come. That takes a knowledgeable confidence and a confident knowledge.

Let me summarize this part by quoting a bit from Calvin's *Institutes*, Bk. IV, Chap. 16, section 30:

For if we consider the peculiar character of baptism, surely it is an entrance and a sort of initiation into the church, through which we are numbered among God's people: a sign of our spiritual regeneration, through which we are reborn as children of God. On the other hand, the Supper is given to older persons who, having passed tender infancy, can now take solid food.

This distinction is very clearly shown in Scripture. For with respect to baptism, the Lord there sets no definite age. But he does not similarly hold forth the Supper for all to partake of, but only for those who are capable of discerning the body and blood of the Lord, of examining their own conscience, of proclaiming the Lord's death, and of considering its power. . . . What is the command of the Lord: "Do this in remembrance of me"? What is that other command which the apostle derives from it: "As often as you eat this bread, you will proclaim the Lord's death until he comes"? . . . None of these things is prescribed in baptism. Accordingly, there is a very great difference between these two signs. . . .

It would appear to me, on the basis of the foregoing, that the basic problem of "children's communion" is thus resolved. Only children who have come to a measure of maturity and understanding could be considered eligible candidates for the Lord's Supper as I see it. And some form of "confession" would then have to precede such participation. Once that basic issue is solved, we can then discuss whether or not our present practice is satisfactory, at what approximate age our children or young people ought to be able to make such a confession, an other related matters. But these questions would be of secondary importance.

One cannot, of course, ever prescribe a set age at which our young people should make profession of their faith. That depends a great deal on a number of factors: the spiritual and all-around maturity of the person involved; his or her upbringing, in the home

particularly; and various other factors that may present themselves. Personally, I have often felt that in general our young people wait too long to make profession of their faith. Young people who clearly love the Lord at age 15 or 16 should be able to make a credible confession of their faith. Calvin apparently thought this was possible at age 12.

1985

IN REVIEW

Dr. Richard De Ridder once again wrote "The Year 1985 in Review" in the latest edition of the *Yearbook*. In this column he notes some general trends which challenge all churches, two of which are "declining denominational loyalty" and women's leadership in "male-dominated denominations." This is a need, he says, which "goes far beyond simply opening the offices of the church to women."

Closer to home, he notes some "current trends" in the Chr. Ref. Church. In this connection he notes "a growing tendency to congregationalism and a general weakening of our common loyalties." He further mentions a "decreasing loyalty to the Church Order."

I realize this column is meant to be a "review," and therefore one cannot and may not expect too much in the way of editorializing in analyzing the problems and seeking for a solution. Nevertheless, such editorializing is present in this column (that can hardly be avoided), and since that is so, one wishes our author would have laid his finger on some of the basic causes of our problems and sought to point to the proper solutions. But one finds very little of that. There is talk about speeches and articles designed to polarize, and of establishing

organizations for the purpose of protest and of dissatisfaction about matters which "do not touch the heart of the gospel," etc. But the real issue is left untouched, namely, lack of adherence to the Scriptures and our confessional standards. That is not mentioned. Apparently the author does not think that is a problem. We are supposed to "honor obligations" and not try to divert the church "from its central mission and task" by creating disloyalty and distrust. But one would like to ask: What is the church's central mission and task? And who are responsible for creating polarization and distrust? Was it Ahab or Elijah that was troubling Israel? Was Micaiah the dissenter, or was it the four hundred prophets of Baal? The analogy might not exactly hold in our present situation, but there is enough similarity to make it applicable. Those opposing the "newer trends" in the church are often accused of polarizing and of causing needless division by making mountains out of molehills. After all, these issues "do not touch the heart of the gospel."

First, one should ask whether loyalty to the Scriptures and our confessions touch the heart of the gospel. The historicity of Adam doesn't affect our salvation, it is said. No, but Paul places Adam and Christ in the same category, and mentions them in the same breath. If Adam was not historical, how do I know Christ was? And that does touch the heart of the gospel! It all depends on whether the Scripture is reliable or not.

