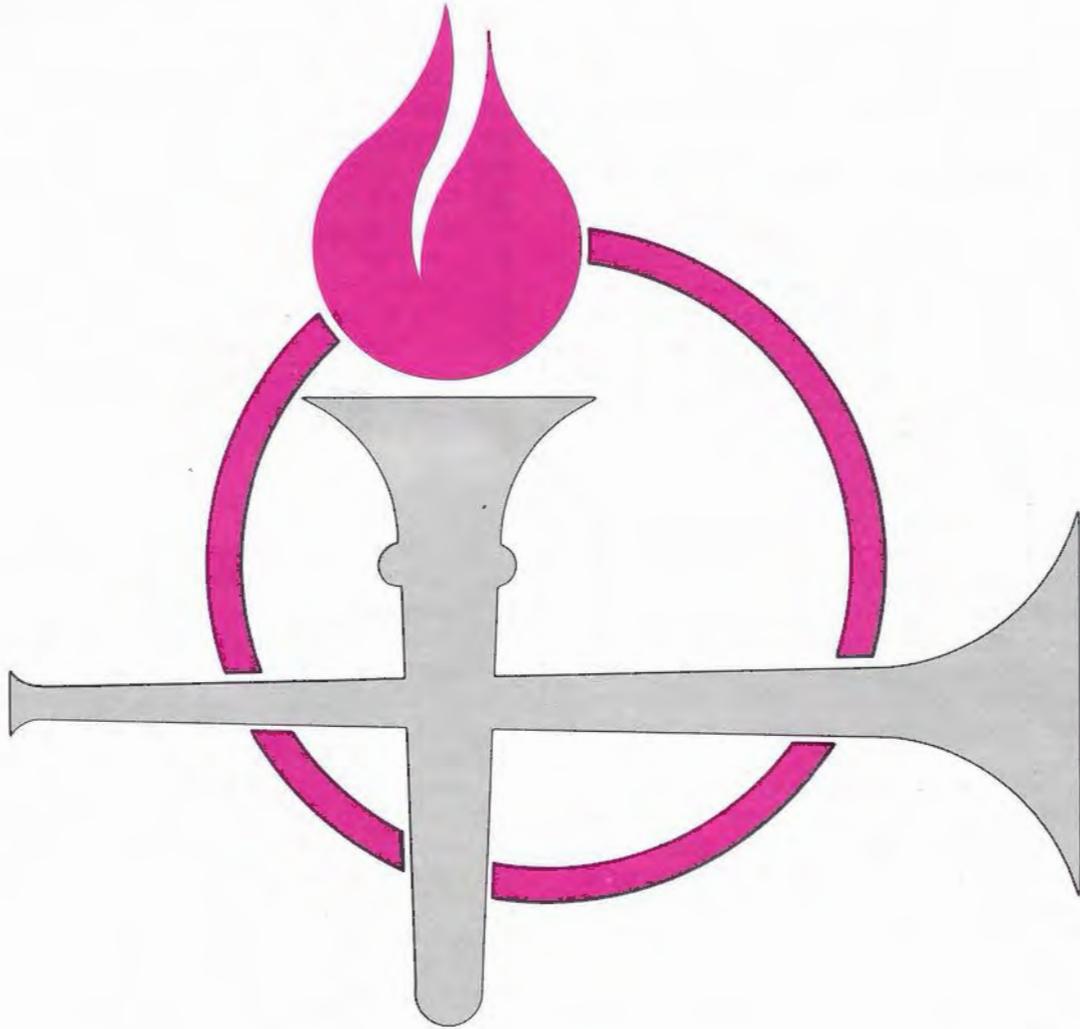


THE OUTLOOK

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

JULY-AUGUST 1986



CRC SYNOD
NECESSARY CHRISTIAN EDUCATION
OUR HERITAGE, PREDICAMENT AND FUTURE

Confidence in God's Complete Work

John Blankespoor

"Being confident that He who began a good work in you will carry it to completion until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

Fear and insecurity are common to man. Who is not often afraid? Small children are often frightened. Young People often fear the future in this constantly changing, dangerous world, threatened by nuclear war. Parents are afraid regarding their children. Old people become more afraid and insecure as they get closer to death. All people are too familiar with fears.

With all of our fears we must go to the Bible. It contains more than 350 passages that tell us, "Don't be afraid," "Fear not." In his letter to the Philippians, Paul speaks about the personal security every Christian may have. What the Lord has begun, He will never leave unfinished. He will complete it "until the day of Jesus Christ."

Assuming that all the readers of these words are Christians, each one of us can say to himself, "I am a child of God today." But what about tomorrow and the rest of my life? So much can happen. I in myself am very weak. Let no one boast that he cannot fall into grievous sin, or even fall away. Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. There are always our three mortal enemies, the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh. If I would face tests that many Christians and martyrs have faced, would I remain standing? Suppose that you or I would have to give our lives for the Lord, would we be willing and able to do that? Would we have the necessary strength and courage?

We all face death. More than once, as a pastor I have seen the undertaker lock the lid of the coffin and then see men let the coffin down into the cement vault, which is covered with a very heavy lid. The body is completely sealed in. The sight is terrifying. I don't want to be locked in like that down in the ground. Foolish thoughts? Perhaps they are. But they are real. And if the Lord tarries in coming back, our bodies will return to dust. Once I saw a coffin several hundred years old. In the side of it was a hole some three or four inches in diameter. With others, I took a peek inside. We saw nothing. Even though there was enough light inside, why didn't we see anything? Because there was nothing but a little dust. The body of that person had been reduced to nothing but a little dust that could be blown away by a puff of wind.

At the return of Christ we all will have to face the Judge of heaven and earth. The book of my life will be opened, showing all that I have ever done, said or even desired. All the evidence will be there. This lies in the future for us. To say the least, it is all frightening.

Amid these fears, God's Word gives us "good news." Paul says that he is confident that what the Lord has begun in us, He will complete "in the day of Jesus Christ."

The apostle speaks first of all of what the Lord "has begun" in us with regeneration, causing us to be born again. The Lord began this work in us, as Christians. We may never make of this some kind of cooperation between God and us, in which He did His part and we did ours. Neither was He dependent upon our free will to accept His salvation. He and He alone, began and worked it all in us, by His Spirit and Word. Of course, man is responsible; we have to believe, accept, receive — whatever words we want to use here — the Bible uses all of them. But all of that was the fruit of the Holy Spirit's work within us. Also here, without Him we can do nothing.

These words, what He has "begun in us," bring us to the present time of our lives. Now, what about the future? Our future must be viewed in the light of what the Lord has done in the past. There is comfort for us in the future, because of what He, the unchangeable God, has done for and in us in the past.

He will finish, will complete, what He has begun, says Paul. That means that from the present moment to the end of our lives, whenever that will be, and whatever the circumstances will be, He will keep us in the faith and never let go of us. It also means that He will carry out this work after we have died. At that moment of death He will take our souls into glory. Perhaps He will send His angels to take our souls into heaven, as they did with the soul of poor Lazarus.

He will also watch over our bodies in the graves. He won't even forget the dust of our bodies. As the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth, He will make most glorious bodies even out of dust. And we shall always be with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:17).

All this will take place in "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." It will be a day in which Christ will be made great. All will be centered around our great Savior. Why? Because all this will be His work and the fruit of His great, incredible love in saving us from the beginning to the very end of time.

Because of these truths the Lord says to us, hundreds of times, "Fear not."



All we can say now about our salvation is that there is a beginning. And it will remain that way through-

out our lives. The Heidelberg Catechism says that even the most holy in this life have "only a small beginning" of this new obedience.

When we see things that have only a beginning, we are not sure they "will make it." When one sees a small plant in a flower (or vegetable) garden there is often little hope that it will survive. That beginning is so small, and our hope of survival is determined by the size of the beginning. This is different. It is the work of the Lord. Therefore it is certain to succeed. It will be completed through the infinite mercy of our God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What a comfort this is for us, and what peace it gives.

The Lord wants us to live in this security and with this peace. Let no Christian ever despair, or live without hope. Our covenant God is faithful.

Does this mean that we can enjoy this comfort, regardless of how we live? Of course not. First of all, Christians may not talk this way. They love the Lord and don't become indifferent about living for Christ. But all Christians can fall into sin. Think of David and Peter. And sin is never cheap, not for God's people either. But the Lord brought them back. What does all that say to us today? This, that even though we may fall into sin, we may be assured that our faithful God will not let the devil conquer us. He will bring His own back, somehow, and at His time. Sometimes that may take years. But come back, they will.

The Lord wants us to persevere, to continue in the way of faith, and to fight the battles of faith. And when we do this we must realize that we can persevere because He is preserving us.

God's ways are different from ours. Many times among us, it cannot be said that what we have begun, we will also finish. We may lose interest in the project we have begun. We may also lose or lack the courage to continue. Perhaps we won't be able to continue for some reason or other. There may also be insurmountable barriers that hinder us from finishing what we have begun. The truth is that often we just can't complete what we have begun. For the natural man everything leads to death. Man's life is "in bondage" to the vanity of death. Everything man undertakes is subject to death and "vexation of spirit," says Solomon.

What a comfort we have in this changing and scary world! What a comfort this is for the church and for us as individuals! And what a comfort this is for parents when they know that their children are also children of God! And what a comfort for people of God when they reach the evening of life!

I remember a saint, old and feeble, who could no longer walk. He had cancer and his wife had preceded him in death. He said to me, "I really have nothing left in life, except one thing, the great promises of God."

He knew the truth expressed in this beautiful text. He knew that God is the "Rock" of all ages. Thank You, Lord.

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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SYNOD 1986

The Synod of the Christian Reformed Church met from June 10 to June 19, 1986, at the Fine Arts Building on the campus of Calvin College in Grand Rapids. This was preceded by the Prayer Service for Synod in the Plymouth Heights Christian Reformed Church the night before, conducted by the Rev. Wilbert M. Van Dyk. The delegates of 41 classes (soon to be 42) gathered, with only a few alternates taking the place of the originally elected persons, to be constituted the 1986 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church.

After electing the Rev. Jacob Eppinga president on the first ballot, and the Rev. Bastiaan Nederlof vice-president, and the Rev. Milton Doornbos and the Rev. Lugene Bazuin first and second clerk respectively, synod began its work. Although there were some important decisions to be made by synod in 1986, it was not a synod that had a large emotional issue on its agenda which would engage it in discussion for an entire day and fill the auditorium with interested listeners. From a certain point of view this was a housekeeping synod, but a somewhat impatient one, inasmuch as the most frequently made motion was the motion "to call the question", or "cease debate." It was a synod composed of some 90 first-time delegates, plus an additional 30 delegates that had attended 1 previous synod. It was a synod whose committees were methodical and thorough, although some matters were referred back to committee. It was a synod that assumed (or at least conducted its business as if) all things were normal in the denomination and the entire church was completely united on all issues and in all respects. It was a synod that appeared to have determined beforehand what it was going to do, and that was meeting to accomplish just that. It was a synod, therefore, that was, from a certain point of view, pleasant to attend, although the undersigned attended with a certain sense of unease and pressure, conscious of the tensions in the denomination.

In view of the fact that synods are more completely reported on in more than one publication available to the churches than was formerly the case, we will give a rundown on some of the important things that happened at synod without going into a great deal of detail. A number of significant appointments were made by this synod which will have influence in and on the denomination for years to come. We will enumerate them first of all:

Rev. Andrew Kuyvenhoven was reappointed to another four-year term as editor of *The Banner*. The matter came up early in the deliberations of synod, and even though some discussion had been held with Rev. Kuyvenhoven in the advisory committee about his style of editorship, nothing was said on the floor of synod, and the recommendation for reappointment was adopted without any comment.

