

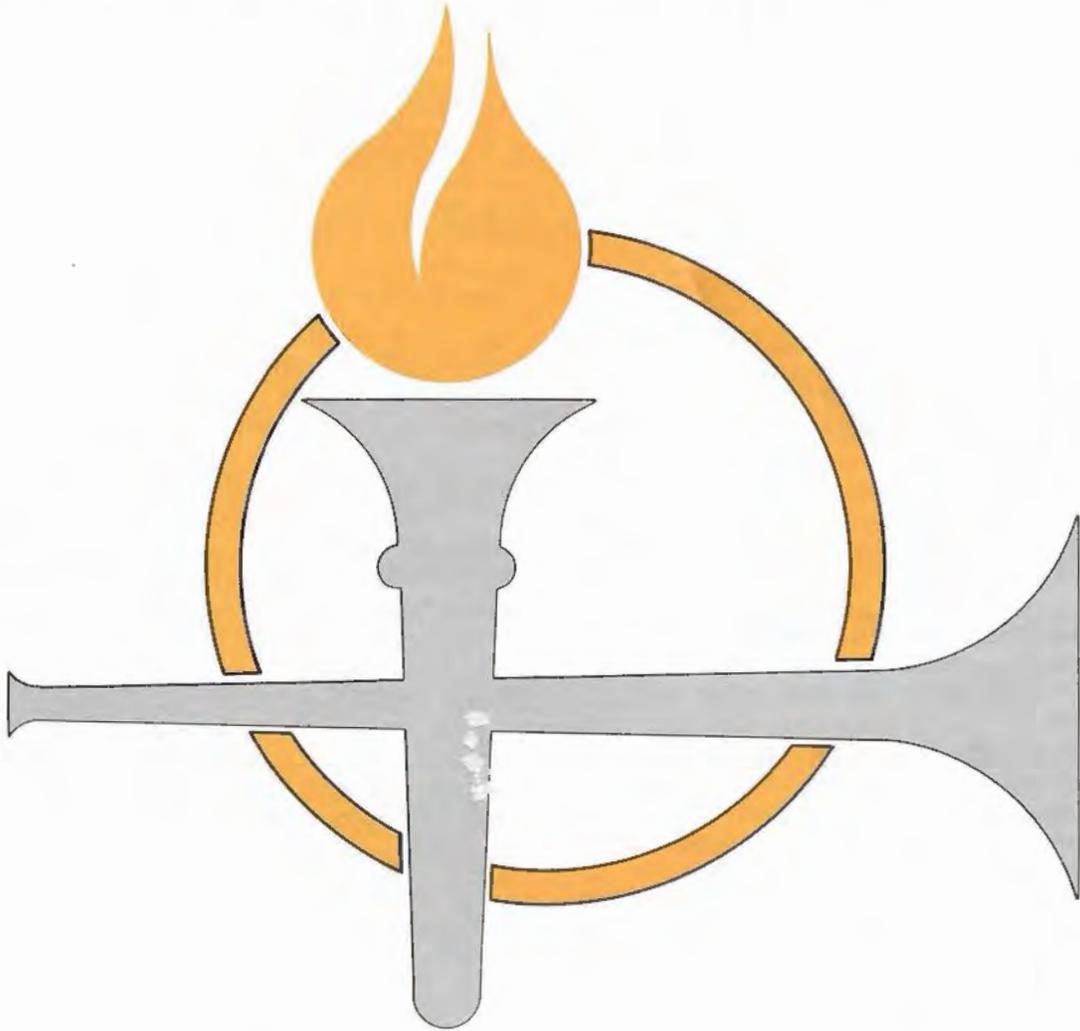
# THE OUTLOOK

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DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

SEPTEMBER 1986



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CONCERNED BROTHERS  
CURE FOR BUREAUCRACY  
CAN TWO WALK TOGETHER

# Training Women

## MINISTERS

Ralph A. Pontier

Should Calvin Seminary be training women to serve in the office of minister of the Word? The Synod of 1985 has stated that the biblical headship principle implies that only male members of the church shall be admitted to the office of minister and elder. If only males shall be admitted to the offices then it would seem to follow logically that only males should be trained for the offices. Why train women for an office which the Bible says they should not hold? Yet that is just what Calvin Seminary is doing.

Let it be said at the outset that there is no Biblical teaching, including the headship principle, that forbids women from receiving theological training. Women's gifts for use in the church are many and varied and those gifts need to be sharpened and refined through training and education. It is very good that Calvin Seminary has been for many years open to women seeking to prepare themselves academically for service in Christ's church.

However, there is a vast difference between providing theological training to women and preparing women to occupy the office of minister. At Calvin Seminary there are four degree programs presently available. They are the Master of Divinity program, the Master of Ministry program, the Master of Church Education program, and the Master of Theological Studies program. The first two are described in the catalog as designed for preparing students for the ordained ministry; the first being the ordinary program and the second an alternative for mature Native Americans. The latter two programs are not preparation for ordination but rather provide theological education as a support for various vocational objectives including leadership in the church's educational ministry.

Most of the students at the Seminary are enrolled in the Master of Divinity (M. Div.) program which is

described in the 1985-86 Seminary Catalog as "designed primarily for persons wishing to prepare themselves for the ordained ministry." Given that stated purpose it seems highly inconsistent of the Seminary to admit women to the program. If women should not hold that office, why use our denominational resources to train them for it. Yet Calvin Seminary has in past years graduated three women from the M. Div. program and this past year had four others enrolled in it. Since Calvin Seminary has other programs available for providing theological education which are open to women, why admit women to the program designed for ordination?

The Board of Trustees of Calvin College and Seminary (BOT) is not unaware of the need to justify women in the M. Div. program. In the BOT minutes dated February 4, 1985, p. 26, the following rationale is given.

- a. As an educational institution Calvin Theological Seminary has a mission which is broader than (sic) preparing men for Christian Reformed ministry.
- b. Even though the M. Div. degree program is "primarily for persons wishing to prepare themselves for the ordained ministry," admission and/or graduation from the program does not require that the student will be or intends to be ordained.

In response to the first reason given it may be said that a broader mission is fine (provided synod defines and mandates that broader mission). However that in no way implies or necessitates that women therefore should be trained for the ordained ministry. The other degree programs of the seminary provide ample opportunity for the seminary to have a legitimate broader mission. By limiting the M. Div. program to males the

seminary would not be limiting its proper broader mission.

In response to the second reason it may well be asked, "Why not?" Certainly ordination should not be required of all M. Div. graduates since not all of them will prove to be fit for ordination. But is it asking too much to require of all those applying for entrance to the program a declaration of their intent to enter the ordained ministry? Good stewardship of the professors' time and the denomination's funds, which heavily underwrite the cost of the M. Div. program, requires that those sponsored in the program give a declaration of intent to fulfill the purpose of the program. What classical student fund would pay for a young man to study for the ministry if that young man had no intention of becoming a minister or was obviously not qualified? But yet the denomination has for several years subsidized the education of a number of female M. Div. students who should not enter the ordained ministry of our church or any other church according to the decision of synod. At least two of the three women who have in the past graduated from the M. Div. program are now ordained ministers in other denominations. If the Board sees as part of its broader mission the training of women ministers for other denominations then their mission has become too broad and is without synodical mandate.

