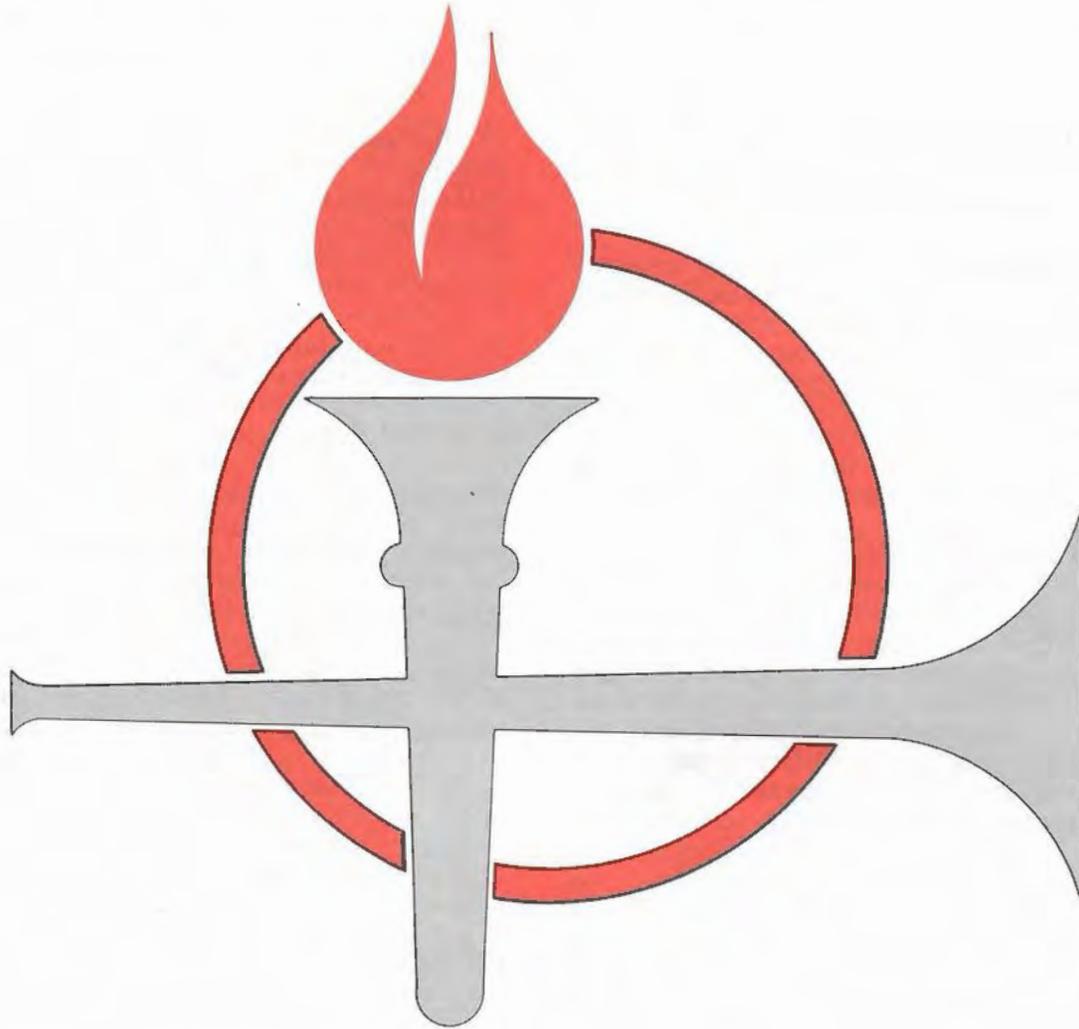


THE OUTLOOK

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

OCTOBER 1986



THE PROBLEM IS THE BIBLE
SALT OF THE EARTH
CARL HENRY'S CONFESSIONS

Through the Eyes of Carl Henry

Peter DeJong

CONFESSIONS OF A THEOLOGIAN: An Autobiography, by Carl F.H. Henry, published by Word Books, Waco Texas, 1986, hardcover \$14.95.