Dr. Harvey Smit and **Mr. Gary Mulder**, each for four-years, as Theological Editor and Director of Education and Executive Director of Christian Reformed Publications respectively, insuring that the present policies being followed by the Board of Publications will continue.

Rev. Wilbert M. Van Dyk, as Academic Dean of Calvin Theological Seminary, for a period of three years, with a concurrent academic appointment as Assistant Professor of Homiletics. This was easily one of the more emotional appointments that synod made. The *Grand Rapids Press* reported, in a front page article, that "Much of the discussion revolved around the 56-year-old minister's views on the controversial issue of whether women should be ordained to preach in the 305,000 member CRC." "Also part of the debate, and one of the reasons for a half-hour executive session, was the fact that Leanne Van Dyk, the minister's daughter, was reprimanded last year by the Calvin Seminary officials for preaching before a congregation in Los Angeles." From the same article: "I am unhappy with what my daughter did. She knows that. I sent her a long and vigorous letter. What she did was obviously against church rules," Van Dyk said." Again quoting from *The Press*: "I don't believe it is a sin for women to preach, although it is against our regulation. . . ." "If I were all by myself on a desert island and reading scripture, I would see there is evidence on both sides of this issue. . . . As I say, if I was alone, I think I'd come to the conclusion that the scripture moves toward more openness, beyond master and slave, beyond men and women. It leads toward men and women both using their gifts.'" The vote was 136-24 to approve his appointment.

Rev. John Rozeboom, as Executive Director (formerly Executive Secretary) of Home Missions. In his interview before the entire synod, Rev. Rozeboom stated he is optimistic about future growth in the Christian Reformed Church, and will continue to promote the work of evangelism in new and established churches. His appointment was for an initial two-year period.

Rev. Dirk Hart and **Rev. Alfred E. Mulder**, for 4 years each, as Director of Evangelism and Director of Field Ministries respectively, for the Board of Home Missions. Each is already serving in that capacity for the Board, the Rev. Hart for a longer period than Rev. Mulder.

Rev. Harold Bode and **Rev. Peter Niewiek**, one for a four-year term, the other for a two-year term, as Executive Director and Assistant Executive Director respectively, of the Chaplain's Committee. These men promote the chaplaincy in various areas as hospital chaplaincy, military chaplaincy, industrial chaplaincy, keep contact with the men and their families that serve in this capacity, and endeavor to serve them in various circumstances of need. This is an area of ministry that has and is growing, and more persons are serving in this way.

Mr. Bing Goei, as Executive Director of the Synodical Committee on Race Relations (SCORR), which, as a News Release of the 1986 synod said, is a denominational agency whose purpose is to

challenge the churches to minister effectively in the racial diversity of North American society. Mr. Goei, a native of Indonesia, has lived in America since 1960, and currently owns a wholesale florist business in Grand Rapids. He has served as chairman of the Committee for Race Relations since 1982. In his interview before synod, Goei said he believes it is important for the CRC to strive for multi-racial diversity in our local congregations. . . "I believe that when opportunity affords itself to invite and to witness to the community that is multi-ethnic in diversity, (the church) must do so." Mr. Goei, his wife Jean, and their five children are members of the East Leonard Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. His appointment is for two years.

Rev. William Van Tol, as Executive Director of World Missions. Rev. Van Tol previously served as secretary for African missions in the Board of World Missions. In his interview before synod Rev. Van Tol stated: "I see in the Christian Reformed Church an enormous desire to announce the gospel to the world through our agency as well as others. It is my responsibility to inspire missionaries by encouraging them to be men and women of God, committed first of all to the high calling of evangelization." This initial appointment is for a period of two years, beginning September 1, 1986. Rev. Van Tol has been serving as acting director of the Board (Committee) of World Missions.

Dr. Roger Greenway, as Executive Director of World Ministries, from a nomination which included the Rev. Peter Borgdorff. As Executive Director of the church's new Board of World Ministries, Dr. Greenway will try to bring peace to a pair of church mission agencies that have in recent years been at odds with one another over a variety of matters. He is quoted in *The Grand Rapids Press*, of Wednesday, June 18, 1986, as saying, "I hope to restore confidence in the church's mission outreach, a confidence that has been deteriorating. People have been disturbed by what has been going on in the agencies. I will work hard at rebuilding trust." Dr. Greenway is presently professor of missions at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, the author of nine books on missions, and a former missionary to Sri Lanka and Mexico. His initial term is for three years.

These appointments covered a wide spectrum of the denominations' life and activity, although they will all, with the exception of Rev. Van Dyk, be serving in the denominational building, most of them directing programs which involve the church in our own land and around the world. They will influence these programs, and the confidence the church has in them.

We list some of the more significant synodical decisions, without regard to the chronological order of synodical action. They are significant in the effect they will have on the denomination for years to come.

Children and the Lord's Supper: synod was asked to consider the question of admitting children and youth to the Lord's Supper. After two years of study by a special committee, which resulted in three reports with differing recommendations, and two hours of discussion on the floor of synod, it was decided to refer

the report back to the committee for further study. All three reports move in the direction of earlier participation of covenant children at the Lord's Supper, although the majority report recommended that profession of faith be made before participation at the Lord's Supper is allowed. The advisory committee stated in its report to synod that the fact that there were three reports is evidence that there are differences about the nature of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and what the biblical requirements are for participation and that that in itself supports the need for a further study. It was decided a continued evaluation of the issue of covenant children partaking of the Lord's Supper should be made, taking into consideration the relationship of the Lord's Supper to the Passover, the history of children's participation in the Lord's Supper, a study of certain scriptural passages, biblical requirements for participation in the Lord's Supper, the relationship of the Lord's Supper to the covenant, and the relationship of the Lord's Supper to public confession of faith. It appeared that synod was happy to be able to take care of this particular issue without making a decision that would arouse strong feelings either pro or con.

Use and Abuse of Alcohol and other Drugs: This was easily an issue that caused as much discussion and debate at synod as any other. A long and complete report on the issue was presented to synod by a committee that has been working on the matter for a couple of years. No one disagreed with the committee's conclusion that the problem is much more pervasive than many recognize or are willing to admit. Hesitation arose when synod as asked to decide, with the committee, that alcoholism is a disease. Most often alcoholism has been equated with drunkenness. And in view of the fact that the Bible sets forth a clear prohibition of drunkenness (I Cor. 6:10), it is understandable that the church has viewed alcoholism basically as a moral issue. The committee says, "It is not true that alcoholism is the same as drunkenness and that drunkenness is the same as alcoholism." And again, "Alcoholism is a primary disease. It is not a symptom of another problem. It is a progressive disease characterized by distinct stages and specific recognizable symptoms" (Agenda of Synod, pp. 386,387). Again, "While he (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. 388). It was over this that synod hesitated for a time, but it seemed that the weight of evidence was in favor of the study committee's position, and synod finally adopted the entire report. Whether the study committee's position is biblically warranted will be discussed further.

Translation of the Canons of Dordt: synod seemed to have little difficulty in proceeding to adopt the new translation of the Canons of Dordt. The advisory committee had numerous changes in form and titles which were recommended to synod and adopted, but no questions as to the new translation itself. Synod adopted this translation, with a new introduction, and decided to continue the translation committee "until this translation has been published in the liturgical materials of our denomination." They are given the

privilege of close consultation with CRC Publications in the various stages of production in preparing this translation for publication because of the importance of this document and the concern and competency of the committee in this aspect of their work. This was one of the easier decisions that synod was called to make.

Contemporary Testimony: It was observed by the advisory committee that it was obvious that this document is of great interest to the churches. The committee which prepared it received a high number of responses to their work, three overtures were addressed to synod about the testimony, and delegates to synod expressed their comments to the advisory committee. The advisory committee concluded that the revisions that had been made were mostly improvements, but that the basic themes, style, and format of the material in the testimony have been left intact, and that the revisions did not substantively alter the 1983 draft of the documents which had been provisionally approved by the synod of that year, and for that reason there were no good grounds to delay further the adoption of the Testimony as had been requested in the Overtures. After a number of editorial changes were adopted by synod, suggested by the advisory committee, the motion was: "That synod give final approval to the Contemporary Testimony 'Our World Belongs to God' as a testimony of faith for our times, subordinate to our creeds and confessions." The grounds are as follows:

- a. Current society, becoming pervasively secular, presents both dangers and challenges to the church. . . dangers and challenges not focused on in the Reformed creeds. Acts of Synod 1977, p. 89.
- b. A contemporary testimony can guide and direct the church in remaining truly Reformed, and in speaking to the current world situation. Acts of Synod 1977, p. 89.
- c. The Synod of 1983 gave provisional approval to a version of this testimony which was substantially the same as this document. The churches have had three years to evaluate this testimony. The document as now presented includes a number of changes and improvements in response to the many suggestions received.
- d. This document is true to the Scriptures and our confessions, and is helpful in expressing our faith in a contemporary manner.

This motion was adopted by synod. The biblical and confessional references were also approved, and will be placed in the margins next to relevant lines in the Testimony. The "Commentary on Contemporary Issues" prepared by the Testimony committee is to be presented to the church as a helpful guideline for the discussion of current issues in the church. Although a number of "improvements" were made to the Testimony in response to suggestions received by the committee, the language, in many instances, is less than precise, and the word choice unfortunate. But it seemed that synod had made up its mind that this was the year for the adoption of the Testimony and it was not to be deterred from doing so.

Psalter Hymnal Revision: One of the major items on the agenda of synod was the revised Psalter Hymnal which is to be released in May 1987. Synod spent a considerable amount of time during the second week singing the proposed selections as the delegates were asked to approve both new and revised texts and tunes. Almost all of the proposed selections presented by the Revision committee were approved. Synod voted to retain nine hymns for the present Psalter Hymnal which had been scheduled for deletion. So this year synod approved the 150 musical setting for the biblical psalms and approximately 80 additional hymns and Bible songs. These psalms and hymns, along with the 450 hymns and Bible songs approved by last year's synod, will comprise the new Psalter Hymnal. Numerous items were referred back to the Psalter Hymnal revision committee and, in view of the fact that publication is scheduled before the synod of 1987, final approval to the book and the changes mandated by this synod will have to be given, by decision of synod, by the Synodical Interim Committee. I think this is a mistake. I think that synod itself, which is responsible for the song book that is used in the churches, should have a final look at the book before it is published. And even though two synods have gone through the process of approving the songs to be included, in reality it is a book of the revision committee, and it is they who have determined what the church will and will not sing for the next generation. I am fearful that many of the psalms will not be sung, especially in the American sector of the denomination.

In 1984 CRC Publications requested and received permission to review and edit the liturgical materials to be included in the back of the new Psalter Hymnal. Several changes were proposed and adopted in 1985. Subsequent to that time, the CRC Publications Board came to the realization that no systematic examination of the liturgical materials had been undertaken and that prior to the publication of the new Psalter Hymnal such an examination would be advisable. It also became apparent that the final opportunity for such an examination and editing would be in 1986 since the Psalter Hymnal is scheduled for publication in 1987. It was felt by the CRC Publications Board that a closer scrutiny of all the liturgical materials would provide more uniformity in them. It was further realized that, while no group had been mandated to do this work, this was not only the final opportunity for it to be done, but CRC Publications was the appropriate agency to do it. The first recommendation was: That synod consider updating the language used in the Apostle's Creed and Nicene Creed so as to make it conform to the standards of vernacular (nonarchaic) language that have been used in revising the psalms and hymns and the liturgical forms. And "for the sake of consistency within the new book," the creeds were "updated," a committee was appointed to "update" the language of the Heidelberg Catechism (so as to make it conform to the standards of vernacular (nonarchaic) language that have been used in revising the psalms and hymns and the liturgical forms), that the liturgical forms approved in 1985 be reconsidered in order to make further changes, that the NIV be used for all Scripture quotations in the Heidelberg Catechism and liturgical

forms as well as the edited version of the Apostle's Creed, and that additional editing changes be made in all the liturgical forms used in the churches to modernize further the language. And to the request that liturgical forms #1 (i.e., the "old" forms) be included also, synod said "no." Nothing in the church is outside the pale of CRC Publications! Nothing is to be spared from its mania for "update"! And this synod was not even willing to take the time to go through the items one by one. After a few of the items had been considered, a motion was made to approve the remainder of the items in one action. And this was done eagerly. The denomination is being pushed into the 21st century rapidly!