One additional argument which the BOT puts forth in support of its policy to admit women to the M. Div. program is that it does not "solicit, promote, or provide opportunities for exhorting by its women M. Div. students." However it does promote "public teaching and speaking in places such as rest homes, chapels, retreats, and other such non-official worship settings," (BOT minutes). This is hardly an impressive argument. The distinction between official worship and non-official worship is not a biblical distinction. It sounds more like pharasaical double talk. (It seems similar to the Pharisees' distinction between swearing by the temple as opposed to swearing by the gold of the temple; the later being an official or binding oath while, in their view, the former was not. Jesus condemned such attempts to evade responsibility, Matt. 23:16ff.) When Paul says that women should remain silent with respect to teaching and preaching did he mean to make an exception for worship services at military chapels or at rest homes? Does only "official worship" count in God's sight? No, all worship counts and should be guided by Scripture. The Synods of 1984 and 1985, in stating and applying the biblical headship principle, made no distinction between official and non-official church functions.

Since the BOT's policy is clearly in violation of the church's long standing policy of not having women ministers and contrary to the clear implications of the headship principle as explained by recent synods, it is time for the BOT to revise their policy and exclude women from the M. Div. program. If the BOT is not forthcoming with such a change, then it is time for overtures to synod and all other proper means to bring about a policy consistent with Scripture and synodical decisions.

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# THE OUTLOOK



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

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# BUREAUCRACY IN THE CRC: CAUSE/CURE (3)

Lester DeKoster

When boards and agencies operate outside the authority and control of local consistories, they are bureaucracies. The CRC is bureaucracy-ridden. But bodies which avoid consistorial control cannot be doing work as the Church. That is "what's wrong" with bureaucracy in the CRC.

So far this series has come.

We noted that bureaucracy violates our conception of church government, because Reformed polity understands the Bible to vest original authority in the local congregation to be exercised through the local consistory.

This means, as we have observed, that no matter how busy a bureaucracy may be, and how large its staff and budget, its work cannot be understood as done by the Church — except to the degree that it is carried on by authority of, and under supervision by, the consistories of the Church. Precisely what bureaucracy avoids.

It is noteworthy that among the offices established by the Lord to serve His Church there is none for bureaucrat. The Church is not called to function through bureaucracy.

Perhaps you are now thinking that all members of our boards, committees, and staffs are, each of them, members of some congregation and therefore responsible to some local consistory? That's a tactical device which boards may occasionally use to sidetrack questions or complaints relative to staff personnel: don't ask us; ask his consistory! And the question rarely gets an answer!

But go ahead, ask the bureaucrat's consistory if they accept full responsibility for, because they can exercise careful supervision of, the bureaucrat's full board or agency. They do not, of course, and cannot. The issue in bureaucracy is not the faith and life of this or that person, but the work of the board or agency as a whole. Where and how is that supervised by local consistories? In short, how is all that activity really the work of the Church?

There is, of course, a category of activities done for rather than by the Church — the care of building and grounds, housing and busing and printing, and the like, all done by delegated authority. You may not, for example, start painting the walls of your sanctuary without consistorial authorization. And the wise building-and-grounds committee carefully supervises what you do — more than they can do with bureaucracies. But this is work done for, not by, the Church of Christ.

We are talking of bureaucracies, namely boards, committees and agencies which presume to work as the Church, and thus at the Church's expense, without the Church's supervision.

It is, of course, the very nature of bureaucracy to present itself as doing the work of the Church, all the while avoiding or obscuring the lines of authority/responsibility between itself and local consistories.

How do things get that way?

Probably by a combination of consistorial negligence, and the ambition of those who know how to use that for their own purposes.

But, friend, don't blame the bureaucrat. He is a product, not a cause. Do you remember Pogo, "We have found the enemy, and he is . . . us!"

Consistorial negligence is the root of bureaucracy, and consistorial assumption of responsibility will be the cure of it.

Consistories seem to have forgotten that ecclesiastical authority has, if you like, a twin.

That twin is, precisely, responsibility.

Authority and responsibility are co-relatives. As the Lord gave authority to consistories, He laid upon them the burden of responsibility.

For example — and you know it right well, reader — if a consistory accepts full responsibility — as before the Lord — for what goes on in the congregation, it finds itself granted the Lord's gift of authority over what goes on in the congregation. Yes, authority and responsibility are twins!

Say that your consistory takes full responsibility for the orthodoxy of the preaching, the teaching, the witnessing, catechizing, house visiting, youth and diaconal work . . . in short for all that is done in and by the congregation as the Church: what happens? The consistory discovers that the Lord gives effective reality to its authority over the biblical character of these activities.

How could it be otherwise? Consider the elder who has just read, say, the awesome description of the risen Lord in Revelation, chapter one. This Lord has, He soon makes clear, an eye fixed on the elder's exercise of office. Now, could such an elder even try to tell this Lord that all's well in the congregation of which he is made guardian if he doesn't know, or can't approve, what goes on there?

Where the consistory does none-the-less abdicate its responsibilities, its authority is removed. Are there elders who don't bother to know what doctrine is implicit in the preaching or is conveyed in catechism classes? What standards govern discussion groups? or youth, or adult retreats? Are there elders who think that the lapse of our fine tradition of extending the right hand of approval to the minister after sermon really excuses them of concern for the doctrinal purity of what has been preached that day? Whatever is sung is all right with you? Dialogue by the unordained is as valid as proclamation by the ordained? And the like. Anything goes if enough vocal people in the congregation demand it?

Then why be surprised if you have no authority in these matters? Why should the Lord endorse a mockery of His prescribed way of ordering His Church?

It follows, of course, that when consistories permit bureaucracy to presume to accomplish the work of the Church out from under their immediate supervision (and pay for it besides), then consistorial authority and control vanish there too. Responsibility ignored; authority gone. Twin casualties. A kind of universal law, really.

It's likely that here is the profile of the bureaucratizing of the Church: consistorial responsibility forfeited; consistorial authority lost.

What consistory even pretends to have a governing word over our bureaucracies? Those that even attempt it are rebuffed. Quotas are laid upon congregations as obligatory taxes — and consistories supinely collect them. New liturgical forms are imposed after the formality of denominational trial; church school materials float down; study reports fill unread Acts and Agendas; pastoral "guidelines" fall like crumbs from synodical tables. It's a veritable hive of activity. And yet, bureaucratic coming and going and doing and saying, if not out of sight, at least out of reach of consistorial jurisdiction.

Bureaucracy steps in where consistories step out. And synods dance to bureaucracy's tune. Recall how

Synod '85 was manipulated by our Interchurch Relations Committee into speaking of *apartheid* as "heresy," — a story detailed by Dr. H. Vander Goot in the recently published volume *Orthodoxy And Orthopraxis* (Paideia, 1986). Neither the first, nor likely to be the last, instance of bureaucratic success in using synod as its servant.

Bureaucracy came to the CRC as consistories surrendered, some of them no doubt gladly, responsibility for what they still wished done in the name of the Church. And then some consistories were surprised to discover that they had no voice in what the bureaucracies they had nurtured are doing.

The history of how bureaucracy came to the CRC is not past finding out, and would make a more useful academic thesis than are many, but let's for our purposes, suppose things went something like this:

Once upon a time somebody said, "Our method of training pastors in ministers' studies is inadequate and out of date. Let's have a school." Sounded like a good idea, especially when put under synodical control to ensure orthodoxy. But step by step consistories lost control over seminary education to the point where the system now has a stranglehold monopoly over whom consistories can even nominate for their pulpits. Bureaucracy calls the tune, synod pipes to order.

Or again, it was said, "Look here now! Local congregations can't bear the burden of mission work, haven't the time or the expertise to supervise it. We've got to have a denominational missions board, maybe two of them, don't we?" (Reverend Van Dellen, you may recall, was thinking of that).