Dr. Henry has been called "the leading theologian" among evangelicals of our time. The skilfully-told story of his life which took him into the heart of many of the major religious developments of our century can help us to better understand them.

Beginnings

Born in New York City in 1913 as the oldest of 8 children of a hard-working German immigrant family, he early began working for a newspaper and was a reporter and editor by the time he was 19. His father was a nominal Lutheran and his mother a Roman Catholic, but the family was not religious, although he went to an Episcopal Sunday school. After his conversion he attended Wheaton College at about the time some of us were at Calvin. In those depression years his journalistic experience helped him to work his way as a reporter and even got him a faculty job at teaching typing. In that capacity, he met the daughter of a baptist pioneer missionary family in the African Cameroons, Helga Bender, who in due time became his wife. After college graduation he took graduate work at both Wheaton and Northern Baptist Theological Seminary. He frankly evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of his training and teachers and at one point calls attention to the influence of Gordon Clark, W. H. Jellema and Cornelius Van Til in shaping his thinking (p. 111).

A Versatile Career

When Fuller Seminary began in 1947 he became dean, and he provides an account of the early opposition to and problems of that venture.

In 1955 he was invited to become editor of a new evangelical magazine, *Christianity Today*, designed to give the liberal *Christian Century* "a run for its biases" (p. 144). In the next twelve years he saw that project through its early struggles far outstrip its rival in distribution and influence. The central part of the book traces these developments. *Christianity Today*,

like the earlier *Southern Presbyterian Journal* (now *Presbyterian Journal*), was an outgrowth of the dream of the famous Presbyterian China missionary, Dr. L. Nelson Bell. (He had headed a large hospital just north of our China field, and had been stirred to action by the liberal betrayal of the Christian mission and by Dr. J. Gresham Machen's exposure of it.) The paper got off to a running start, especially with the support of Bell's famous son-in-law, Billy Graham, and of the Presbyterian industrialist head of Sun Oil Company, J. Howard Pew. "Contending that the venture was needed only if it 'gets preachers back to preaching the Bible', Pew volunteered \$150,000 a year for two years" (p. 145). With that kind of beginning subsidy the paper was able to quickly gain many readers by free offers to all ministers and ministerial students while soliciting paid subscriptions.

The remarkably frank reporting of the interplay of personalities and diverse opinions in the development of the paper makes interesting and illuminating reading (especially to anyone who has any experience in such a venture). Bell once said that "not even one of the Board has the remotest idea of the complexity of our problems," as they thought only of printing some good articles, editorials and news reports, with little awareness of the needed "analysis, balance and judgment" (p. 150). During these years the differences of perspective in the board and editorial staff gave trouble. Henry felt that the paper, aimed at winning the clergy, should more forthrightly deal with our Christian responsibility to face political, social and economic problems and not leave these matters (as some evangelicals had tended to do) to the exclusive attention of the liberals. Others, increasingly disgusted with liberal churchmen's and churches' preoccupation with political, social and economic matters to the neglect of the gospel, felt that this should be vigorously opposed and that the paper should aim at arousing and enlisting laymen in the opposing evangelical movement. "Only by awakening the laity can this trend be stopped. How to do it is the problem" (p. 268). Such differences about policy finally led to the rather awkward end of Henry's 12-year editorship in 1968 and his replace-

ment by Dr. Harold Lindsell, a long-time friend who had been best man at his wedding and later a fellow-teacher at Fuller Seminary.

Henry's prominence as editor of *Christianity Today*, as well as his books and teaching, had involved him in a wide variety of evangelical movements and speaking assignments around the world. He taught at Eastern Baptist Seminary, figured in Key-73 and the Lausanne 1974 Congress on World Evangelization, and authored a massive series of books on God, Revelation and Authority (which in their encyclopedic coverage remind one of the books of Berkouwer). Since 1974 he has been lecturer-at-large for World Vision, in demand for speaking and teaching engagements in many parts of the world.