Constitution of the Board of World Ministries: Since 1983 the World Missions and Relief Commission has been at work to unify and coordinate the work of two denominational agencies, the Board for World Missions and the World Relief Committee. Coordinating the programs of both agencies on the field has proven difficult in recent years when members of both agencies work together in the same locale. The commission recommended a unifying structure of one Board of World Ministries, under which the two independent agencies would become committees for missions and relief. The World Missions and Relief Commission presented to synod this year a proposed constitution for the Board of World Ministries and synod spent a considerable amount of time on the first Saturday morning discussing that constitution. Controversy centered on whether the constitution should require one director to be in charge of an overseas field, or whether two directors, one from World Missions and one from World Relief, should supervise a field of work. Synod amended the proposed constitution to allow the Board of World Ministries and its Director Dr. Roger S. Greenway, to determine the number of field directors, and then adopted the constitution. This does not promise, however, that all the disagreements on the various fields where the two agencies work will be resolved. We understand that there is an undercurrent of dissatisfaction among the personnel of the two agencies because of the structure that has been imposed on them, and the number of persons to whom they must now answer. A great deal of time, effort, and expense has been expended in seeking a solution to this problem of disagreement between the two agencies, but whether we have found the best solution to this problem remains to be seen.

Service Committee for Ministry with Retarded Persons: This committee dates back to 1978. The committee was reappointed in 1979, 1982, and 1983. This committee requested Synod 1986 to change its status from that of a service committee, which depends on periodical renewal for its existence, to that of a standing committee which would continue its work year after year. Dr. Thomas Hoeksema, chairman of the committee, argued that the needs and opportunities for ministry to persons with mental impairments has increased substantially, and that these needs require the ongoing attention of a more permanent standing committee. Synod decided that this committee should be granted the status of a standing committee, gave it per-

mission to engage a full-time director or administrative coordinator, but did not grant the request for a quota of \$1.25, but gave them only \$.25 for the year 1987.

World Literature Committee: Since 1982 this committee has translated and published church-related literature in five major languages. In recent years the work of the committee has expanded to include five subcommittees and a budget of \$350,000.00. The Committee requested that their work be reassigned to CRC Publications for a period of five years, and then be re-evaluated as to the effectiveness of the merger. Synod also approved the appointment of a committee to provide the necessary translations (in a bilingual, English/non-English format) of our confessional standards and the Church Order for the non-English-speaking congregations of the Christian Reformed Church. This committee would arrange for such translations by working with small satellite committees of the various linguistic groups to produce these translations. Priority is to be given to the translation of the Heidelberg Catechism and the Church Order into Navaho, Spanish, Korean, and Chinese, with the committee being authorized to determine future priorities.

Clergy Silence: This has to do with confidential information received by those who serve the church in an official capacity as pastors, chaplains or elders. They are sometimes made aware of information that might be used in court against them and/or their counselees. Those who serve the church in an official capacity are increasingly vulnerable to challenges concerning their right to silence regarding certain communications which transpire between them and another person. The possibility of legal action is growing due to the litigious mind-set of Western society. So synod decided to appoint a committee to study the legal and ecclesiastical ramifications of clergy receiving confidential information and remaining silent about that information.

Reformed Churches in South Africa: The issue of apartheid and the Reformed Church in South Africa, a major issue for last year's synod, also claimed considerable time for this synod. The previous synod had informed the RCSA that the official relationship between that denomination and the CRC was in "grave danger" of being disrupted because of the support which the South African Church gave to apartheid. Synod of 1985 called for the relationship to be reevaluated by the synod of 1989. The committee appointed to communicate with the South African church, however, expressed frustration with the South African church for not responding to the committee's actions and communications. Synod therefore mandated the Joint Committee on South Africa to "quicken and intensify the pace of discussions" between the CRC and RCSA in order that the South African church will recognize that without meaningful change it would be almost impossible to maintain an official fellowship between the two churches after 1989. Representatives of the Interchurch Relations Committee expect to visit South Africa this fall.

Clayton Libolt: Among the names of the seminarians presented to synod for declaration of candidacy was the name of Clayton Libolt. As has been pointed out

before, Mr. Libolt requested candidacy from the synod of 1981, and after examination by synod itself, was refused this candidacy. This year his name again appeared among those requesting candidacy, and being assured by the advisory committee that Mr. Libolt has satisfied them concerning those matters on the basis of which his candidacy had been withheld previously, the candidacy was approved along with 38 others.

The Use of the Lot: Although most CRC congregations use the majority vote to elect elders and deacons, in recent years some congregations have used the method of casting lots to select elders and deacons. Synod was asked to consider two matters concerning the use of the lot. First, synod was asked to make a judgment concerning an appeal made by three members of the Mayfair CRC of Grand Rapids. The three members objected to the use of the lot for the selection of elders and deacons in their congregation. Neither the local church council nor a broader church body (Classis Grand Rapids North) sustained the objection of these members, although two study committees of Classis recommended that Classis should sustain their objection against the use of the lot in their congregation. Synod, however, after examining the matter, did sustain the appeal of the three members of Mayfair CRC. Secondly, synod was asked to declare that the method of selecting elders and deacons be left to the discretion of the churches. This would have allowed a greater degree of freedom to local congregations in the methods used for choosing elders and deacons. Synod, however, on the last evening of their deliberations, refused to make a decision on the matter, but referred it to the Church Polity Committee of the Synodical Interim Committee for a report to the synod of 1987.

Overture 23, Classis Zeeland: There were two references at synod with respect to the decisions of 1984 and 1985 opening the office of deacon to qualified women. This one was a protest of Bethel Church, Waupun, Wisconsin, concerning the amendment of Church Article 3. Synod simply took note of the protest and received it for information in view of the fact that synod 1984 left the implementation of its decision concerning women deacons to the judgment of the local consistories. The other was the overture of Classis Zeeland concerning the grounds given by the synod of 1985 in rejecting the protests and appeals that had been addressed to that synod, requesting that synod sustain those protests and appeals and declare that the office of deacon is not open to women. The matter did not reach the floor of synod until 8:30 p.m. on the last night of synod. The recommendation was not to accede to Overture 23. Synod discussed the matter very briefly, without a due consideration, and someone "called for the question." And that was that. Synod did not desire to discuss the matter; it is, as far as synod is concerned, a settled issue. We go on from there. It was compared to the discussion at one time between the individual cup at communion over against the common cup, and it was stated that it was merely a matter of practice.

Summary: Much more business than is described in this account was transacted at synod. Some decisions

were made without any discussion at all. But it was not a synod characterized by theological precision; it appears that the interest is in the broader life of the denomination. But whether this augers well for us as a Reformed denomination, maintaining creeds and confession, is difficult to see. We pray that God will enable us to be faithful to our heritage!

Rev. Edward J. Knott is pastor of the Forest Grove Christian Reformed Church, and a delegate to the 1986 synod from Classis Zeeland.

BUREAUCRACY IN THE CRC: CAUSE/CURE (2)

Lester DeKoster

The CRC is bureaucracy-ridden.

How come?

Well, once upon a time a bureau, or board, or agency, or committee was created to get a job done. Work was projected for an executive and staff; funds were provided by the parent body.

Once in place, who was strong enough to disrupt so cozy an arrangement?

The agency found more and more for itself to do, requiring ever more people to do it, and ever more funds to keep all running smoothly. The Church was persuaded to go along, though this might sometimes require a public relations agent who funnels more and more propaganda with less and less information out into the denomination. The bureau has become, perhaps almost accidentally, a bureaucracy.

Now, what's wrong with that?

What's wrong is that giving the Church over to bureaucracy is undoing the work of the Reformation. And if the Reformation was right, as judged by the word of God, then returning to bureaucracy is wrong.

The Reformation was fought to transfer the seat of authority in the Church from the hands of a bureaucratic hierarchy into the hands of the lay eldership elected to office by the membership. This was a momentous transformation. Not because such a transfer was some whim of the Reformers, especially Calvin. Not at all. But because this is the polity, that is the form of church government, established by the Bible.

This is how Reverend Idzerd Van Dellen, whom we have quoted before, puts it as regards one example:

"In process of years our Home Missions were more and more centralized in the Board with headquarters in Grand Rapids, Michigan. True, the local Church still calls the missionaries, but they work under the supervision of the Board and are directed by that body. The calling Church and its consistory functions as a servant of the Board. Even Classis has very little to say in Home Missions matters. . . .

"We believe that this is contrary to our Reformed Church polity. The consistory and Classis lose their place and their right. The present system gives more and more power to a committee of Synod, and has a tendency to create "bishops" or "superintendents," who are called to supervise their fellow ministers and even consistories and Classes" (p. 98).

This, then, is what is wrong with bureaucracy: it "is contrary to our Reformed Church polity," that is contrary to the rules and regulations set down by the Lord for the governing of His Body. What this sage student of Reformed Church polity would, were he living, have to say about the web of bureaucracy in which the CRC is now entangled would be interesting and instructive to hear.

Observe carefully what is at issue here. It is not whether you or I happen to like bureaucracy, though in fact I don't.

The issue is not, either, whether you or I care for bureaucrats, though many tend to be dubious about them.

The issue as suggested by Van Dellen is this, and it is very important: May we believe, on the basis of the Word and our tradition that bureaucracy is the Lord's way of wanting His Body's work done in the world? That is, does the Bible teach that through bureaucrats runs the route the Lord chooses to build His Church and mold history? Or, again, among the offices instituted by the Lord in the Church is there also the office of bureaucrat?

Student that he was of Reformed Church order, Reverend Van Dellen obviously did not think so. Not as his own view, but as the teaching of Scripture.

I suppose we might say that if the Lord wanted to work by way of bureaucracy, then He would not have brought a Reformation into the Church.

At the time of the Reformation the Roman Catholic Church was, as it still is, one massive bureaucracy. The bureaucrats held all the power; the people paid all the bills. And anyone who dared to question that arrangement stood a good chance of cooking at the stake. But the Body of Christ languished in the world, to become a powerful instrument of justice and progress only through Reformation, that is through being re-formed according to God's Word.

And, in terms of Church government, what reformation was made?

In this reformation, one of the most important in Western history, the power of bureaucracy was destroyed, and government in the Church came into the hands of those designated by the Lord to exercise it, namely the eldership elected to consistories in local congregations. Thus the Church not only entered upon a new era of strength and vitality, but set the

pattern for the freedom that brought immense political and material progress.

It is the Reformed tradition which more than any other transferred the seat of authority in the Church from a bureaucracy to the people. That is a heritage jealously to be preserved. It was the famous Consistory of Geneva which became a model for both ecclesiastical and political structures in the Western world. That is a model which the world still needs.

Reformed polity perceives the unifying stream of divinely ordained authority as entering the Church, so to say, from the bottom up, not by way of bureaucracy operating from the top down. The point is important: authority rightly exercised is a unifying force. Abused by bureaucracy, authority is stripped by the Lord of its unifying power. Illustration of this is all about us.

What, then, was precisely the Church government issue fought out to displace bureaucracy?

At issue was — and still is — how the Lord chooses to rule His Church.