And local consistories, some more readily than others, chorused in effect, "Yeah, we don't really want to be responsible for organizing and supervising mission projects anyway. Who's got the time or the money? Let's have a board!" (The bureaucrats will find the time; and we will still put up the money).

But at first some congregations probably applauded. Now we began to count in the world. Some "leaders" had vision, they did. Let the Van Dellens (and there were others) croak their ill omens! Bigger is better! Who needs be hobbled by Reformed polity, whatever that is? And lo, mission boards there are! As bureaucratic as described.

Then 'twas said somewhere, "Local congregations can't take care of catechetical materials, can they! The preacher is too busy counseling. Elders haven't time, either. And that old question/answer technique is certainly out of style — no respect for the initiative of the young. We need a source (doctrinally above suspicion, of course; synods will see to it) for the production of 'Bible school' materials."

And many consistories said, "Yes, we'll buy that." And lo, a board of publications, as bureaucratic as any. Preachers are indeed freed from typing study outlines, but consistories are out of control of what study materials say.

Probably so it went. Always the apparently right solution to a problem, though always bearing the

same stamp: transfer of responsibility out of the hand of the local consistory — and authority going along.

“What does the laity know about liturgy, anyway?” And so we got a liturgical committee. “What do consistories know about hymnody?” And behold, a succession of Psalter-Hymnal revision committees. “How could local churches compete on the air waves with the electronic church?” Another committee. “What about extending material relief into areas of disaster?” Another committee. Interchurch relations? Another committee. Race relations? Another committee. Hosts of matters to be studied and then “guidelines” into the churches? More committees.

What a field for enterprising bureaucrats!

And we've found them, or they us.

And where in all this are the consistories?

In terms of authority, out of sight.

With but one crucial function left them:  
scrounging up the funds!

And with the local congregations reaping  
the fruits, then?

What fruits?

Why don't you inspect your congregations' storehouse and see what harvest is gathered there from all the bureaucratic activity you help pay for? Chances are you cannot even name all the bureaucracies, let alone the bureaucrats. But look to see what, if anything, you are getting for your stewardship. You may, indeed, encounter a few elders wistfully wondering how they, the seat of original authority in the Body, count for so little while the bureaucratic creatures of their own making loom so large.

But what fruits?

All this flurry of planting, and so little in the local cupboard?

How come?

We seem to have thought that God can be mocked with impunity.

Consider this: the Lord lodges authority and responsibility for what His Church does in the handle of the local consistory. That is Reformed polity.

But the local consistory has been sold the notion that the Lord made some kind of mistake. The local consistory has persuaded itself, it may be with a boost from the bureaucrats, of its own incompetence. Lay elders simply came to see themselves as lacking the time, the skills, the vision, the theological acumen, and whatever else bureaucracies offer to provide. So they sought to shift Church work to bureaucratic shoulders. Clear enough.

But this was quite clearly saying, then, that the Lord made a mistake in wanting His work done through consistories instead of through bureaucracies. And, obviously, the loss of consistorial authority in the CRC clearly demonstrates that the Lord is displeased when His servants question His judgment.

Dare one say that the Bible neglects by oversight to provide for the office of bureaucrat? That is, a Church functionary who owes no responsibility to consistories? Or does the Bible really prohibit the

elder from trying to shift his responsibilities and authority into other hands? (We had a study committee in the early '70s which tried to amend the Lord's seeming neglect by telling the Church it could create whatever offices it likes — a mistaken view already rejected by Reformed synods four centuries ago).

What, then, was the Lord to do with those consistories that so willingly forfeited their own birthright on the promise of bigger and better messes of pottage?

What use had He in His Church for servants fleeing from obligations?

Not much. So He stripped them of authority over the bureaucracies they so willingly created to try relieve them of responsibilities. Truth may have been that most consistories were once glad to “let Johnny do it,” and may even now know no better. Elders may see nothing out of order, perhaps, in Johnny's being off and running with the reins well out of consistorial hands.

But sowing has come to reaping, and the bureaucratic vine bears little fruit in local vineyards. We may sacrifice much at the bureaucratic altar, but the Lord counts obedience first!

Bureaucracy among us has never been bigger and more expensive while consistorial authority has never been at lower ebb. And along with it is going respect for the Church Order, for the Forms of Unity, the Form of Subscription, and for the “pastoral advice” of synods. Never more centralized busywork and the Church never more divided.

How is it that consistories appeal in vain to broader bodies, except that these broader bodies respect them no more than they respect themselves? Is it surprising that dozens of consistorial protests to Synod '85 re women in office were disposed of in less time than it took to compose and process them? Why should a so-called “major” body be impressed by higher authorities which meekly pay the bills despite having given their prerogatives away to boards, committees, agencies and staffs?

There is, it is true, as already noted, one denominational role left the local consistory. It is that of tax collector, bringing in the quotas, sometimes enforced by strongarm tactics at the classical, or even the synodical, levels.

But to call the quota system the exercise by consistories of responsible stewardship is to rob terms of their meaning.

There is, too, the election of delegates to broader bodies, there to encounter the Establishment as described by Reverend Van Dellen.

To this we have come from the consistorial heights won for us by the Reformation.

What then?

What's the prescription?

Plain enough to write it ourselves, really.

It's been implied all along in this series: the recovery of consistorial responsibility as route to re-assertion of consistorial authority. That's the formula written on the prescription. And the counter to which that prescription must be taken is the table in every consistory room.

Cure starts with the recognition that bureaucracy is everywhere a symptom, of the nature of a fever, an alarm signal pointing to consistories derelict in duty.

What duty?

The God-assigned duty of guardianship over what the Church does. A responsibility which cannot be evaded before the Lord, cannot be exercised in ignorance, nor satisfied by checks despatched to classical and other treasurers.

Or say: a high bureaucracy-count indicates that the church body is ill. That count needs to come down, lest this body join other churches in the comatose state of amounting to nothing in getting the Lord's work done on earth.

The only cure is that consistories once again be what the Lord means them to be: bodies responsible for and exercising authority over all that transpires as the work of the Church.

Not impossible, but by no means easy.

Some steps are to hand:

1. No use blaming bureaucrats. Often of good intention, hard-working and skilled, though smitten with the virus of secrecy that hallmarks bureaucracy. No use blaming anyone, really; it's time to get to work at what it means that the Lord devolves original authority in His Church upon the local congregation, to be exercised via the consistory. A study for elders and members alike.

2. Sound stewardship is always possible. It involves consistorial oversight of the funds provided in good faith by the congregation. How can these be responsibly disbursed without receipt in exchange of the fullest accounting of how bureaucracies use each penny? We recall that in the Lord's parables, stewards are always called to an accounting. "You can just trust us," is not a biblical stewardship pattern.

3. One goal, of course, is making bureaus out of bureaucracies. Bureaus, as was pointed out in the beginning, are agencies so eager to keep consistories fully informed of every detail of their work, and so sensitive to consistorial concerns, that consistories can in good faith assume full responsibility for what is done and paid for in their name. In short, consistories can demand full accounting of all that the bureaus do, and in turn, the bureaus can accept from consistories full supervision of what they are about. Work can start any time on making bureaus out of bureaucracies, and disbanding those that will not make the adjustment. Van Dellen's phrase, borrowed from Professor Steffans, was, you remember, "Kill the boards!" That, then, for those bureaucracies either not

essential or unwilling to become bureaus. Here the exercise of consistorial responsibility begins with withholding funds. Is there any other definition of stewardship, either with the Church's monies or our own?