Secondly, one should ask: If issues like women in office are not that important, why are they being promoted and foisted upon the church as if the very life of the church depended on them? Who is making mountains out of molehills? One may push for these things as much as he wants, but woe to you if you oppose them. Then you are causing needless polarization. Believe it or not!

It is good and well to talk about "honoring our obligations" and about promoting "denominational loyalty." But it ought to be remembered that our basic unity must be a *confessional* one. Faithfulness to the Church Order and to quota requests were predicated on confessional unity, and when confessional unity is eroded, other less basic forms of cohesion will also

deteriorate. We confess in L.D. 21 that "the unity of the true faith" is what really keeps the church together. It would have been well for De Ridder to mention that fact, and to make a plea for exactly that kind of unity, also within the CRC.

"Denominational loyalty" has its place. But there is a more basic loyalty, and that is to the Word of the Lord and to our Forms of Unity. The truth is always more important than any kind of "denominational loyalty." The fact is, there can be and is a kind of "blind loyalty" to churches and institutions which can be a form of idolatry. It takes the form of "my church, right or wrong, my church." I sometimes wonder how well Jeremiah or Amos would have fared in our circles. The leaders and people got angry at them for telling them things they didn't want to hear. We probably would have told Amos to get lost too, and not to prophesy against Grand Rapids and our "sacred" institutions, for it is "our school" and "our headquarters" that you are speaking against. (Cf. Jer. 38:1-6; Amos 7:13).

Finally, it is all well and good to say that we must follow "the ecclesiastical road" (de kerkelijke weg). De Ridder says "the denominational structures provide the way for correcting errors or securing information." Do they? When a decision of synod conflicted with the Church Order, we simply changed the Church Order. Is that the way to "correct errors"? Once again, when there is a deep and loyal bond to our confessions among all the members of the church, "the churchly way" works well. But when that is lost, there is very little recourse to any kind of common authority. Both De Cock and Schilder became painfully aware in their day that "the churchly way" led only to their demise. It was used in a hierarchical and underhanded way to silence critics and to maintain the status quo. Technicalities were used to overturn appeals to the confession. It can happen and is happening again today. I wish De Ridder would have alerted us to these more basic concerns. That could have been a step in the right direction.

J. Tuininga,
Lethbridge, Alta.



TENSIONS IN THE CHURCHES

Dear Mr. Editor:

Please allow me to respond to a number of fanly syllogisms and misconceptions as presented by brother Tuininga in his article, "Tensions in the Church," in the February issue of the *Outlook*. It is true that unfamiliarity causes tension. The Christian life, including worship, will always be one of tension as the working of the Spirit seeks to sanctify and purify one's life. It is *not* true that *all* charismatic/gifted people (which Christians are) seek to cause tension. Brother Tuininga cites several examples that have caused irritation within the worship structure of a particular congregation such as, the

raising of hands during singing, mutual greetings, prayer requests, and participation of members in prayer. When I look in my Bible I find all these "irritations" scriptural. If waking up sleeping young people causes some to feel uncomfortable, perhaps they should re-evaluate why we have the privilege of going to church in the first place.

To say that those who advocate reform (is not a reformed church always reforming?) are the ones who adhere to myths and disregard sound doctrine is an outright faulty syllogism and a slap in the face to many who seek to serve the Lord. Since when has God prescribed a formal order of worship binding to the church for all ages? This to me smacks of medieval Catholicism.

Our style of hymn-sandwich worship can be glorifying to God, but I know of many services which do not follow this strict liturgical pattern and still, nevertheless, glorify our God. It is fanly to equate emotional selfism as characteristic of the whole charismatic movement. The expression of joy is an element of reverence that comes forth in more than one way.

It is also very dualistic to assume that God's presence is meted out in greater portions in the building where we gather to worship. Worship is to be a very reverent experience, but to consider the raising of hands as levity and frivolity is ludicrous. Brother Tuininga, have you really evaluated what you consider evil? Alleging that these people do not possess a living faith is a terrible accusation. God will judge the heart of every action. Please evaluate the worship of the OT and NT church or the church of Revelation four and five, or Paul's injunction to Timothy to raise hands (which Calvin almost declares to be a sacrament). As God's reformed church we must continue reforming or we will become deformed.