The Lord wills to rule His Church, Calvin was fond of saying, with the scepter of His Word. That scepter invalidates Catholic polity because the Word in no way endorses bureaucracy as the appointed means for getting the Church's work done. There is no office of bureaucrat designated by the Word.

Rather the Word points to the consistory, the body of the ruling eldership, as the divinely designated seat of the Lord's authority in His Church.

That is not an idle or theoretical principle.

In the consistory of the local congregation, as composed of the ruling eldership elected to office by the membership, the Lord lodges both the authority and the responsibility — they are correlative — for all that the Church does in Christ's name, and thus with anticipation of His blessing.

Precisely, then, what did the Reformation, especially the Calvinist wing of the Reformation, effect in Church polity?

Just this: the lay consistory, elected by each congregation, is required to assume full responsibility for what the Church says and does, and is given authority commensurate with that awesome obligation.

This principle invalidates bureaucracy.

Why?

Because whatever is done by the Church must be done under the jurisdiction of the local consistory. What avoids or evades such scrutiny and supervision, as bureaucracy does, cannot be the doing of the Church.

This is a principle that Rome understands right well, however misapplied by the Catholic bureaucracy. What is done by the Roman Catholic Church is done by authority and under the supervision of the hierarchy — else it is not ecclesiastical. All authority, and thus all responsibility, belongs finally with the Pope, who expressly thinks of himself as "Christ's vicar" (Christ as present) in history.

The Reformation retained the principle, but took from the Bible a very different content.

In Reformed polity what is done by the Church, as Church, must be done by authority and under the supervision of the local consistory. Else 'tis not done by the Church of Jesus Christ.

This, of course, is what Reverend Van Dellen means when he warns that Boards operating outside the scope of consistorial supervision violate Reformed polity. Bureaucracy seeks support as if it were the Church in action while declining the consistorial supervision which alone validates such a claim.

It follows that bureaucracies may be very busy, and may spend lots of money, even throw considerable weight around, but the more they evade consistorial jurisdiction the less they act as the Church! This was at issue in the Reformation.

This is what is fundamentally wrong with bureaucracy.

And there is more.

In a time of bureaucracy it is easily forgotten that there are two kinds of authority, original and delegated authority. The distinction is decisive.

Each local consistory is endowed by our Lord with original, or inherent, authority. The consistory is the seat of the authority in the Church, as the Reformation understands the Bible, just as the Pope is the seat of authority in the Roman Catholic Church as that bureaucracy understands tradition.

Both Catholic and Reformed polity perceive that divinely given authority is inalienable.

This underlies Van Dellen's criticism of a grasping for power by a denominational board.

What does "inalienable" mean?

Quite simply, it means that what God has given, no one can either give or take away. What God joins let none sunder. God will frustrate those who try, and that is why bureaucracy sows confusion in the Church.

Recall for a moment that the American Declaration of Independence speaks of God's endowing men with "inalienable rights." What were those learned men thinking of?

They meant two things, really. What God gives, 1) the recipient cannot give away; and 2) another cannot take away. An effort to do either can only counterfeit the gift and surely encounters divine displeasure.

So it is, as Reformed polity understands the Bible, with the authority lodged by the Lord in the local consistory. It cannot be given away; it may not be usurped. None may presume to act with consistorial authority.

Consistories may, indeed, shortchange the Lord. They may abdicate responsibility for what is done in the name of the Church—and into such vacuums bureaucracies make their way. A consistory may be tricked or threatened into yielding a spurious authority to other hodies. But nothing changes the essence of the polity reaffirmed by the Reformation: Christ works through the local consistory in exercising His authority in the Church. I need hardly remind you — though I am fond of recalling it — that so long as this

view governed ecclesiastical behavior, the Reformed churches were powerful forces in the world.

Bureaucracy has its own way of avoiding an accounting to local consistories. It turns to the "higher" bodies as easier to manipulate.

So we must ask, briefly, what then of the authority allotted to so-called "higher" (the term should always be "broader"—the highest body in the Church is, obviously, the local consistory) bodies, like classes and synods?

Classes and synods have no original authority. This is illustrated by the fact that classes and synods come and go.

Theirs is but a "delegated" authority usually spelled out in the Church Order. That is, consistories may delegate specifically limited powers to broader bodies, such as classes and synods, but cannot give away original authority. This means that consistories cannot devolve upon classes or synods, and these may not try to exercise, the right to command consistorial obedience. Consistories may not, as Van Dellen implies, be made the tools of other interests, neither classical, nor synodical, nor bureaucratic. It is important to remember this as bureaucracy makes increasing use of broader bodies to try to mandate quota and other demands upon local churches.

Bear in mind, then, whenever bureaucracy is discussed, the mistake of thinking of classes or synods as "higher" bodies. They are bodies of limited authority, delegated to them by local consistories for specific purposes. Classes and synods are by design, as noted just above, bodies of limited duration. Each classis or synod is a new classis or synod, a system intended to prevent the creation of a ruling hierarchy. And when, incidentally, we try to build some kind of bridge between synods by the creation of a synodical interim committee we do obvious bureaucratic violence to our own polity and tradition. Just as when the structure of a forthcoming synod is manipulated by unelected persons, or influenced by unelected advisors.

As Reverend Van Dellen implies, original authority cannot take two or more forms in the same community, lest there be inevitable confusion. And if the Reformation was sure of anything in this matter of church polity, it was sure that God is not a God who promotes, or endures, confusion.

But over the centuries prior to the Reformation an elitist priesthood usurped the elders' guardianship so effectively that it required a Reformation to get at least some of the bureaucracy off some of the people's backs.

We have come in the CRC to where we, too, must move ahead to a similar re-formation. How we might at least try to do so will occupy us next time.

Happily we have the historical Reformation in our genes, and the future open before us.

Dr. Lester DeKoster, a former Calvin College professor and editor of The Banner, lives at Grand Rapids, Michigan.

For 35 years since April/May, 1951 the Reformed Fellowship through its publication, first called *Torch and Trumpet* and later changed to *Outlook*, has championed the cause of a Biblically Reformed testimony and church. By the grace of God, its needs have been supplied through loyal members and supporters. While for a time it seemed that we were almost the only journalistic voice in our circles that was still speaking out in this way, recently our efforts have been joined by those of Mid-America Reformed Seminary, of *Christian Renewal*, and now of Concerned Members of the CRC. For this increasing support of a common cause, we thank God.

In an effort to reach as many readers as possible, the Fellowship has tried through the years to keep its subscription cost down, supplying the difference between expenses and income through donations. In April *Outlook* we began a campaign to enlarge our readership by offering a three-month complimentary subscription to anyone our readers thought might be interested.

This and other means of promotion are absolutely necessary in order to maintain and increase our subscription list and they add to the drain on our resources. At present we have sufficient funds to publish one more issue and we're at a time of the year that our income is at its minimum. To those who love our Biblical Reformed Faith, we believe that the 35-year effort of the Reformed Fellowship in its publication of the *Outlook* gives abundant reason for asking for additional support. Whether you are able to give little or much — please give!

The Board of the Reformed Fellowship

Who Am I?

Glenn P. Palmer

When you hear the word "Levite," what image comes to your mind? Perhaps a robed man with a turban helping with a sacrifice in the temple? Or a holy man offering incense? You surely do not think of a warrior ready for battle.

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai and witnessed the idolatry in which the people were "running wild," He commanded the Levites to strap on their swords and kill the people. The Levites rallied to the Lord's side, and about 3,000 were killed that day.

At Balaam's advice, the Moabite women began to seduce the Israelites, and God's anger burned against those Israelites. Then Zimri, the son of Salu, the leader of a Simeonite family, had the audacity (and stupidity) to appear before Moses and all the people with Cozbi, the daughter of Zur, a tribal chief of a Midianite family. (Aren't you glad that I did not ask you for those names?)

Because I was as zealous as the Lord was for His name, I took a spear and I chased them to their tent. I "drove the spear through both of them—through the

Israelite and into the woman's body. Then the plague against the Israelites was stopped. . . ."

Because of my killing of the breakers of the law, God made a covenant with me and my family, and since then we became priests of God. Who am I?



I live in a coastal village of some renown, for it is from my home town that Jonah fled toward Tarshish. I am a rather unusual figure in the Bible, for it says of me that I "was always doing good and helping the poor." I made robes and other clothing for the widows. I became sick and died, and others washed me and laid me in an upstairs room. Peter came to me and said, "Gazelle, get up." I got up, and many believed I was raised from the dead. Who am I?

Numbers 25
Acts 9:36-43.

Polystratic Trees

Aaldert Mennega

It is difficult for a person to be different from the crowd. We see this in our own lives, and particularly in the lives of our growing school children. Whether we are aware of it or not, peer pressure does affect our lives extensively. As a biologist I see that this is true among natural scientists as well. When nearly everybody holds to a particular explanation or theory it is hard for an individual not to go along with it.

Sometimes we have to choose between what the majority accepts or believes and what we see as the only acceptable or scientific way to go. Making such a decision is complicated by the fact that we all want to be accepted by our professional peers. No one likes to stand out from the group. And we do highly value and respect the opinion and judgment of fellow scientists. But how much is group acceptance worth?

I want to focus now particularly on the phenomenon of polystratic trees, i.e., fossil tree trunks which are found standing upright, and which are surrounded by a number of layers of sediment. I have in my files an article* with a photograph of a miner standing in one of the European coal mines. Next to him is a tree trunk which has been preserved with bark characteristics clearly visible. This tree trunk is surrounded by sedimentary layers. The report indicates that these polystratic trees are found in strata called Pennsylvanian, which are "some thousands of meters" thick, and which evolutionists claim were laid down in about 30 million years. Assuming that these trees were surrounded by the sediment gradually, and at a fairly constant rate would mean that the average 5-10 meter long trunk would have been surrounded by sediment over a time span of around 50 to 100 thousand years.

It is at this point that I have to make a choice. While the majority of scientists accept such time figures regarding the earth layers, I have difficulty understanding how a tree trunk could be surrounded by sediment gradually and not be worn down and decomposed due to the natural environmental processes which we observe today. When a tree is exposed to air, it may stay in good condition only as long as it is living. But after it dies, the tree will begin to decompose in a relatively short time, even if we think of hundreds of years. Then how can we get a fossilized tree trunk with clear bark characteristics showing from top to bottom, spanning a time of many thousands of years?

I am, therefore, looking for a different answer to this problem. This tree trunk could not have been exposed to the elements for many thousands of years and still be preserved so well both at the bottom and at the top of the trunk. The top, at least, should certainly show some signs of decay. Since its external features are so well preserved, it must not have been exposed to air, wind and water for very long, and therefore I surmise that the surrounding sediments must have been deposited over a relatively short time. I would consider tens of years, but certainly not many thousands of years.

I can not accept the majority opinion regarding the length of time it took to lay down the sediments around this tree. That also makes me question that majority opinion in many other, similar instances of polystratic trees. And if the 30 million years of this section in the mine can be reduced to a few years, can other earth layers and fossils then also be reduced to a short time period? It looks like it is time to develop an alternative paradigm. It is safest to go with the positive evidence. ●

*N. A. Rupke *Herdatering van het Verleden, in Creatie-Evolutie-Referaten-bundel van de Conferentie van Gereformeerden, at Oosterbeek, 1967. Published by Stichting voor Gereformeerd Wetenschappelijke Arbeid, Amersfoort, 1969. pp. 45-65.*

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THE NECESSITY FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

C. J. Williams

In order to appreciate the necessity for Christian education we must be aware of two things. First and foremost what God has to say upon this important matter, and secondly what constitutes the nature of the modern State and its concept of education. Then we must enquire briefly into some of the reasons why there are so few Christian Schools in this country and conclude with an exhortation to do our duty before God in the light of His revealed will in the Scriptures.