4. Without developing another subject, we may observe that even the work of bureaus is not of the essence of the Church. Education can be done for the Church through external agencies. Publication can be farmed out. Thus local congregations could be offered a range of options for their pulpits and teaching. Evangelism and missions, use of the air waves and outreach of all kinds, including diaconal concern, can be accomplished by one or a combination of several consistories. All this would keep responsibility close at hand. Synods can be liberated from influence by non-elected people; synodical agendas can be limited to matters arising only as actual local problems; and synodical meetings can be reduced to being held at two or three year intervals.

In a word, the cure for bureau-itus begins with renewed consistorial exercise of responsibility for what the Church does — and with that will come authority for what is now obscured in bureaucratic haze.

Each consistory is, by divine appointment, the Boss! Act like it!

For one day judgment will be handed down by that standard.

Might someone now be thinking: only so general a prescription as that? No step by step route to the restoration?

To be asking that is to have missed the point so far, I fear.

Still hoping for someone to tell you, as a consistory, what the burden of original authority involves? Thinking of turning to some "authority," perhaps? A weekend retreat, and lecture on "What Should Consistories Do?"

Your congregation deserves better than that. It's you they elected to take full responsibility, now, for what transpires among them, and how their money is used. Or, better, it's you the Lord has appointed to guard His flock. He offers a guide, the Bible, and a rule, your conscience. Forget the "experts." Remember that when the Church was run by theological "experts," it got so far off track that the Reformation was necessary. St. Paul makes it very clear that God deliberately chooses seemingly ordinary people to do His work. He will qualify as deserved by commitment and effort.

Take courage, then, and be counted. If drift is to be curbed among us, you must be one of the turning points.

Don't, of course, expect the bureaucracies to help you out. Bureaucrats in board, committee, agency and school have a stake in keeping things as they are, and more so. You may even hear that local consistories should acknowledge classes and synods as "higher" bodies, to fit in theory with what now goes in practice.

Or you might hear that Reformed polity is not nearly so clear, nor of the nature as described in these articles. Think it out for yourselves.

It's an issue not really very obscure: Can activity, of whatever kind, be done as the work of the Church unless it is under the jurisdiction and control of the local consistory, by its authority and correlative responsibility?

Bureaucracies operate best under what Dr. Machen was fond of describing as "conditions of low visibility." He meant engulfing issues in a mist of uncertainty, as is done with the discussion of women in office. Bureaucrats are good at that, they sniffing out

their way, while the rest of us are immobilized by bad weather.

Consistories who mean business — and there should be no others — will have to knit their brows, recapture the vision implicit in our heritage, and dig in.

To everything the same test: is it done as our responsibility, and thus by our authority?

Where the answer is "No," there is work to do. ■

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# Biblical HEADSHIP and the Board of Publications

David A. Kloosterman

Perhaps your congregation, like mine, has used in its adult education program the *Bible Studies on I Corinthians* published early this year in *The Banner* by the Christian Reformed Church's Board of Publications. Perhaps you are presently using these materials or are considering using them in the near future. If so, it is with you in mind that I write with a particular sense of urgency regarding these I Corinthians lessons. Even if you will never use these materials, however, you should be aware that the teaching found in these materials contradicts Synod 1984's declaration on headship.

As is well known, Synod 1984 declared that "the headship principle, which means that the man should exercise primary leadership and direction-setting in the home and in the church, is a biblical teaching recognized in both the Old and the New Testament" (1984 Acts of Synod, p. 623). Immediately after this declaration as it appears in the 1984 Acts of Synod is a list of delegate's names who wished to record their negative votes. The very first name in this list is that of a Homer Samplonius. Who is the author of these lessons on I Corinthians — a book which contains two of the three New Testament passages which teach the direction-setting headship of the man in the church — you guessed it: Homer Samplonius.

The CRC Board of Publications in a letter written to myself has stated that "the editorial staff was unaware of Rev. Samplonius' negative vote on 'the headship issue.'" Be that as it may, Rev. Samplonius' stance in opposition to Synod's declaration is made abundantly clear in his lessons on I Corinthians, and

there can be little excuse for the lack of editorial supervision which allowed such a stance free expression in a teaching office.

For instance, in lesson 11 we find the following treatment of I Corinthians 11:3:

In his argument that women should continue the practice of wearing veils, the apostle appeals first to the divine order (11:3). Recent studies cited by F. F. Bruce in his commentary of I Corinthians make a strong case for understanding the word head (v. 3) as 'source' or 'origin.' Not only is this supported from everything which follows in this particular section, but it also clears up an otherwise serious inconsistency with the Athanasian Creed, which does not really permit us to speak of God as being the 'head' of Christ, since the three persons of the Trinity are all co-equal. Yet it is quite proper to speak of 'head' as 'source' because God is the eternal source, or origin, of the Christ ('begotten of the Father').

This exegesis echoes that found in Minority Report #2 of the Committee on Headship in the Bible, which urged the opening of all church offices to women:

We of the minority read Paul's threefold headship in I Corinthians 11:3 as alluding primarily to source, point of origin. This is the interpretation of such commentators as C. K. Barrett, F. F. Bruce, and J. Murphy-O'Connor.

1984 Acts of Synod, p. 356

Even the Board of Publications has recognized that "in declaring 'the headship principle' a biblical teaching, synod based its decision in large part on the

exegesis found in the Majority Report." The Majority Report's treatment of I Corinthians 11:3 is quite opposite to that of Samplonius:

Verse 3 deals with a triple headship: 'the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.' The question is, what does *headship* mean in the passage? Some hold that *head* here means source or origin. In the abstract this is possible, since source or origin is one of the meanings of head in the New Testament. But the question is: Does this meaning fit here? [The report here goes into a detailed analysis from which it concludes that this meaning does not fit when considering Christ as the head of every man and God as the head of Christ]. . . .

If we think of *head* in the sense of 'ruling head,' however, the words just discussed make perfectly good and perfectly biblical sense. Christ is indeed the head of all men in the sense of ruling over them; this holds even for non-Christians, since all men are under the rulership of Christ, whether they know it or not. God, or God the Father, is certainly the head of Christ in the sense of 'ruling head,' if we think of Christ as the Mediator whom the Father sent into the world. Christ, in fact, says many times that he has come into this world only to do the Father's will, and only to do the works which the Father has given him to do.

Since the first and the last headship mentioned in verse 3 are headships of rule, we conclude that the headship spoken of in the middle part of the verse, 'and the head of the woman is man' is also a headship of rule, or a direction-setting headship.

1984 Acts of Synod, pp. 308, 309

What is even more amazing is that the Leader's Guide for the I Corinthian lessons presents essentially the same viewpoint as Samplonius. For instance, on I Corinthians 11:3 the Leader's Guide comments:

... the Greek word used for man here is *aner* which can mean either 'man' or 'husband.'

So the question we face is this: What does Paul mean? Is every man the head of every woman? Or is the husband the head of his wife, but not necessarily the head of other women?

John Calvin understands Paul to be speaking of husband and wife, about the order of marriage. He says, for example, 'If the woman uncovers her head, she shakes off subjection — involving contempt of her husband.' I too think that is the best way to understand Paul.

Compare the above to what the Majority Report says on this matter:

Does this section [I Corinthians 11:3-12] deal only with the relation of husbands and wives to each other? There are several reasons for believing that the passage has to do not only with husbands and wives but also with men and women generally, whether married or not: (1) The passage deals with conduct in the worship service, and such a service would involve those who were unmarried as well as those who were married. (2) The references to 'every man who prays or prophesies' (v. 4) and 'every woman who prays or prophesies' (v. 5) sug-

gest that more than married men and women are intended. (3) Verses 7-9 give the creational basis for the headship of man; this creational basis, however, holds for the unmarried as well as the married. (4) In verses 13-14 Paul appeals to nature or 'the nature of things' (NIV) to prove his point; nature, however, has to do not just with husbands and wives but with men and women in general.