Sincerely, a concerned brother,
Peter J. Vellenga
Burlington, Ontario

THE REAL TENSION IN THE CHURCH

This article is written in response to Cecil Tuininga's piece "Tension in the Church" (Feb. '86), but is directed to the Reformed community at large. I agree whole-heartedly that there exists within Reformed denominations a tension between what Tuininga calls "the spirit and practices of the historic Christian faith" and what he refers to as "the charismatic movement that is invading many mainline churches today." What I disagree with is his premise that one is evil and the other good based on his understanding of the charismatic movement and the historic Christian faith. I hope to show that not only is he incorrect in his understanding of the two, but also that this tension is an either/or decision for the church.

Having studied at Reformed Bible College, Calvin College, Westminster Theological Seminary and Calvin Theological Seminary, I feel adequately competent in understanding the historic Christian faith. Having recently experienced what charismatic Christians call "baptism or release of the power of the Holy Spirit," I also feel qualified in explaining what this means to a Reformed Christian. This article is written not as a rebuttal but as clarification of what is truly causing tension within the Church.

Tuininga begins his article by stating that "the cause of tensions today are unique, quite different from what the Church has ever experienced before, as far as I know." It appears as though his knowledge of church history is rather limited, because there has been tension within the church ever since Paul's admonition of Peter regarding the Jews and Gentile Christians (Galatians 2). Tuininga unconsciously implies within the article that for him the historic Christian faith dates from the Reformation to the present. He states that because of the charismatic movement, there will be "more deviations from the heritage of the fathers, more churches forming that are distinctly unreformed in life and practice." A quick perusal of any church history book will give

abundant information regarding tension within the church very similar to today's tensions, long before the Reformation came.

The correct understanding of the historic Christian faith should be taken straight from the Word of God as in the Heidelberg Catechism (Q&A 21), Belgic Confession (Art. 27-29) and the Canons of Dort (III.17). The Bible tells us in Acts, chapter one, that Jesus told His disciples "you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Samaria and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8). Shortly after Jesus' ascension came the day of Pentecost, and Acts two tells us that all the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues. Following Peter's sermon three thousand souls came to know Christ as their Lord and Savior and so began the Christian Church. It is this historic Christian faith, as stated in the New Testament on which I base my appeal, not just the "heritage of the fathers" or the distinctly reformed churches of today. So let us go to the Word of God.

Mr. Tuininga states that the whole charismatic movement has its origin based upon 2 Tim. 4:3,4 (not 2:3,4), in which the church in the last days will not put up with sound doctrine, with the result that they will turn aside to myths. Every Reformed charismatic Christian would agree with him fully. What brought such sadness and pain was that with this text he has condemned the entire charismatic movement to hell. He states that they no longer want to hear the truth or have a meaningful study of God's Word, have a dislike for sound doctrine, have no living faith, deny the power of God, do not know what it means to repent, or have any idea what is to take place in a worship service. All of this he bases on the premise that Reformed charismatic Christians want to incorporate into the worship service the raising of hands during singing, the greeting of members and visitors in worship services, speaking in tongues, participation of congregation in prayers, prayer requests and testimonies, and that all they want is an easy to understand message.

Obviously heretical, right? There is one small problem however, and that is, what do we do with the Word of God as it relates to each of these "heresies"? We would have to deny Psalm 63:4 and I Timothy 2:8 (lifting of hands), I Tim. 2:1 and Phil. 4:6 (requests and prayers), I Corinthians 14 (tongues and orderly worship), and I Corinthians 1:26-2:5 (understandable message). Unless I am mistaken, the Reformed community still believes in the inerrancy and infallibility of the Word of God. It is here that the true tension exists within the church: that of the theological and the experiential Christian. Nowhere in Scripture are these two separated. Only in the hearts and minds of Christians who have been blinded by pride and arrogance has this division arisen. This is the problem of both sides.

There is a need to seek a balanced view between the Word and the Spirit, between Christology and pneumatology, between the intellectual and the experiential, between the Presence and the Power of the Holy Spirit.