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Firstly, the question we must answer and decide upon is whether or not education is to be viewed as a take it or leave it option to be decided by us as we see fit. Are we to look upon Christian education merely as a nice cozy alternative, but as not absolutely essential? Most Christians behave as if it were a matter of

indifference, interesting, yes, but not necessarily binding upon them.

Well, what does our Lord and King have to say upon this crucial issue? Far from being a take it or leave it option, it is presented to us as a command as declared in Psalm 78: "For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children." This commandment to teach our children has both a positive and a negative aspect. We are positively instructed by the Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians, that the "Nurture and admonition" we give our children must be "In the Lord." In other words, the education we provide for our children should be thoroughly God-centered. Conversely, it is thus forbidden us to educate our children outside of a Biblical framework of thought.

Moreover, not only are we commanded to provide a God-centered education, but it must be carried out with diligence. Our children must be taught to see that the Word of God is relevant to every aspect of their lives; that it should be, and indeed must be, the regulating and governing principle in and over man both individually and socially. Furthermore, not only are our children to receive a diligent instruction in all the ramifications of Biblical Faith, but it must be carried out with a frequency that admits of no interruption. For thus saith the Lord: "And these words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and thou shalt write them upon the posts of thine house, and on thy gates" (Deut. 6:6-9).

Then we are presented with the negative side of this commandment through the prophet Jeremiah: "Thus saith the Lord, learn not the way of the heathen" (10:2). Well, what is the way of the heathen? The way of the heathen begins by accepting Satan's lie in Genesis 3:5: "Hath God said?" Does God really mean what He said — if He said it at all? Instead of listening to God, why not be your own God [sic] determining for yourself what makes for good and evil, right and wrong, truth and error? Therefore do your own thing, make your own law and be your own god. Thus the way of the heathen is the way of original sin. It is the way that ignores the person of God and the way that considers God's Word as being irrelevant to life.

The way of the heathen in the context of education comes across as passive and active anti-Christianity. State schools today are by their very nature passively hostile to God, insofar as they ignore His person and the claims of His Word. From the moment a child enters the Infants right through to University, the Word of God has no place or relevance, in real terms, in the learning process of the student. This is immensely damaging in the child's formative years as it becomes apparent in the child's mind, unconsciously at least, that there are major areas of life to which the Word of God is of little or no relevance, which is the subliminal message of statist education. Thus the Bible comes to

be looked upon as being no more than a devotional manual for church use. Consequently the child's world and life view instead of being a unified whole becomes schizophrenic. The institutional church alone is looked upon as being the world of Christianity, and the home too, perhaps, if the television breaks down, and out of that is the secular world where God's Word has little relevance.

Not only is the child's view of life corrupted in this way, but the family suffers too by having its God-given authority over the child and the child's education seriously undermined. For the child soon learns that his or her parents have little or no control over their education as displayed by their parents' genuine and well founded concern over what their children are taught in school, and their apparent impotence to do anything to alter what is taught them or not taught them, for six hours a day, five days a week, forty weeks of the year and for fourteen or more years of their lives.

Of course, humanistic education is not content only to be passively hostile, it is also actively so in ways that we are only too familiar with. It is incumbent upon us therefore, to diligently test the fountain-heads of knowledge from which our children are obliged to drink so deeply for so long — to establish if they are either poisoned wells of passive and active anti-Christianity or founts of knowledge that passively and actively promote a Christian world and life view. In short, as the Israelites of the New Covenant we are to see to it that we do not pass over our children's education into the hands of the Philistines.

The way of the heathen is further imposed through peer group pressure — through the example of ungodly children. The child from the Christian home is usually the loner and therefore subject to tremendous pressure to conform to the group. The child soon realizes that most other children live as if God was non-existent and His Word a complete irrelevance. It was the downfall of the Israelites against the direct command of God that they mingled with the heathen and learned their ways, as declared in Ps. 106:34. So much so that during their Babylonian captivity the influence of religious and cultural syncretism caused the ten tribes of Israel to blend with their pagan neighbors to such an extent that they have just vanished as a distinct people and have never been heard of since.

As we hope and pray not to be led into temptation, so in like manner we are not to lead our children into places and positions of temptation to doubt the veracity and relevancy of the Word of God. Indeed, "Blessed are those children whose parents cause them not to walk in the counsel of the ungodly, nor to stand in the way of sinners, nor to sit in the seat of the scornful. But are taught to delight in the law of the Lord and to meditate upon it day and night. And they shall be like trees planted by the rivers of water, that bring forth their fruit in their season, their leaf shall not wither, and whatsoever they do shall prosper" (Psalm 1, paraphrase). Surely, it should be every Christian parent's desire to be commended by God with that commendation that God commended Abraham in Genesis 18:19: "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him and they will keep the way of the Lord."

Secondly. In order for us to appreciate the necessity for Christian education, we must understand the nature of the modern humanistic State. It is a mistake to look upon the modern State as being secular as opposed to religious, for nothing could be further from the truth. The state is intensely religious, being devoted to the worship of the democratic will of autonomous man. We can easily identify the God of this nation by establishing the source of law that governs us. For in whatsoever men place absolute authority — the source of their law, that is their god. Therefore, in our society today law is the product of the will of man as revealed through the State.

The philosophy which has given rise to Marxism, Fascism and Nazism is the same philosophy that motivates all the political parties of any consequence in this country today. It was the German philosopher Hegel who has greatly influenced modern politics this century. His thesis taught that the State is the Divine Idea as it exists on earth and that the individual can only realize himself through the State. This pernicious doctrine collides head-on with the first commandment of our God which declares that "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." Nevertheless, the State today is the absolute authority in the land beyond which there is no redress or appeal; an authority that does not recognize any higher law than its own law, and to whom the Holy Law of God is an irrelevance to be passively ignored on the one hand and actively attacked on the other.

It is important to recall that up until 1917 British Lord Chancellors had expressly stated that Christianity was part and parcel of English Common Law. But in 1917 a British House of Lords declared that Christianity was no longer part of the law of England. Commenting on this break with our Christian heritage by the House of Lords, but certainly not commending it, Sir William Holdsworth, professor of law at the University of Oxford said: "The judges are obliged to admit that government statutes however morally unjust must be obeyed. . . One might have thought the excesses of the Nazi regime would have made our jurists realize the iniquity of such a theory of law. England's Attorney General at Nuremberg demanded the death sentence for Germans who obeyed the Nazis, but back in England the same Attorney General (as reported in *The Times* May 13th 1946) said "Parliament is sovereign, it can make any laws. It could ordain that all blue eyed babies be destroyed at birth." Professor Holdsworth goes on to say: "Herod could not teach our modern jurists anything."

They have since been fanatically true to their word, have they not? For they have now made it a capital offense to be an unwanted baby regardless of the color of the eyes, and we have the tiny corpses of the three million victims of the horrifying holocaust of abortion to prove it. "If you want a picture of the future," George Orwell wrote some thirty years ago as he viewed a Socialist future, "imagine a boot stamping on a human face — forever" (1984).

Every aspect of the permissive Society, a society which the State has engineered, legalized and en-

couraged, is a declaration of war against our sovereign God and the rule of His Absolute Law. Even at this very moment they are conspiring to repeal what laws are left restricting trade on the Lord's Day. Also there has just been published a Law Commission Report recommending the repeal of the blasphemy laws. And not forgetting their incessant attack upon the sanctity of marriage by the enactment of legislation making divorce evermore easier and readily available for any reason or no reason.

"Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Christ, saying, Let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh, the LORD shall have them in derision" Psalm 2.

Professor R. W. Chambers has succinctly stated the issue: "Upon that difference — whether or not we place Divine Law in the last resort above the law of the State — depends the whole future of the world."

This passive and active hatred of God displayed by the State will inevitably be reflected in the State's schools. It is simply ridiculous to imagine that the humanistic State will do anything to tolerate or promote Biblical Christianity in its educational establishments, or that the State is somehow neutral on this matter. Education is a preparation for life and in no way will the Hegelian State prepare children to own allegiance to another law and authority higher than its own. Quite the reverse. As the State becomes even more selfconsciously anti-Christian this hostility will permeate its educational system. For the State will always educate its children from its own perspective and to its own ends.

Therefore, as the passive denial of God is the fundamental axiom of state education, it will produce the conditioning necessary for slavery; because without God, truth is now what Man says it is! Children are then taught to look to no higher authority, lawgiver, provider or savior than the State. Thus the way of State education is the way of the heathen, which is the way of original sin, and the broad way that leads to hell and destruction and many there be who travel thereon.

But there is another aspect of the deification of the State that makes Christian education a pressing necessity. That is the State's incessant attack upon the Institution of the Family, undermining the family's responsibility in the education of children. We could well ask the question, and indeed we must ask the question, what business has the Civil Government in Education in the first place, because the Bible emphatically puts the responsibility for the child's education squarely with the family?

The answer to this question is to be found in the humanistic State's Hegelian philosophy which dictates that there must be a Minister of State for Education as well as is being suggested now, a Minister of State for the Family. Indeed every aspect of our lives has become, or is in the process of becoming, the responsibility of some department of State. Since the State sees itself as the Divine Idea as it exists on earth, so the Divine State must realize its own divinity by becoming all powerful in and over society. It does this

by usurping the responsibilities belonging to the various Institutions of society. For responsibility is, and means, POWER — Power is responsibility. To possess God-given responsibility means that we are invested with authority and possessed of the inherent freedom to exercise authority. It is of crucial importance to clearly understand the meaning of power and the reason for the State's insatiable lust for it; because if we do not we shall never be able to truly perceive the web of totalitarian tyranny being rightly spun around us today.

The first step in the State's take-over of our responsibilities is to degrade the concept of responsibility itself. This is done through the tool of the Permissive Society, which not only serves to assert the sovereignty of State law over God's Law, but it also serves to engender moral irresponsibility in the people by enslaving them to sin and guilt. Morally rotten people are guilty people and the guilt-ridden are easily led and manipulated. Permission to break the Law of God is a false, delusive and destructive freedom given by the State in exchange for that precious God-given liberty, the liberty that distinguishes freemen from slaves. Like unto all false gods the Divine State requires a sacrifice to be made unto it. Upon the altar of the "Public Good" you must offer up your liberty, not all at once, but gradually until all power resides with the State.

When a people abandon faith in God and despise the authority of His Word they inevitably show a marked dislike towards Christian responsibility and freedom, slavishly yearning only for the cradle to grave security of the Welfare State. Instead of viewing all the varied aspects of life as diverse and independent forms of government under the unifying authority and government of the sovereign Word of God, they fall an easy prey to the Divine Idea of the State and the Godless vacuum left in their lives is soon filled by this new Deity regulating and controlling their lives with a vengeance. Thus when such degraded people hear those oft repeated media words: "The Government" their first thought is the State. For them "The Government" has become the only lawgiver, provider and savior in their lives, and freedom is no longer considered that important. This is the slave mentality — A slavery that does not need a ball and chain as Aldous Huxley points out in his book *The Brave New World*: "A really efficient totalitarian State would be one in which the all powerful executive of political bosses and their army of managers control a population of slaves who do not have to be coerced because they love their servitude."

Close upon the heels of this corruption and enslavement of the human mind follows the bribery of State grants, handouts and subsidies. It is through this means that the State buys its way into the responsibilities belonging to the other Institutions of society. Agriculture is a classic example of this policy in action. Farmers, like others, have been only too eager for grants and subsidies — something for nothing, so it is foolishly thought. But the lack of true faith and the love of money blind people to the real price that they have to pay in return, namely, their true God-given freedom. For along with State money come the conse-

quent regulations and controls to the point that farmers cannot plant a potato or milk a cow without the State's permission or license. Thus the ownership and responsibility for running a farm is increasingly moving from the individual farmer to the relevant State bureaucracy. The power of responsibility which is the freedom to make authoritative decisions is being taken from the farmer and his liberty drastically curtailed to the point of serfdom. Power is in this way transferred from the people to the State.