1984 Acts of Synod, pp. 309-310

These same patterns are repeated in the treatment of I Corinthians 14:33-38: From *Bible Studies*, Vol. 27, lesson 14:

Verses 33-35 continue to be a source of much confusion and dissension. Let us note that Paul has already permitted the women to prophesy and pray in church. Since we do not believe that Scripture contradicts Scripture, we believe that Paul is not discussing these activities. It appears that in the Corinthian services good order was disturbed by speaking in tongues, indiscriminate prophetic utterances, and also by inquisitive women asking (embarrassing?) questions (v. 35). The women who were asserting their newfound rights were urged to respect the good order of the church and to wait to ask questions of their husbands until they were at home.

From *Bible Studies Leader's Guide*, Vol. 27, lesson 14; p. 45:

It may be useful at this point to read again the Lesson Notes on I Corinthians 11:3-5. Paul would not be contradicting now what he said then. Paul's main emphasis is on maintaining good order in the meetings, so his advice (vv. 26-36) addresses whatever disruptions were taking place.

My own opinion is that Paul advises the church in Corinth to prohibit women from speaking in the service on the grounds that all the other churches did so, and that most women were not capable in those days of making a meaningful contribution to the discussion of the gospel. Those circumstances no longer describe churches in the twentieth century, so the advice no longer applies.

From Majority Report, Committee on Headship in the Bible, 1984 Acts of Synod, p. 313:

The injunction forbidding women from engaging in this kind of speaking in the church, therefore, is probably an implication of the headship concept. It suggests that Paul is here repeating the thought developed in I Corinthians 11:1-16: namely, that the headship of the man should be recognized in the worship services of the church.

All this is bad enough, but the *Bible Studies* materials on I Corinthians do not merely put forward questionable and one-sided interpretations of I Corinthians, but also use slanted, leading questions which seem designed to promote the cause of women in all church offices, and to attack the traditional interpretation of I Timothy 2:12, which is undoubtedly the clearest and strongest text in the New Testament prohibiting women from positions of authority in the church. I quote the following questions and answers from the Leader's Guide:

Lesson 12, Discussion Question 5. Many denominations are involved in an ongoing study of office

and ordination. Verse 28 [of I Cor. 12] mentions the appointment of apostles, prophets, and teachers, along with many others. Is it possible that our present difficulties with respect to office and ordination stem from the fact that we have been too restrictive? Have we elevated the two traditional offices of elder (including the minister) and deacon too much, separating them from the rest of the member's functions? Why or why not?

... the church since New Testament times has been relatively free to develop whatever system of government seems to work best and to contribute most to spiritual growth.

And this is in line with Paul's teaching about the gifts of the Spirit. Whenever the church develops a rigid system of office, that system serves to some extent as a straightjacket for the Holy Spirit. It does not allow the gifts of the Holy Spirit to be freely exercised to their fullest extent.

In my opinion, the concept of 'office' in the church ought to mean virtually the same thing as 'function.' Each congregation has certain functions that need to be performed regularly. Persons are appointed to do this (here appointment means 'ordination'). But as the Holy Spirit provides spiritual gifts which do not fit into the established order, each congregation should be free to expand its appointments as it sees fit. Their established structure should not keep them from using spiritual gifts that have obviously been given to certain members. We should not let our idea of structure based on tradition overrule what the Holy Spirit seeks to do among us by way of his gifts.

*Leader's Guide*, pp. 40-41

Lesson 11, Discussion Question 2. It is generally recognized that women participated in the prayers of the congregation in the early church. But what is the gift of prophecy? Do we prophesy today? Is this distinct from Paul's teaching elsewhere, when he forbids women to teach (I Timothy 2:12)?

... Paul's prohibition against 'teaching' would seem then to mean that he did not consider women in general to be sufficiently well-educated or trained to take on the official task of instructing newcomers in the faith, though perhaps there could be exceptions.

Personally, I do not think this prohibition should be taken as a hard and fast rule. It reflects the generally low position of women in that time and age. Women today are as well educated as men, so the reason for prohibiting their 'teaching' is no longer valid.

*Leader's Guide*, p. 37

Again, the patterns noted previously persist here. Minority Report -2 presents an argument virtually identical to that quoted above. The Majority Report, on the other hand, has this to say about Timothy 2:12:

According to verse 12 a woman is not permitted 'to teach or to have authority over a man.' These words apply primarily to the worship service of the church. Though not all types of teaching are forbidden to women, what Paul here forbids is teaching which involves the exercise of authority over men — such instruction as was done by the

official teachers of the church. Because Paul grounds this prohibition in the biblical data about creation and the fall (vv. 13-14), it is clear that this injunction was not only for the Ephesian church at that time but is binding for the church of all time.

1984 Acts of Synod, p. 329

I and another brother wrote staff members Mr. Gary H. Mulder (Executive Director), Dr. Harvey A. Smit (Education Department Director), and Rev. Andrew Kuyvenhoven (*The Banner* editor), as well as members of the executive committee of the Board of Publications Rev. Alvin L. Hoksbergen, Dr. Sidney Dykstra, Dr. Henry ten Hoor, and Mr. Gordon Quist. In our letter we detailed our complaints and communicated our strong feeling that some sort of public explanation of the matter was required in the very near future.

The Board responded in a letter in which they said this:

The majority report cannot be regarded as an authoritative, synodically approved document. Only the decisions of synod have that status... we do not find in either the *Bible Studies* or the *Leader's Guide* material on I Corinthians 11 and 14 anything that we judge to be 'at variance with recent synodical decisions,' nor do we find any attempt to promote a view of headship that contradicts that position adopted by Synod. Rather we find here interpretations of Bible passages that fall within the range of interpretations found in Reformed circles and attempts to speak specifically to the text. Consequently, we see no necessity in printing a public explanation of this matter.

This, to my mind, is an unsatisfactory reply. Granted, the majority report is not an authoritative, synodically approved document. But the declaration of the 1984 Synod in part was that the headship principle (1) "means that the man should exercise primary leadership and direction-setting... in the church" and (2) "is a biblical teaching recognized in... the New Testament." The *Bible Studies* on I Corinthians do not find this biblical teaching in I Corinthians 11, nor in I Corinthians 14, nor even in I Timothy 2. In a thorough survey of the pertinent passages in the Bible, the Majority Report found three, and only three passages in the New Testament which taught this headship of the man over the woman in the church. The three passages they found were I Corinthians 11:2-16, I Corinthians 14:33-38, and I Timothy 2:11-15. It simply will not do for the Board of Publications to maintain that their study materials do not conflict with synod's declaration that the headship principle is a biblical teaching when those materials deny each and every scripture passage which does in fact teach the principle. The headship principle, Synod declares, is recognized in the New Testament. I certainly recognize it there. It is apparent that these materials do not. ●

Mr. Kloosterman is an analytical chemist and a church school teacher and consistory member living at 3610 Konkle, Kalamazoo, MI 49001. He also contributed an article in our March, 1986 OUTLOOK.

# Can Two Walk Together...?

N. D. Kloosterman

"Interpreting Scripture in the Reformed Community Today" was the title of the second conference sponsored by Redeemer College of Hamilton, Ontario, on May 29-31, 1986.