Conclusions

The last chapter of his biography on "The Evangelical Prospect in America" highlights his "two main convictions," (1) "that American evangelicals presently face their biggest opportunity since the Protestant Reformation, if not since the apostolic age" and (2) that they "are forfeiting that opportunity" as "many evangelical leaders bask promotionally in the movement's towering success instead of point it to repentance, rededication, reformation and renewal." He recalls the coming of the NAE in '42, Fuller Theological Seminary in '47, Billy Graham's crusades in '49, *Christianity Today* in '56, and the rise of new evangelical student groups, but ruefully observes, "Yet none of the major contributory evangelical movements fully achieved its original goal" as evangelicals "failed to walk through open doors that might spectacularly have set their cause ahead with important consequences for the nation's religious fortunes." His survey, from the unusual point of view of his own deep and wide involvement in these movements, highlights their internal weakness and tendency to fragment because of their lack of a common biblical, doctrinal foundation. One senses in his analysis a certain ambiguity as he shrewdly exposes this problem, but in his own ecumenical efforts to promote broad evangelical cooperation does not really escape from it. Thus we find him seeming to deplore the disagreements about the Bible's inerrancy (pp. 365, 384), although he had maintained before even taking the job as editor of *Christianity Today* that "an authoritative scripture is the watershed of theological controversy," and evidently continued to champion this principle throughout his career (pp. 142, 366, 367). The early history of the Reformed churches highlights the way in which they, facing comparable confusion, by painstaking study of God's Word achieved their carefully constructed "forms of unity" or creeds, and on that basis were able, despite some large differences, to work together for centuries in a common Christian cause. Henry's survey of some of today's grandiose but disappointing ecumenical efforts really highlights their weaknesses because of lack of such a common foundation.

The "Watershed" Issue

Despite some such confusion in his ecumenical involvements, Henry's unqualified commitment to the

THE OUTLOOK

(USPS 633-980)



Published Monthly

July-August Issue Combined

"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).

JOURNAL OF REFORMED FELLOWSHIP, INC.

Send all copy to Managing Editor, Rev. Peter De Jong, 4985 Sequoia Dr., S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49508. Phone (616) 698-6267.

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This periodical is owned and published by Reformed Fellowship, Inc., a religious and strictly non-profit organization composed of a group of Christian believers who hold to the Reformed Faith. Its purpose is to give sharpened expression to this Faith, to stimulate the doctrinal sensitivities of those who profess this Faith, to promote the spiritual welfare and purity of the Christian Reformed Church particularly and also of other Reformed churches, and as far as possible to further the interests of all Christian action and institutions of Reformed character.

The publishers of this journal express their adherence to the Calvinistic creeds as formulated in the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, and the Westminster Confession and Catechisms.

All contributions represent the personal views of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the members of Reformed Fellowship, Inc.

Subscription Policy: Subscription price, \$7.50 per year, \$13.50 for 2 years (Canada rates \$11.50 per year, \$21.00 for 2 years). Unless a definite request for discontinuance is received, it is assumed that the subscriber wishes the subscription to continue without the formality of a renewal order and he will be billed for renewal. If you have a change of address, please notify the Business Office as early as possible in order to avoid the inconvenience of delayed delivery. Include your Zip Code.

Registered as Second Class mail under permit #9489 at Norwich, Ontario.

EDITORIAL AND CIRCULATION OFFICES

THE OUTLOOK

4855 Starr Street, S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49506. Telephone 949-5421

Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 9-11 a.m.

After Office Hours - please call: 452-9519

Mailing Address: 4855 Starr Street, S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49506

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Lord and His Word comes through his writings and biography loud and clear. And it has important bearing on the predicament of our churches today. While he taught some recent courses at Calvin Theological Seminary, for which he commuted from his home in Arlington, Virginia, I, in a brief interview, referred to his having been a subject of Dr. Allen Verhey's doctoral dissertation. Of this he was apparently unaware, but when I remarked that this dissertation on "The Use of the Scripture in Moral Discourse" virtually repeated both the views and the structure of the book of Verhey's Yale University Professor David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of the Scripture in Recent Theology*, this provoked Dr. Henry's immediate interest. He referred me to some 50 pages in the 4th volume of his *God, Revelation and Authority* which contained a devastating analysis of Kelsey's treatment of the authority of the Bible as being an example of "the newest phase in a continuing antisciptural revolt against divine authority. It repudiates the Holy Spirit's inspiration of the scriptural writings, repudiates the contingent divine authority of the apostles in their doctrinal witness to such inspiration and repudiates the objective truth of the inspired teaching of Scripture" (p. 97). "It . . . reduces theology to an intricate exercise in futility and nonsense" (p. 91).