Exactly the same method is applied in the take-over of the family's responsibilities. Take family allowance. Family allowance is a State grant designed to help pay for the upbringing and care of children. The very acceptance of this money is an acknowledgement that the State has a legitimate moral responsibility in this area — whether we want to realize it or not. Can we have any grounds to complain, therefore, when the State thinks it fit that girls be allowed to take deadly contraceptive pills without their parents' knowledge or consent? Can we really complain when the State wants a commanding say in what our children are taught in school? After all, it has bought its way into the responsibilities of the family and is helping to pay for the children's upbringing, is it not? This alone is sufficient grounds to justify its interference — it is an interference by right of purchase, in accordance with that proverb which says that "he who pays the money calls the tune" (Prov. 22:7). It is interesting to note that only the mother can draw this welfare money, thus short-circuiting the natural father's responsibility and authority in the home; which is a pointed way of saying that the State now considers itself as the true father and provider.

How can we claim to be free men and women in Jesus Christ and yet slavishly dependent upon State money, especially when we still have the freedom to refuse it? Such double standards will cause the speedy demise of the family as a separate institution under God by paving the way for its absorption into the State. Therefore it is of immense importance that we as Christian parents start free Christian schools free from State bribes and the inevitable controls. By so doing we claim back from the State our God-given responsibility, authority and freedom to educate our children in a Biblical framework of thought and to an uncompromising Christian world and life view. In this way we can make an important start in providing the alternative Christian society to the ugly and vicious statist one being forced upon us today. Surely, we can only take seriously Christ's Great Commission: "Go ye therefore and teach all nations. . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." ONLY when we first start at home and with our own children?!

Finally, in the light of what has been said why are there so few free Christian schools in our country today? Why is it that so many professed Christians are apathetic, indifferent and even hostile to the concept of a distinctive Christian education? Well, the parents of today were the pupils of yesterday who have

themselves been submitted to the State's educational process and have unconsciously imbibed passive anti-Christianity; who have come to believe that somehow the Word of God is irrelevant except within the confines of the church.

Once educated in this humanistic framework of thought it naturally becomes very difficult to recognize the implicit anti-Christianity in our cultural conditioning. After all, it appears to be normal since everyone is conditioned to think and behave in the same way; a way which is appealing to our fallen human nature. As a society's culture is the outworking of its basic religious faith, and if the faith is placed in the absolute authority of man (humanism) and in the Divine Idea of the State (socialism), then we too as the educational products of that culture will automatically manifest its basic faith in our lives. Therefore we have Christians, as a matter of course, challenging the absolute authority of the Word of God with a "Hath God said" attitude; whether it be on such issues as corporal punishment in school (Prov. 29:15), God's requirement for dress (Deut. 22:5) or any other commandment of God that does not happen to suit them or that runs counter to the prevailing humanistic culture is dismissed as being "legalistic" or the "cultural" product of its age and not really relevant to our time. This attitude is much like that described by Piers Compton in his book *The Broken Cross*, in which he says "Those who were familiar with the writings of Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre could detect, in the statements and even casual remarks made by all too many prelates, the equivocations and lack of authority habitual to men who are the products of modern thought." Never was a truer word spoken by a certain American communist who said that "Revolutions with machine guns are the least important. The revolutions that are really important go on in people's minds and in the way they think and feel."

This insidious and prevailing spirit of humanism has contributed in no small way to the radical yet subtle departure from the Biblical Faith of the Reformers and Puritans by the Evangelical Church of today. We have, as it were, pulled the Faith inside out. Where once what you believed, the doctrines of the Faith, was of paramount importance, today, however, what is central is a person's religious experience. Thus doctrine has become vague and peripheral and is looked upon as being divisive, cold and hard. This is why so many evangelical churches no longer demand adherence to a Creed or Confession of Faith as the condition of Church membership. These have now become interesting but not quite relevant historical documents.

With the pulpit reduced to being largely non-propositional (i.e. weak and watery on doctrine), it has in proportion become non-confrontational insofar as the duties and sins of the nation and the individual are no longer approached with an authoritative and absolute "Thus saith the LORD!" Such a black and white confrontational approach is considered too "unloving" and through years of studied irrelevance by pulpit and pew alike, has finally given way to a bland greyness, compromise and cowardice in the face of implacable foes and to the vital issues and titanic struggles that confront us today.

This has given rise to what I call the two unwritten laws of evangelicalism. Which are, firstly, Thou shalt not make waves to rock the boat. If the truth is controversial, shut up about it! And secondly, Thou shalt not criticize or offend anyone for anything. Be nice and smarmy at all times with sugared words and sweet smiles. The net result of which is an emasculated, spineless and withered church; a sort of Protestant convent detached from reality in true platonic fashion — A church that is more interested in mystic spiritual experiences and dreams of revival than in being the salt and light of the world, and that by its shameful silence has given its tacit approval to the Divine Idea of the State and the appalling implications thereof.

Wisdom instructs us to "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). Then why is there so little wisdom manifest amongst Christians today? Surely it is because there is so little of the fear of God in their hearts (Prov. 1:7)? If Christians really feared and loved God they would train their children to go in the way of the Lord, instead of training them to go in the way of the heathen through years of pagan schooling, endless hours watching television, listening to the radio and reading unwholesome literature. I put it to you my reader, which way are your children going? In all seriousness it is better to arrive at the right answer to this question now than to have the wrong one at the Day of Judgement. "Not everyone that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Mat. 7:21).

It is truly marvelous how Christians can divorce the will of God for them from His revealed will in the Bible. We have Christian parents saying that the Christian education of their children is perhaps not the will of God for them, though it may be for you. In so saying they have personalized and mystified the will of God by removing it from the concrete and objective reality of His revealed will in the Bible by placing it in the religious feelings of the individual self-will. When stripped of pious platitudes this is simply another manifestation of original sin.

I started off by asking the question is Christian education necessary? It is not only necessary it is absolutely essential. Why? Because God says it is! And the consequences of disobedience are grim indeed. Therefore I can only say to you, Christian parent, that you must go forward in the Name of the Father, in the Name of the Son and in the Name of the Holy Ghost and start your Christian school without further delay and great blessings will follow not only to this generation but to those yet to come. I conclude with a paraphrase of those words of Elijah the prophet: "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Baalistic State be God then serve it by keeping your children in its schools. But if the LORD be God then serve Him and give your children the education that God commands."

"If ye love me, keep my commandments" (Jn. 14:15). ©

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S.O.S. or Abandon Ship?

Steve M. Schlissel

That the Christian Reformed Church is in the midst of a crisis is not here being reiterated; it is assumed. The question raised in this piece is, What ought we to do about it? An increasing number of people appear to be calling for formal separation. Others, while recognizing the gravity of the situation, seem to be content with pointing out in print the dangers that we face. There are yet others who seem to operate under the (rather naive) notion that everything will work itself out, somehow. I suggest that we, as a committed, Reformed people, put on the full armor of God and take our stand against the devil's schemes, throwing them back in his blasphemous face. We've got to get tough for Christ. Too many conservative members and ministers are busy packing their bags, ready to abandon ship. I am urging them to stay on board and save our ship.

There is much concern, and right concern it is, about the sort of church we will be leaving our children if things continue on the present course. But may I remind the elders and ministers of the Christian Reformed Church that we have a very present responsibility under God *this moment* to shepherd the faithful in our pews. The sound leaders of the church should not be the first ones overboard. It has been my experience in the short time in which I've been a member of the CRC to meet with many, many fine and faithful Christians in our denomination who are ripe for strong leadership in waging the battle against relativism. They will lend their support to men who would be valiant for Truth, but they, like God in Ezekiel's time, look for a man to stand in the gap, yet find none (Ezekiel 22:30. Now is the time for all of

us who hold dear the absolute truth of Scripture to stop running, to stop hiding, and to start fighting.

The first thing we need in order to fight is a knowledge of the enemy. Who is it we're fighting? The answer is "Relativists." Relativists appear as neo-orthodox, as modernists, as feminists, as egalitarians — they wear all sorts of garb. But they all have one thing in common: they deny that God Almighty can speak absolutely and once for all in the Bible. They vary in their methods of compromise (some redefine the words of Scripture, some deny the words of Scripture, some re"interpret," via convolution, the words of Scripture, others sacrifice one portion of Scripture seemingly on the altar of another, but actually on the altar of Relativism), but they are generally agreed that an absolute and final revelation is anathema. In fact, many are convinced that the Holy Spirit Himself regrets being "bound" to the word written; they claim that He is "leading" the Church, in essence, beyond (away from?) the Bible.

The current controversy in the CRC regarding women in office is stunningly analogous to the very first temptation of Satan in the Garden. "Is it really the case that God has said ye shall not eat from every tree of the garden?" (Gen. 3:1, Leupold's translation). Leupold's comments are to the point: "The thought aimed at by this suggestive question is that there must be something about God's restraint of man that puts a very unwelcomed curb and check upon man. The circumstance that God has permitted man to make use of all the rest of the trees (cf., what God has permitted woman to do — SMS) is pushed aside as negligible. The fact that man has been barred from one tree

(or, woman from office in the Church — SMS) is dragged into the forefront and magnified into a grievous and very unwelcome restraint that could hardly be thought of as imposed by God (cf., "I can't believe God would give me the ability without willing me the opportunity." — SMS). . . . As Luther rightly points out, the temptation. . . directs itself against God's Word. More specifically, it seeks to make that Word doubtful to man. . . Adam and Eve are to be led away from its truth according to the purposes of the tempter." If God's Word is not Absolute, it is relative. If it is relative, it is subject to the same forces and influences as man's word, indeed, it can be no more absolute than Satan's word. There is no sure starting point; everything becomes relative. Man might as well lead the way. God becomes simply a very smart being who can offer good advice for the benefit of man. Man has fallen in with Satan to try and do away with God. In so attempting, he merely does away with himself. God does not come under the death sentence. Man does.

The relativist seeks to lead the denomination away from the Word of God as absolute, final, authoritative and normative. He will appeal to passages such as Galatians 3:28 (neither male nor female) in the same way Satan asked Eve to regard the general permission to eat from every tree (Gen. 2:16); as final in themselves and admitting of no qualification, no, not even by God. If God tells you you can eat, then eat anything you like. Passages like 1 Timothy 2:11ff. are then, a priori, inadmissible and unacceptable. But if God speaks absolutely, (and, of course, that's the only way He can speak) then He legislates the exceptions as well as the rules. To seek "freedom," as some are doing, by interpreting a qualified rule as unqualified, is to embrace death. The relativist will not find all of God's law unacceptable, but like a spoiled child, he'll eat the chicken and sneak the spinach to the dog. Christians, however, follow Jesus Christ, who said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by EVERY word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Mat. 4:4).

(While we're on the subject of words, I'd like to note parenthetically that the Bible happens to be in favor of "inclusive language," though I doubt that it would find favor with relativistic feminists. According to Scripture, woman is INCLUDED in man, her head. Therefore, Scripture says, "God created MAN in his own image. . . male and female he created them." If they wish to be consistent, they might think of speaking about man and "wo." But that might come too close to the truth, in their case, for comfort!)

In addition to identification of the foe (not to be confused with "wo"), we need wisdom. Who can deny that relativists have taken full advantage of every opportunity to maneuver and manipulate? We need to take to heart our Savior's command to be "wise as serpents" while remaining harmless as doves. Let us strategize. Let us meet together before Classis meetings, and certainly before and during Synods, to analyze the movements of those who would destroy our beloved denomination. As we say in Brooklyn, we've got to "get hip" to what's up and learn how to use procedures patiently and persistently against

the forces of the father of lies. And we especially need to encourage greater participation by Elder delegates in all assemblies. Elders alone could make the difference if they are given sound, wise advice on how they might be faithful in times like these.