Dr. David Holwerda began the conference with an address aimed at answering the question, "How does the Reformed community interpret Scripture today?" He sketched first the broad area of agreement, and then the areas of disagreement among Reformed Christians.

We all agree, Holwerda argued, on matters of epistemology (how we know truth to be true); that is, we all agree that faith is basic to reason and that the Christian faith does not depend on rational proof. Reason is not the judge of truth. Though we all share this confessional, philosophical position, our differences arise, Holwerda alleged, when we develop a structure to place on this foundation. Because the exercise of interpretation is not one of purely logical deductions, readers are bound to arrive at different conclusions.

Four differences were outlined:

1) Because some view the historical distance between the Bible (and its world) and us (and our world) as so great, a shift in the view of truth has occurred. The view of truth as relation, articulated in (the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands') *God Met Ons* (God With Us), has lost an objective criterion of truth and depends upon a tension between the reader and the biblical text.

2) The Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (synodical) (GKN) provide example of another difference among Reformed Bible interpreters: a shift has occurred in the view of how Law and Gospel relate, and of how Creation and Eschaton (the Last Time)

relate. Moreover, the cross of Christ is being used to relativize the Law (cf. the GKN report on homosexuality), involving a practical denial that the Word structures life.

3) A third difference concerns the use of "critical" methods of Scripture interpretation. Today some argue that historical criticism, form criticism, literary criticism, and so forth, can and may be used by "evangelicals," among whom we who are Reformed may count ourselves.

4) A fourth difference concerns the matter of common grace and its presumed justification for adopting/adapting the conclusions of a "neutral" science of Bible interpretation.

Professor Holwerda concluded by reminding the audience of the aim of Scripture according to II Timothy 3:16, 17: obedience in the world. We can't turn simply "to the Bible alone," ignoring the problems that history and creation pose for Bible reading. The path of obedience isn't directly discernible from Scripture. These differences of interpretation are inevitable, and controversy about them is, in fact, an aspect of the Spirit's leading us into the truth.

## Test-Case: Divorce/Remarriage in the CRC

On Friday morning, May 30, conferees were addressed by a panel of three (Dr. Al Wolters, Redeemer College; Rev. Nelson Kloosterman, Mid-America Reformed Seminary; Dr. Allen Verhey, Hope College), each of whom analyzed CRC decisions about divorce and remarriage as an example of the application of principles of Bible reading.

Dr. Wolters summarized the events begun in 1970 by an overture from Classis Toronto, and the three

study reports issuing from that request. He noted the initial breadth and subsequent narrowness of meaning given to the word *porneia* (adultery). The 1973 report viewed *porneia* as anything leading to marital disruption, whereas the 1980 report argued that *porneia* refers to sexual infidelity. Wolters noted with appreciation the emphasis on Jesus' clarity about the indissolubility of marriage, but wondered why no report considered Ezra's command that the Israelites married to pagan women divorce their wives (Ezra 10:1-44).

As second speaker, I summarized the interpretations of I Corinthians 7:10-16 offered to the synods of 1906, 1957 and 1980. The various components of interpretation (context, word meanings, grammar, broader biblical history, etc.) received thorough attention in each of these reports, and differences of exegetical opinion were often discussed at length. But the surprising feature of the 1980 study is that, after setting forth an array of exegetical choices, it argued that the existence of these differences made it impossible "to state specifically what Scripture requires in this passage."

We also noted that during the years spanned by these reports (1906-1980) the limits of exegetical uncertainty expanded considerably. As the years went by, Scripture became more and more "ambiguous" and "unclear." This is surely surprising when contrasted with the "certain" conclusions of critical biblical scholarship more widely accepted among us! Especially the 1980 report alleged that certain passages of Scripture are obscure, an obscurity due principally to the fact that Scripture's original situation cannot be reconstructed from the text. We therefore asked: if this be so, what does it mean to confess the clarity and sufficiency of Scripture as the only rule of faith and life?

Dr. Allen Verhey commended the 1980 study very highly for respecting and promoting "pluralism" in the interpretation of Scripture. He gave that report a high grade for its willingness to engage in source and redaction criticism of Scripture, and for its unwillingness to straightjacket the text as though one answer or interpretation is right.

If Verhey had written the 1980 report, he said that he would have pointed the church to the rabbinic schools of Hillel and Shammai, who had differing interpretations of Deuteronomy 24:1 (the "unseemly thing" refers either to sexual impurity [Shammai] or to anything distasteful [Hillel]). Here, Verhey alleged, is a good example of two people holding a high view of Scripture who nonetheless came to quite different exegetical conclusions.

Dr. Verhey would also have taught the church, had he written the 1980 report, about the Talmudic strands of Halakah and Haggadah as important background for understanding what Mark and Matthew did with what are purported to have been the words of Jesus. (I say "purported to have been," because, according to Verhey, we don't have the very words of Jesus preserved for us in Scripture, and it is very difficult to reconstruct the historical Jesus, who may or may not have said these words). Matthew and Mark were interested in communicating to us not a

legal permission for divorce (Matt. 5:32; 19:9), but rather the encouragement to shape our character by the story of Jesus, so that we'll not be disposed to divorce. The appropriate question to address to the Bible, therefore, is not: what must I do?, but: who must I be? Scripture is the story of the cross enabling and requiring forgiveness, not a set of rules forming a new system of legislation. The Bible isn't the only source for moral rules; but it is the last word on who we are and who we are to be.

(The reader is referred, for a similar line of argument in Verhey's own words, to his book review "Grounds for remarriage?" in the May, 1986 issue of *The Reformed Journal*, pages 28-29).

### **The Proof of the Pudding: Preaching**

The principles of Bible interpretation are most clearly evident in preaching. "How is Scripture used in the CRC pulpit?" was the question addressed by Dr. Carl Zylstra, minister of the Word in the Immanuel CRC, Orange City, Iowa. In spite of the facts that this address was given in the evening and that its subject ought to interest church members, the audience was comparatively small.

Dr. Zylstra structured his remarks in terms of the Past, the Present, and How Preaching Should be Done. Zylstra argued that past "heroes" of the CRC pulpit chose, in somewhat conscious aversion to biblicistic fundamentalism (a term fondly bandied about at conferences, whose precise meaning few care to explain), to preach the text's message rather than the text's words. Today, by contrast, preachers seem more and more to be preaching the words of the text. Witness the interest, Zylstra contended, in the expository method of verse by verse explanation of Scripture. CRC preachers have lost their fear of biblicism! Witness also the distaste for catechism preaching — a sign, Zylstra alleged, that we're being overrun by the expository preaching of Scripture's words.

But Zylstra's analysis fails to ring true to the church situation generally. Moreover, it appeared to this writer that the speaker had impaled representatives of the past and of the present on the horns of a false dilemma. How, one might ask, is the text's message understood and communicated apart from the text's words? Even the so-called "reconstructive method," guiding the preacher to put the text's message into his own theme and divisions, relies on the text's words to validate and anchor the sermon's theme and points. More often than we preachers like to admit, we are haunted and arrested by our listeners' question, "Now, where did you get that idea from the text?"

### **Observations**

More addresses and other panel presentations were given at the conference. Prof. Dr. W. Velema from Apeldoorn, the Netherlands, and Prof. Dr. J. Faber from the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches participated in a stimulating exchange concerning the use of Scripture in ethics. Drs. Sidney Greidanus, John Stek and Henry Vander Goot brought the conference to its conclusion with their

analysis of questions still needing to be faced in Reformed hermeneutics today. But, for lack of space, we are unable to report their remarks in further detail.