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. prepared a report entitled "The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit" in 1971. It reads in part: "There are a number

of people in historic Protestant churches who have had an experience which they call 'baptism of (with, in) the Holy Spirit' (Reformed prefer 'full release of the power of the Holy Spirit'). This experience has been so meaningful and vivid to those who have gone through it that they have difficulty putting it into words: 'a new relationship, a deeper encounter, a closer walk.' Many speak of it primarily as an extraordinary sense of God's reality and presence, and lay claim to a praise and adoration of God hitherto unknown to them. At the same time they often testify to a new bond of community with those who have had the same experience, and a heightened desire and capacity to bear witness to the gospel. In all aspects of life they claim a deeper love, joy and peace. . .

... They usually disclaim an interest in the spectacular as such; rather their testimony is to the reality of God, a deeper awareness of His presence, and the wonder that the Holy Spirit has filled their being."

This report gives an excellent definition of those whom Tuininga considers to be an evil movement within the church. The question must be asked: What is un-Christian or un-biblical about these brothers and sisters in Christ who belong to the Reformed community of believers? Is the current tension within the church based on ignorance of one another, or upon our own stubbornness of wills? It is ironic that Tuininga mentions Revelation 3:3a in support of Scripture's admonition to the charismatics, when they cite Rev. 3:1-3 in showing the deadness of traditionalism. Must there be an either/or choice within the Reformed community? Again the Word of God gives us the answer in I Corinthians 3:3,9. "For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? . . . For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building." We all must search our hearts to find the answer to this question. For me, it is more appropriate to say both/and.

Mark A. Brunrsema, Director
One-Way House, Inc.
(Project of the Sunshine C.R. Church)
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Dear Editor:

I will answer very briefly to the two brothers. First to state that I am pleased with the response to my writing. We must evaluate carefully just what is happening among us and then be sure we are not being led astray. As I have openly expressed it, and naturally, that is my understanding of it, I see what is happening among us as a trend in an unreformed direction. If we understand Reformed rightly, that stands for our particular interpretation of the Scriptures.

It would be very helpful if those who claim to have received the "baptism" of the Holy Spirit would explain just what this means. Does that mean, for example that only a favoured few experience that, or do all those who truly believe receive that? I believe every true believer has received that baptism and with it the power of the Holy Spirit. I am very suspicious of those who claim more than that, that is, that this involves special gifts of tongues, healings, deeper love, joy and peace, etc. It sounds a long way from the true humility that should characterize God's children.

Rev. Arthur Besteman
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Zeeland, MI 49464

Surely it is not in my, or anyone else's, jurisdiction to judge whether men are saved or not. It is our business to test the spirits whether they are from God or not. Let me now repeat what I said before, that all change is not necessarily bad. But we must analyze the changes being introduced, why they are being introduced, and where they are leading us. I do not single out any specifics, but the overall direction, and that I fear greatly. As I have expressed it, we are losing our great Reformed heritage without any reasons given as to why. Or let me say it this way, it seems we do not care to ask why our forefathers developed the beautiful liturgies and just what their deeper meaning is for true worship. Before we change we should ask why, and if it is an improvement, or a losing of something most precious.

Having lived with, spoken to, and sought to understand the motivation, of aspirants to our present day innovations, I can come to no other conclusion than, that back of this trend lies an indifference to doctrine, a desire for theatricals, an attempt to bring life into what is judged to be a dead, traditionalistic church, in short, to effect a complete break with all liturgies and practices of the past. Yes, I do believe that very few know what it means to gather for worship. If they did, these innovations would soon end, for then it would be seen that we come together in the very presence of God to join mutually in praise, prayer, (receiving) hearing the Word proclaimed, and giving for the cause of God's Kingdom on earth. In other words, as covenant homes, units of a covenant church, we come fully prepared to worship our covenant God and thus we are all fully involved.

One final comment. It seems to me that those pushing for all these innovations want to go back to the confusion and disorder found in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 14:26).