Make no mistake about it, we also need courage. It may—it will be necessary to say things against the actions of people who may be personally dear to us. But to place feelings toward another above loyalty to Christ is to be guilty of idolatry. We ought to follow up on questionable statements and practices of ministers in our churches and in our own and neighboring classes. We need to make a little noise, ruffle a few feathers. As I said, some people find it easier to leave the denomination than to be a "pest for Christ." But don't we realize that if all our faithful friends follow suit, this entire denomination with its noble history will become a haunt of doctrines of demons! We must not let this be!! We must remember God's words to Joshua, "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you."

Now listen to a portion of that law: "Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt" (Lev. 19:17). Listen to Jesus: "If your brother sins, rebuke him" (Lk 17:3). Listen to Paul: "when Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. . . . When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I (rebuked) Peter in front of them all" (Gal 2:11, 14). And again, note Paul's instructions to Titus in the face of spreading heresy: "There are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers. . . . They must be silenced. . . . (R)ebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith." Things weren't good, but Paul didn't advise, "Bail out." No. Rather, he told Titus, in the power of the Spirit of Truth, to dig in and fight!

Throughout Scripture, God raises up rebukers to set people on or keep them in the right path. Little Samuel reproved Eli with the Word of the Lord; a donkey rebuked Balaam; John, Elijah and Nathan brought the word of the Lord against nobility. Too often, we are content to air our complaints only in the sight of those who already agree with us. Its time to have a showdown, face to face with those who have been led into error and who endeavor to so lead others. With the grace of God and humility of the Spirit, which seeks not its own, but Christ's, let us REMAIN members of the Christian Reformed Church. But let us confront the forces of relativism with every spiritual, tactical and procedural weapon at our disposal. There are plenty of corrupt denominations in America and Canada already. Let us invite and persuade the relativists to leave us and join them!

Yes, we all hear the trumpet sounding. We all know its a call to action. But I suggest the action we are being called to is an aggressive, wise prudent and sustained advance, NOT A RETREAT. ☉

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Our Heritage, Predicament and Future

(Conference of Concerned)

With considerable curiosity many of us went to the extensively advertised conference of the concerned at South Holland, Illinois on April 29. No one could predict how much response there would be to invitations to such a meeting, though we were aware of a widespread conviction (and prayers) that holding one should be attempted. Hopes were gratified when an estimated 300 came, some from places as far away as Los Angeles and Edmonton, and in the evening the number swelled to possibly 600.

The meetings began with an introductory devotional by Rev. Warren Lammers, pastor of the Dutton Church at Grand Rapids and president of the sponsoring organization.

Our Historic Heritage

In a highlight of the opening session, Dr. W. Robert Godfrey, Church History professor at Westminster Theological Seminary at Escondido, California, and an ordained G. R. minister, addressed the gathering on "Our Historic Heritage." As an enthusiastic convert to our faith he shared the concern about the Christian Reformed denomination's present course which prompted this meeting, a concern about the loss of "joy and commitment to the Reformed Faith." He traced the denomination's commitment to maintaining that Faith to its early immigrant origins, noting its problem of distinguishing what was Reformed from what was Dutch custom. He traced its effort through the post-World War I controversies with Bultema's dispensationalism (1918), Jansen's Biblical criticism (1922) and Hoeksema's bitter and more disruptive anti-common grace split (1924).

After that struggle (which James Bratt's book attributed to a "confessionalist" tendency to fight) a reaction set in toward a peaceful and smug toleration which masked increasing differences. The speaker observed that to dismiss today's differences as mere-

ly characteristic of people who are concerned about confessions is to radically misunderstand them. Whereas the old questions arose about how to build on the accepted Reformed foundation, today's questions arise about what the foundation is. In 1925 there was still a common, unreserved commitment to Holy Scripture and the Creeds, resulting in a piety of heart and action, and a (Kuyperian) recognition of Christ's claim to all of life. In those earlier years the revealed doctrine of God's Word was commonly recognized as the proper foundation and source of our life. (Louis Berkhof's life-work of clearly teaching that doctrine is still highly and widely appreciated and used outside of our circles, although it is increasingly despised and discarded within our churches.) Today this doctrinal foundation is being displaced within our churches by appeals to human experience, with that experience being used as a basis for criticizing doctrine. What is being forgotten is that defective experience results from defective doctrine, and that our experience must be evaluated, channeled and directed by God's Word.

What has happened to our earlier consensus? What went wrong, to arouse our concern today?

In 1952 there was a shake-up at Calvin Seminary in which almost the whole faculty was fired for intolerable wrangling, to make way for a new one which should seek moderation, coexistence and peace. (While peace should be sought, it should not be "peace at any price." The orthodox must "speak the truth in love" and reveal a sanctified way of life.)

The growing crisis in the Dutch churches in the 50s, highlighted by the radical shift in the theology of G. C. Berkouwer and the changes in the life and doctrine of those churches, has influenced our churches especially through leaders who studied there.

The devil constantly tries to divert us from the claims of Christ to make accommodations to the world

with the promise of success, wealth and respectability. Thus we are pressed to join the World Council and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, with some which deny Christ and His Gospel and are therefore no longer Christian churches at all.

We have experienced the death of many stalwart leaders who had helped to shape the life and Biblical commitment of our churches, and present positions of denominational leadership are no longer held by people like them. James Bratt's book observed that the synod's 1959 declaration that the Bible was infallible was the last unqualified triumph of the Confessionals in the church. Since that time there has been a steady weakening of Reformed commitment in synod decisions of the 60s, 70s and 80s. The speaker cited mid-1890 predictions in *De Wachter* that as our churches adapted themselves to their environment, the Calvinistic doctrines of Dort would become "antiquated curiosities," psalms would be replaced by hymns, choirs would replace congregational singing, the catechism would no longer be taught and there would be an indiscriminate search for novelties — all of which are coming true. Our church members must look at the real changes in our churches which plainly show a decline — The Bible is no longer permitted to function as the Word of God when we pick it apart. We do not treasure and proclaim the Biblical doctrine of election confessed in the Canons which stresses the sovereignty of God in our salvation — so that Jesus is our salvation. And our Church Order of Dort is being amended out of existence, as decision-making is shifted from the church assemblies to boards. The shift in church services is from Worship to sensational entertainment, as people, evidently "just don't want to hear the Word of God." Christian discipline and stable family life have been disappearing from our churches, along with observance of the Lord's day, sacrificial giving, knowledge of the Bible, personal piety and prayer. Thus, in summary, the speaker described, where, according to his observations, we are and the route by which we have arrived here.

Awakening to see our position and condition calls us to repentance, first for our own waywardness, and to a renewed trust in and commitment to our Lord and His gospel. We must bring that gospel to all kinds of people around us. We must work at teaching the whole Gospel faith which we have been neglecting—many in our churches have never heard it — and we must live it and fight for it.

In following discussion the speaker called for appropriate protests and appeals, to be accompanied by refusal to implement and support un-Biblical actions of synods. We must ask what we are supporting; our gifts may not be regarded or paid as taxes to support causes that do not promote the gospel.

In the Tuesday meetings, Rev. Richard Blauw of Chino, California spoke on our problems with the office of deacons as we get away from the Bible; Rev. Raymond Sikkema of Hamilton, Ontario presented a Canadian perspective on the CRC; and Rev. Aaron Kayayan, who has charge of the French broadcasts of the Back-to-God Hour presented a Reformed view of missions. (Because of space limitations, we hope to deal with some of these addresses later.)

Our Present Predicament

In the evening Rev. Nelson D. Kloosterman, professor at Mid-America Reformed Seminary at Orange City, Iowa, described for the crowded church where the C. R. denomination is today. Citing a couple of local incidents, he showed how the 15-year, sometimes bitter and divisive synod debates about women in office, far from being settled by synod decisions, were now simply being projected into each congregation.

Instead of delineating the widespread movement toward congregational independence, or the denominational agencies' grabs for power, or the ecumenical drive toward merger with the RCA — warnings which would come too late to do any good — the speaker pointed out that for 15 years we have been seeing that at the heart of our problem was the doctrine of the Bible — our failure to listen to the Word of God in the church. Referring to Jeremiah 23:1-4, he observed that the standard by which we must assess our denomination was God's Word. There God said that because the spiritual shepherds of His people had scattered and failed to care for them, He would punish the shepherds. Each of us needs to ask whether we have been giving the necessary time to studying and teaching God's Word to those we are supposed to lead. Our performance must be measured by the standard of God's Word and by our confession of it.

In our churches' Belgic Confession Article 32, while we acknowledge the need for wholesome order in the church, we also reject all man-made laws "to bind and compel the conscience in any manner whatever." See how that confession is plainly violated by last year's synod's declaration that "a church is held accountable to classis for its share of the quota payment determined by the number of its member families" (Acts 1985, p. 811), a decision unsupported by a shred of Biblical evidence. In that Confession article 32, we also "admit only that which tends to nourish and preserve concord and unity, and to keep all men in obedience to God." Note how the 1984 and 1985 decisions to allow women in office did not promote "concord and unity" but discord and disunity and were supported by only one irrelevant text. The decision to, in the name of Christ, compel payment against one's conscience is an immoral law — far removed from the voluntary "cheerful" giving taught in God's Word (2 Cor. 9:7). Thus our synods have tried to compel consciences and made ordinances which "depart from those things which Christ, our only Master has instituted" (Belgic Confession).

Such developments are driving us to action — to concerted action. In our trying to act, the speaker saw three dangers against which we must be alert. (1) Some have said that all that we have been doing is talk among ourselves. This is misleading. There has been a flood of overtures and appeals — which were "reduced by the denominational machinery to a puff of exhaust" — and there have been good minority reports — There has been much more than talk. (2) Some are saying that we must break the denominational bureaucracy. But we must beware of trying only to correct structures when our problem is really the

churches' departure from God's Word. (3) Merely organizing a confessional movement to oppose the evils in the church, as many in the Dutch churches have long been doing, despite strenuous efforts, proves ineffective, because the denominations simply disregard the opposition. "We must beware of the danger of consolidating within the Christian Reformed Church a nucleus of confessional conservatives that would continue for the next generation or two, to fuel reaction to symptomatic ills in the CRC, to the detriment of a constructive, Biblically balanced, Reformed, obedient faith-life."

What must we do? Recall how we conclude Article 32 of our Belgic Confession: "For this purpose, excommunication is requisite, with all that pertains to it, according to the Word of God." "For this purpose," that is, to maintain the body of Christ's church, we need, not an "institutional face-lift," not creating a "church within a church" or repeating appeals to the major assemblies to listen to God's Word, but CHURCH DISCIPLINE. We face the painful duty of the discipline of the denomination by the church in order to maintain the church for God's honor and for the salvation of our coming generations.

How can we do this, when the official avenues of appeal and protest are closed by synod rules? How can a minority discipline a majority? The Bible and our confessions show us the way. They teach us that the power to discipline resides in the local consistory and is exercised by those whom the Lord has appointed to office. Discipline is to be carried out by local churches and their consistories, working together in covenant fellowship and obeying Christ according to His Word.

In trying unitedly to carry out the discipline which the Bible and creeds enjoin, we need free and open discussion to reach a proper strategy for action. Historically, differences about strategy divide conservatives. We must pledge to one another, in fidelity to God's Word and our confessions, to consult with one another and to walk and talk together to arrive at a proper, common course. This cannot be done hastily.