I should like to add two final observations to those already made.

In spite of the suggestion that "we are all agreed on the basics," I believe there is fundamental (that is to say, basic) disagreement in the CRC on the validity of what is called "Scripture criticism." It was shocking to see the conclusions of criticism slide unchallenged past most of the CRC participants. (Non-CRC participants Faber and Velema were forthrightly critical of careless remarks and ideas about Scripture and revelation expressed by some at the conference). For example, the highly questionable assumption that Mark was written before Matthew (a "mild" one at that!) was employed to determine "what Matthew was trying to say" when the speaker reworked Mark's material concerning marriage and divorce — all this without rebuttal! In fact, the openness exhibited in study reports to the conclusions of higher criticism was praised by some as a virtue!

Here lies, in my judgment, the greatest threat to Reformed hermeneutics today. Relatively little attention was devoted to distinguishing between the presuppositions, methods and conclusions of historical criticism, and to analysis of their origin.

Finally, Redeemer College deserves our compliments for hosting this second conference on CRC perspectives. Having participated in both conferences, I've seen the congenial hospitality of the col-

lege personnel displayed in fine form! Initiated in part by Dr. John Bolt's concerns about polarization in the CRC, the 1985 conference dealt with the nature of truth itself. (You can obtain a copy of the main speeches given at the '85 conference, published under the title *Orthodoxy and Orthopraxis*, from Paideia Press, P.O. Box 770, Lewiston, NY 14092; or P.O. Box 1000, Jordan Station, Ont. LOR 1S0). Underlying one's view of truth is one's view of Scripture — hence the topic for the '86 conference.

But now, after two meetings of representative CRC spokesmen where deep differences of conviction and practice were expressed, the question needs to be asked: How beneficial can these conferences be when irreconcilable points of view are "exchanged" (with the best of manners) as if they were equally true and valid? High on the sponsors' agenda should be the question whether they wish to continue offering conferees the wide spectrum of divergent, contradictory CRC opinion (if so, why? for what real good? to whose edification?) — or whether genuine leadership within the church might better be provided by making a choice among the "truths" to be championed, studied and applied among us today. Avoiding such a choice will, I fear, narrow conference participation to clergymen, theologians and philosophers, continuing to talk only to themselves. ●

*Rev. Nelson D. Kloosterman is a professor at Mid-America Reformed Seminary at Orange City, Iowa.*

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# Our Concerned Brothers

The May-June issue of the conservative Mennonite magazine, *Guidelines for Today*, contains an address of its editor, Sanford G. Shetler, delivered at the meeting of the Fellowship of Concerned Mennonites at Landisville, PA, September 5, 6, 1984. He observed that it was the "rapid change in beliefs and practices that brought into being this organization . . . of Concerned," just as such changes in other church circles had occasioned the rise of similar groups in "virtually all of the mainline Protestant churches . . . in the last 25 years."

"The basic reasons for organizing these concern groups," the speaker found in "the drastic changes in attitude toward the Bible and the accompanying pluralism in faith and practice which has developed because of this. The catch-phrase 'It's just a matter of interpretation,' has virtually negated many of the long-accepted doctrines and practices of all denominations in such areas as the social gospel, social and political action, the role of women, evolutionism, and human sexuality." After alluding to the rise of the Modernists and "neoorthodox," he noted that "drinking at the fountain of these big-name theologians who held a very low view of the Scriptures, many Mennonite churchmen began to follow and promote their new subjective theology which views the Bible only in terms of what it means to the individual and not as objective truth applicable to all people for all time." The result, in these churches as in many others, has been what Francis Schaeffer called in his last book, "*The Great Evangelical Disaster* . . . that the Bible is no longer considered by many biblical scholars to be the 'inerrant guide to faith and life.' This may well be called the greatest tragedy to befall Christianity since the days of the Reformation. The Reformation slogan *Sola Scriptura* (the Bible alone) is coming to be replaced rapidly with *Sola Persono* (only what the individual wants it to mean)." "This attitude toward the Scriptures is actually just a minor revision of the original Satanic slur in the garden, 'yea, hath God said?' All other problems stem from this colossal apostasy which is becoming the earmark of our times. The solemn Biblical declaration of the prophets, 'Thus saith the Lord,' has been exchanged for 'Thus saith the scholar.' The deep respect for the historical-critical method of Biblical exegesis has left many young seminarians to emerge with a faith that is riddled by doubt, leaving them to preach

on the great themes of the Bible without conviction." He cited Francis Schaeffer's remark in his book, that "Something is profoundly wrong when a Bible teacher in a prominent evangelical college teaches that one of the Gospel writers made up some of the stories about the birth of Jesus, and that some of the things which Jesus said as recorded in the Gospels really were not said by Jesus at all, but were made up by other people later." Harold Lindsell, in his *The Battle for the Bible*, observed that "More frequently than not, men with this kind of training did not go into the parish ministry," but into teaching in educational institutions and "enjoyed teaching these new and attractive but irregular doctrines through the literature of the denomination. So they became editors and writers for church school materials."

Again citing the writers who had so clearly diagnosed the present condition, the speaker emphasized their call to draw a firm line against this misuse of the Scriptures. "Will we have the courage to draw a line, and to do it publicly, between those who take a full view of Scripture and those who have been infiltrated theologically and culturally? If we do not have the courage, we will cut the ground out from under the feet of our children, and we will destroy any hope of being the redeeming salt and light of our dying culture." Despite the cost and unpopularity of opposing the movement against the Bible, ". . . if we truly love the Lord and His Word and His church, we have no other choice." The speaker observed that despite some 30 years of church conferences and consultations, "the great disappointment has been that little or nothing has been done to correct the shift away from the historic faith."

"The true prophets of the past were not those who were accommodating themselves to the ways of backsliding Israel, but those who were calling for a return to the old paths. Our task . . . is to continue to be watchmen on the walls of Zion, alerting our people to the subtle attacks made from within and from without by the great enemy of our souls. This is no time for blind optimism, false acclamations of brotherhood and progress. In the true tradition of the prophets and the apostles, we must declare the whole counsel of God, warning our people about the many subtle dangers facing us, knowing that as leaders and laity we will be responsible to God."

PDJ

# Comment and Opinion

John H. Piersma

CHURCHES, ESPECIALLY CRC CONGREGATIONS, LACK LOVE — Someone sent me a clipping from the Detroit News under date of May 3, 1986 in which Kate DeSmet, "religion writer," reports on a survey conducted by the Institute for Church Growth in Pasadena, CA. In this report the Christian Reformed Church is alleged to be marked by the "lowest love-care quotient," whatever that might be.

The report says more interesting things.

The most important might be that "theology may be irrelevant to growth in a church." W. Charles Arn, vice-president of the Institute and an accredited researcher with a doctorate in education from the University of Southern California, is quoted as saying:

...our contention is that churches grow because they provide a sense of caring and belonging. Theology is not so important as how much you care for people. Churches losing members would do well to march under the banner of their lovability.

Christian Reformed people need not feel that they are alone in their lovelessness. "Mainline Protestants" generally are tarred with this same brush. Denominations also mentioned as deficient on the love scale are the Missouri Synod Lutherans and the Presbyterian Church USA. The latter denomination is said to have declined by 15 percent in the last ten years.

Growing churches mentioned are the Assemblies of God (about 50 percent in the last 10 years) and the Nazarene Church (about 22 percent in the same period).

No doubt about it: church members ought to be kind, friendly, loving, inviting, courteous, attractive, bright, etc. etc.