Sincerely,

Cecial Tuininga, Edmonton, Alberta

TODAY'S HYPOCRISIES

It is probably asking too much to expect from a man whose lamentations concerning the Christian Reformed Church appear with tedious frequency that his interpretation of what he reads is always correct. I, therefore, pass over with a sort of benign neglect the inaccuracies in the Rev. Mr. J. Tuininga broadside entitled, "Today's Hypocrisies" in the February issue of your Journal.

However, I must protest a misconception that Mr. Tuininga seems to hold as to the role of Q & A in the Banner. I attempt to answer questions directed to me concisely, in the belief that these views are also in harmony with the teachings of God's Word. That every answer will not please every reader is a

given. That Mr. Tuininga finds many answers unpalatable is not surprising.

The function of Q & A, however, is to answer specific questions, not to make tempting detours on matters that, though they may be related, are not part of the question.

Our brother says that we have congregations who blatantly ignore and openly defy synodical decisions by having adjunct or associate female elders and that this is tolerated by our editor (W.D.B.) "without a whimper"; the same goes for a female "preacher" who occupies the pulpit in a Christian Reformed congregation in violation of all synodical rules.

The solution here is simple: no "whimper" has come from me, because these questions have not been asked. Since Mr. Tuininga is very likely not yet ready to claim omniscience, how does he know what my reaction would be to these matters? Want to try me, Jelle?

Fraternally,

William D. Buursma
Third Church
2400 Winchell
Kalamazoo, MI 49008

Reply to Rev Buursma:

Judging by the tone of your reply, Bill, I think my comments were quite on target. I can be blunt, but your reply is downright unkind and betrays a hurt ego.

Re the "tedious frequency" of "lamentations". I suggest you see I Kings 22:8b, 18; Isa. 30:10 and Jer. 6:14.

Yes, of course, you answer questions sent to you. But you know very well that is not quite so cut and dried a matter as you make it out to be. It gives you a good opportunity to let your biases come through, and one doesn't have to be particularly astute to note in your answers the direction from which you're coming. And that, of course, is your good right (within certain limitations). But when you then begin to editorialize and severely reprimand a congregation for ignoring synodical "encouragements," honesty and integrity would then demand that you also come down very hard on congregations who openly violate synodical decisions. The question at that point was inexcusable. That is the point I was trying to make, and still make.

J. Tuininga

A Good King Became Better

Josiah was one of the good kings of Judah. One might not have expected this because he was the son of Amon and the grandson of Manasseh. Yet when he became king, he undid the evil works of his father. Scripture says that he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in the ways of his ancestor David, I Kings 22:2. This was a great compliment!

But then Hilkiah, the high priest, discovered the book of the Law. Moses' writings were read, and the king was amazed. He thought he was religious; he thought he was faithfully fulfilling the will of God. He thought he was walking in the steps of David. But he saw he had fallen far short. He had been only semi-right but he now improved. He read the Word of God to the priests and to the people. He led the people in a return to the Lord. All the signs and symbols of the old idolatry were cleansed from the temple along with all the other symbols of false worship in the land. The Passover was once again celebrated as God had commanded. The writer of Kings says: "Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength." I Kings 23:25.

The application to today is obvious. Church bodies and church leaders generally do not intentionally do wrong or mislead people. Rather they do want to do what is right. When they place themselves on a line of continuum, they would judge themselves to be on the good end rather than on the bad end. They may be. But they also may be like Josiah who did good, but still fell short. It would be much better if they went to the Word of God for direction for their faith and life. Paul points out in II Timothy 3:15-17 that the Christian leader there finds all that he needs for his Christian faith and life. When the Word of God is completely followed, then church leaders become modern Josiahs. Such men the church needs today.

The deficiencies come from failing to follow completely the Word of God. Man certainly is not perfect, but God's Word is, as is the salvation in Christ which it proclaims. Josiah and his people were blessed when there was a complete return to the Word of God; the point for today is obvious. Church leaders should not judge themselves on the basis of what they think they are doing. They should judge themselves on the basis of God's Word. Then there will be present all of the blessings which God gives His Word. Partial service of God will become complete dedication. Then the praise of God and our gracious Savior will again echo through the church, and His people will find joy in His service.