The speaker suggested that at this juncture a common declaration by this gathering might be in order that the synod decisions of 1984 opening church offices to women and that of 1985 concerning compulsory quota payments are not binding. To encourage Biblically responsible stewardship, he suggested introducing a 2-envelope system, one for local and the other for denominational activity. In view of the deteriorating denominational condition, he urged the creation, support and use of alternative institutions within the CRC. This involves that our consistories assert their divine right to license candidates and call ministers of the gospel. He suggested too that young men committed to Reformation who are preparing for the ministry in our churches be encouraged to study at schools that are also committed to such Reformation. The speaker highlighted the need for increased publishing of sound educational material for the churches' catechism classes (of the kind available through the Reformed Fellowship). Finally he encouraged believers and consistories who feel

conscience-bound to prepare to leave the denomination to consult with other consistories to seek concerted action. These were his suggestions for our present course.

On Wednesday morning the assembly divided into five sections: Rev. Robert Heerema of Wyoming, Michigan, introduced a discussion on Biblical Church Unity; Rev. Edward Knott of Forest Grove, Michigan, took up the subject of proper procedure in bringing matters to a classis or the synod; Rev. Ted Hoogsteen of Brantford, Ontario introduced the subject of the faulty Contemporary Testimony which is to come up for adoption this year; Rev. Ray Lanning of the Bethel Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan, addressed the Quota Question; and Rev. Randal Lankheet, of Jamestown, Michigan, reflected on the provocative question, "Can a Conservative Student Survive at Calvin Theological Seminary?" Because both the simultaneous meetings and our space limits make it impossible to comment on all of these, let's note only the last two.

Rev. R. Lanning pointed out the "wrenching contradiction" we encounter in our church quotas in the fact that while they are supposed to be advisory guidelines for voluntary giving, they are being regarded and presented in our church center as taxes which must be paid. While our synods will not say that they are taxes, they try to more and more stringently enforce their payment by the "delinquent."

This system of enforced automatic payment (which is the envy of some other denominations) has created an inflated "run-away" denominational superstructure, just like taxes create big government. In the large Presbyterian Church some years ago when unlimited funding had produced unlimited and irresponsible growth, failing support forced a 50% cut in the size of the bureaucracy and, the following year, a further 1/3 reduction. As long as the agencies are permitted to run the quotas we may be sure of annual increases.

The speaker observed that our churches are falling behind in the development of local ministries, largely because of denominational quota demands on the churches. And the denominational agencies are experiencing a crisis of confidence, which it is proposed that we remedy by stricter enforcement of quotas. The churches show signs of rebelling against these demands. The Sunshine Church of Grand Rapids, the largest in the denomination, is refusing payment of a large part of its quota, and others, on grounds of conscience, are refusing to support what some agencies are doing.

The system is in trouble because it is in conflict with the teachings of the Bible. God's Word, in 2 Cor. 9:7 tells us that "God loves a cheerful giver." Taxes deprive us of the privilege of giving; we do not "give" quotas; we "pay" them. It is no wonder that these lack God's blessing. 1 Cor. 16:2 instructs us to give as God "has prospered" us, but quotas, as flat-rates are blind and insensitive to the state of the church and the prosperity of its members. 2 Cor. 8:14 teaches us that in the need of Christian brethren the flow of giving should be from the affluent to the needy—that is not Grand Rapids. The Macedonian Christians had shown an extraordinary readiness to give (2 Cor. 8:5) "their

own selves to the Lord and to" the missionaries, confident that they were doing the will of God. This is the proper remedy for the "crisis of confidence." In this kind of confidence no quotas are needed.

As a recent graduate from Calvin Theological Seminary, Rev. Randal Lankheet commented on the peculiar problems that the conservative student encounters at the denomination's seminary, and suggested some ways of trying to deal with them. While he did not say that Calvin openly discriminates against conservative students, such a student confronts pressures against expressing opinions based on the Word of God. He recalled how a student who had expressed objections to criticism of the Bible experienced subsequent harassments. Of some 17 seminary professors, only 3 or 4 publicly oppose placing women in church offices. A prominent mark of the educated is supposed to be open-mindedness, a readiness to question everything. In controversial matters, one will not hear both sides presented at the seminary.

The conservative student will have to study harder than others, will have to go out of his way to be personable and accommodating, and will need to seek the support of others in trying to maintain his minority views. Especially those who have attended other seminaries will experience additional pressures and sometimes extra inquisitions and harassment. Can conservative students survive at Calvin Theological Seminary? Some do, and may, on occasion, even emerge with honors. But they face adverse pressures because of their convictions.

Our Future Course

The final speaker was Rev. Arthur Besteman (who is transferring from Zeeland to the Beverly Church of Wyoming, Michigan). He addressed the question, "Where do we go from here?" He saw the present denominational course which prompted the concern occasioning this conference as an example of what Francis Schaeffer outlined in his last book as *The Great Evangelical Disaster*. Our churches' unfaithfulness to the Lord and His Word that constitute the "disaster," had been shown by many, including speakers at this conference. In such distressing circumstances, the writer of Psalm 143 (v. 5) encouraged God's people by recalling the Lord's work. God's covenant faithfulness has continued to be shown among us in churches which still seek to be faithful to His Word. The speaker cited the 35-year history of the Reformed Fellowship and its publications, in the face of the antagonism and ridicule which testify to its influence. Recently it has been joined in its efforts for the Reformed Faith by *Christian Renewal*, which is gaining readers on both sides of the US-Canada border. Since 1982 the Mid-America Reformed Seminary is becoming established, despite the hostility of denominational leaders. This Conference has shown that even among some of the students at Calvin Theological Seminary there is evidence of Reformed movement. Despite abundant cause for concern, there are also reasons for confidence.

But many are asking, "What can we do?" Some are saying that the only thing we can do is leave the

denomination, and some have done so. The speaker advised serious consideration before making such a move. The psalm contains the appropriate prayer, "Teach me to do your will" (v. 10). He recalled the remarks of John Calvin about the Lord's continuing correction of the Corinthian church despite its gross abuses. Because we try to maintain a Reformed witness within the denomination, we are unjustly accused of trying to split it. The divisions in the church are coming, not because of us, but because of those who tamper with the Word of God, the creeds and the Church Order.

What can we do? We must make sure that we know what we believe, studying the Word of God, and our churches' confessions of it. We must demand that that be preached in our churches. The speaker cited Abraham Kuyper's own conversion through the influence of a godly parishioner. If one cannot get the Word of God in one's church, transfer to another that has it. Beside our own future, the future of our children is involved. We must insist that the Biblical doctrine be taught in catechism classes, and that we find a church in which it will be done. We must work with others who seek to maintain the Biblically Reformed faith, and not permit ourselves to be divided by differences of opinion over minor matters. And we must pray. In the words of the famous missionary, Judson, "The future is as bright as the promises of God."

At the conclusion of the conference a number of resolutions were adopted.

We approached the conference wondering what the response would be to the invitations to such a meeting. We left it aware of the many reassuring evidences of interest in and support for a united effort to promote the Reformed faith. Although there were differences of opinion, there were differences among those united by a common commitment to the Lord and His Gospel. Many who are so committed are being drawn (or driven) together by the increasing, official betrayals of that Faith in the denomination. The differences often arise out of differing perceptions of just how far that betrayal has gone. Some, especially those who are newly aware of these developments, envision a return of the denomination to its confessed Biblical doctrine and life; others who have been confronting the problem for a longer time may see matters more comprehensively. The Lord might grant a miracle of Reformation. One of the Missouri Synod Lutheran leaders described his denomination's return to orthodoxy over a decade ago in that way. But even that denomination is in danger of losing its gains through compromises. We must resist and refuse to support that kind of compromise in every way that we can. But we must do more than resist what the churches' misleaders are doing. We must, as speakers said, put more effort into positive proclamation and teaching of the whole Biblically Reformed gospel. And we must do this not merely as a Reformed witness within an increasingly apostate body, but constructively working, fighting and praying for a church that will believe what it says and say what it believes. That must drive us toward ever sharper division from those who are determinedly

dragging the church in an opposite course (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1). Our pursuit of that Biblical Reformed objective must be genuinely ecumenical, seeking to draw together people who today are separated by church boundaries, but who, becoming increasingly aware of living amid "the great evangelical disaster," are also increasingly aware of being drawn together in the thrilling work that the Lord has done, is doing and will do with His whole gospel until He Himself returns. The future of such a course is indeed "as bright as the promises of God."

P.D.J.

The following tapes of the conference are available from CMCRC Tapes, P.O. Box 1335, South Holland, IL 60473, for 3 per tape plus \$1 for postage and packaging:

#1 Godfrey, #2 Blauw, #3 Sikkema, #4 Kayayan and Lanning, #5 Kloosterman, #6 Besteman.

The Concerned Members organization which sponsored the conference had been seeking to enlarge its mailing list by asking consistories to permit the use of their membership lists for a single informative appeal. The organization found itself overwhelmed by the unexpected need to send out some 25,000 mailings. Although the work was done by volunteers, postage costs, as well as the cost of the conference confronted it with sizable bills. The generous \$3,300 conference offerings contributed toward meeting these increasing expenses. We thank the Lord and the many loyal supporters of these continuing efforts in His Name.

Resolutions of the Concerned Members of the Christian Reformed Church Conference — April 29-30, '86

PREAMBLE

1. We take our stand without reservation on Holy Scripture, the confessions of our church, and the Church Order (prior to 1984), and seek to be a positive reforming influence in the Christian Reformed Church by calling the church back to her confessional basis.

2. We are concerned about evidence of departures from our Reformed standards and heritage in the Christian Reformed Church. We refuse to honor synodical decisions that undermine our Reformed confessions.

3. We declare ourselves firmly opposed to any and all such weakenings of our Reformed heritage, and we urge others to join us in our efforts.

4. We are concerned about a lack of Reformed leadership in the Christian Reformed Church, especially among those in important positions in the church.

5. We express our concern about much of the educational material that comes from the Board of Publications—materials which do not build up a sound training in the Reformed faith

I. REGARDING ACTING THROUGH ECCLESIASTICAL CHANNELS

Resolved that individuals and consistories ought to continue and intensify efforts to draw attention to and prosecute departures from Scripture and the creeds, as well as violations of the Church Order.

II. REGARDING THE DECISION OF SYNOD, 1984, OPENING THE OFFICE OF DEACON TO WOMEN

Resolved: 1. that we declare this decision to be in conflict with the Word of God, the Reformed confessions, and the Church Order;

2. that we will not cooperate with or contribute to the implementation of this decision (C.O. Art. 29);

3. that we call upon the consistories of the churches to so declare publicly.

III. REGARDING THE PRESENT QUOTA SYSTEM

Resolved: 1. that we declare the enforcement of quotas to be in conflict with the Scriptures which teach "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:7);

2. that, when for conscience sake, individuals or consistories cannot support an agency, institution, or program of the denomination, such individuals or consistories ought to seek out alternative causes which are Reformed in character and worthy of their gifts and prayers.

IV. REGARDING THE COMMITTEE OF CONCERNED MEMBERS

Resolved: 1. that we support the on-going efforts of the committee to assist consistories in bringing their overtures to classes and synods;

2. that we encourage the Committee to consider future conferences on the Christian Reformed Church.

V. REGARDING A CALL TO PRAYER

Resolved that for the reformation and revival of the Christian Reformed Church, believers be called upon to exercise themselves individually and corporately in prayer to God for these great ends.

VI. REGARDING THE CONTEMPORARY TESTIMONY

Resolved that the Conference of Concerned declare that it is opposed to the adoption of the Contemporary Testimony by the Synod of 1986, that it repudiates the notion that the Contemporary Testimony is a Biblically informed confession and declare that if it is adopted, our members will not be confessionally identified by it, nor accept it in any form as a binding creedal declaration.

C

Rev. Arthur Besteman
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