I think these things are hard to manufacture, however. And there are some built-in limitations which might afflict the best-intentioned. Still more, I cannot accept the thesis that churches need nothing more

than love to grow (the heading of Ms. DeSmet's report is, "All churches need is love").

"Church growth" is not something which always happens under the influence of certain psychological and social factors. There is a law of God operative here also. By which I mean that there might be "growth" at the expense of truth, which, for God-honoring Bible-believers is never acceptable.

One more note: the churches mentioned are charismatic groups.

They have the following characteristics, in my observation:

(1) They are deeply convinced that people need a saving faith in Jesus Christ to be saved from eternal damnation. This provides them with both motive and passion to get people under the preaching of the Gospel.

(2) They are sincerely committed to the doctrine which they teach. They are not tolerant of all opinions, of every "theology," or the lack of it. They take very seriously their understanding of God's Truth.

(3) They are bold in their demand for a radical, biblical obedience. They are prepared to condemn immorality in every form, and to urge upon their hearers a conviction of sin and an improvement in Christian walk. They dare to insist upon church attendance, even at two services each Lord's Day.

I can hear some say: this is due to their Arminianism, authoritarianism, perfectionism. I suppose so. However, it seems to me that their loving acceptance of people has a deeper base than just a desire for increased membership. It roots in basic convictions and commitments enthusiastically proclaimed.

However, maybe all of this talk isn't really worthwhile.

If truth and faith are paramount, if grace is purely a sovereign dispensation, might it not be possible that no one would accept it, no matter how lovingly presented?



## ADAM AND EVOLUTION (May, 1986)

Dear Readers:

In a recent issue of *The Outlook* (May 1986, page 12) the following question was asked: What are we to do with the fossils that are found in God's world? In a magazine whose front cover proclaims that it is "Devoted to the exposition and defense of the Reformed faith" we might have expected the answer to be a quotation from

Scripture, perhaps Psalm 24:1 "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it." Or perhaps a quotation from John Calvin, such as "We know God, who is Himself invisible, only through His works." (*Commentaries on Genesis*, King translation, 1948, Eerdman's, page 59). But the answer suggested in *The Outlook* was "Why, nothing, of course."

Ought we really to do nothing with the products of God's handiwork which we

observe in His world? The fossils, the light from distant stars, and the radioactive isotopes in the rocks are surely as much a part of God's world as are the lily, the sparrow, and we ourselves. Why should we be afraid to see what God's world is like? Why should we be afraid to investigate the history of God's world? If we fail to give serious consideration to the products of God's handiwork in the world when we are thinking about God, then what are we to do with Article II of the Belgic Confession of Faith?

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,  
Clarence Menninga  
Calvin College

#### RESPONSE:

The Editor has kindly referred Professor Menninga's letter to me for comment.

As was predictable, the Professor hopes to avoid the thrust of my articles by trying to shift the focus of discussion away from his view of special revelation (in regard to the issues I raised) and onto my view of general revelation.

Thankful, however, that Dr. Menninga has generously stepped forward, let's just go along with his rather crude device by answering his questions to see if he will then answer mine.

First, as to God's general revelation, fossils included: the heavens declare God's glory and the firmament displays His handiwork (Ps. 19). The things that are made bear witness to God's everlasting power and divinity (Rom. 1). Yes, we may learn this from Psalm 24, and elsewhere too; and, to be sure, this we confess in Belgic Article II. No problem. We can be reminded of it also, of course, by Calvin. But I trust that in reading Calvin's Commentary on Genesis, the Professor also learned to take Genesis as God's inspired Word, and thus, as Calvin says, has been "taught by the ministry of Moses, not to wander in foolish and trifling speculations" (p. 63). Indeed, on the very page Professor Menninga quotes, Calvin reminds him, and us, that it is the Holy Spirit who "has spoken by his [Moses] mouth" (p. 59)! All this simply accents an underlying theme of my articles, and I am glad to have it stressed.

"Why should we be afraid," Dr. Menninga then twice wonders, "to see what God's world is like?"

Afraid, Professor? Are "we" afraid?

It is, I think, the impression of many readers of this magazine that you (and others of your colleagues) are in fact "afraid" to tell the Church in plain speech just how you relate what you think you hear the fossils saying to what God plainly says in Genesis. This is precisely the thrust of the two articles your letter so conspicuously tries to evade. Are we mistaken?

However, now that you have joined the conversation, let me briefly confront you with some of the issues again and we can go on from here.

Why not lay all the fossils you like on your table, bathe them in "the light from distant stars," season with isotopes to your taste, and then will you tell us, who like Calvin listen to Genesis, just what we are missing:

What do you hear your fossils saying?

As I pointed out in paragraph 5 of my first article, whatever you say will have to come in man's words, and these lack one characteristic of God's Word, namely infallibility. In fact, when do any two evolutionary theorists agree for long, either with each other or with themselves as concerns this biggest myth of the twentieth century?

And you will forgive some for wondering: when a conflict arises between the going "word" of the fossils and the Word of God, which do you and those who think like you, choose?

In cases like these, for example:

1. God says through Moses, and confirms through St. Paul, that Adam was made a distinct and first man out of the dust of the earth. What do you hear your fossils saying?

2. God says that Adam was not only made the first man, but that he was deliberately designed to be the unique "type" of the Christ, thus called the Second Adam. What do you hear your fossils saying?

3. God says that Eve, the first woman, was uniquely made out of one of the ribs of this first man Adam. What do you hear the fossils saying?

4. God says that this first woman was beguiled by a serpent into sin, and that this first sin admitted death into history. What do you hear your fossils saying?

One might, and should, ask a good deal more, Dr. Menninga, and I suppose you could reply in answer to each question that the fossils say nothing.

Quite so, but why then object to my advising those who derive their view of human affairs through the lenses of the Bible not to bother with transient fossilized "trifling

speculations" (as Calvin puts it)? That advice seems to surprise you; perhaps you are unaware that it echoes a suggestion made by distinguished Catholic scholar Etienne Gilson some decades ago?

Let the reader, by the way, who wants an entertaining account of some of the games which evolutionary theorists play with their fossils dip into Cambridge University Professor Michael Pitman's *Adam And Evolution*, distributed through Baker Book House. Not, indeed, Calvinist, but good for a chuckle along the way. Perhaps a good guffaw is the best way to clear the air of the grim seriousness with which some "Christian scholars" cling to evolutionary hypotheses which more subtle secular minds are now deserting.

However that may be, Professor Menninga, I am sure the Editor will provide you space for clear and concise reply to my, I think, clear and concise questions.

Or are you (and colleagues, too) really "afraid" to tell us?

Lester DeKoster

#### SYNOD AGENDA (May, pp. 8, 9)

Dear Rev. DeJong

You are certainly correct when you say that Classis Lake Erie has continued to license Clay Libolt. Your readers ought to know that Classis did that only after a special examination to deal with the issues raised by synod.

You are incorrect when you refer to Overture 8 (Synod 1982) as simply a defense of Mr. Libolt. Overture 8 is a defense of any candidate who, after spending 7 or 8 years preparing for the Gospel ministry, is denied candidacy by synod. Our classis believes there is a much more pastoral and just way of dealing with such cases and used the example of Mr. Libolt to illustrate that. Now that the issue of his candidacy has been resolved, this very good overture could probably receive an objective hearing.

Sincerely,

George Vander Weit  
Warrenville Heights, Ohio

#### RESPONSE:

Shouldn't we decide whether one may be a candidate for the ministry by examining his orthodoxy rather than by merely counting the years he has studied?

Editor