Kelsey's book purported to be a historical study of some 7 theologians ranging from Warfield to Paul Tillich, to determine from their use of the Bible what it means that the Bible is the authority in moral matters. Finding little, if any, agreement among them, he concluded that it is one's own "inspired imagination" that determines how the Bible functions as authority. Dr. Verhey followed a similar procedure, comparing Walter Rauschenbusch, the father of the social gospel, with Carl Henry, on point after point agreeing with Rauschenbusch rather than Henry. Thus, for Verhey too, although the Bible is "authoritative," it may be applied to current matters only when sanctioned by "warrants" such as its acceptability in present society, and the most important "warrant" of one's own "experience!"

When, a few years ago we had to object to the synod against Dr. Verhey's critical denial of scripture texts, the objections were dismissed as dealing with mere isolated texts, despite Verhey's statement that his method covered also our Lord's resurrection. When we pointed out that his 318-page dissertation showed the same subjectivist denial of the Bible's authority in morals, this was brushed aside as irrelevant. Who would have thought at that time that the denomination's Board of Publications would, on its own initiative now publish Verhey's, what a *Christian Renewal* review characterized as "socialistic" treatment of the Heidelberg Catechism as a denominationally sponsored guide to the churches' creed?

Henry has well said that the Bible's authority is a "watershed" which decides in what direction one's course will go. Even confronted by enormous pressures to work for "common fronts," he has really been unable to allow for straddling that dividing line, and has labored long and well to persuade people to

acknowledge the authority of God's Word. Dr. Berkouwer, with whom he in his writing has been compared, after early labors on the right side of that divide, has gone over to the other side to further mislead churches that are getting ever further away from confessing the Bible's authority. Our synod studies and decisions, one after another, testimony of students in our seminary and the denomination's official publications, especially the almost invariable conclusion that "the Bible doesn't speak clearly" about the points in question, clearly show to which side of the "watershed" our denomination is currently moving.

Don't overlook the fact that even the effort to pull the divided churches together by allowing for differences of opinion on this point, has itself already gone over to the wrong side of the divide, because it is conceding that the Bible no longer decides our course!

Our problem is not new, produced by the sweeping changes in our society, as some learned guides would have us believe. What we are encountering is exactly the same thing as our Lord did when he exposed and ridiculed the fraudulent labors of the scribes of that day to "nullify" the word of God, whenever it crossed their wishes (Matt. 15:6; Mark 7:13). The Lord encountered the same tactics when the devil in his temptations "cited scripture to his purpose," and was silenced by the Lord's own appeal to His Word. Recall how the Lord concluded His written Word with a kind of "footnote:" "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book" (Rev. 22:18, 19). Although one may try (as a recent writer did) to restrict the application of this text, no one can stop the Lord's own on-going execution of his threat in the churches of our time. May we, accordingly work and pray to be "doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your OWN selves" (James 1:22).

The reader can keenly appreciate Dr. and Mrs. Henry's expressed recognition and dependence on the Lord's gracious direction through their extraordinary career. At the same time, the large, promising and disappointing evangelical projects in which he was involved, not consistently and solidly based on God's Word — as we have seen — expected far too much from big "rallies" and spectacular demonstrations. (Recall Elijah's disappointed expectations at Mt. Carmel). The humanistic (Arminian) calculations and methods often used in these modern projects seem very different from the apostles' reports of "all that God had done with them" (Acts 14:27; 15:4), and from Paul's explanation, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase" (I Cor. 3:6, 7). We must pray and work for reformation and revival in the Lord's way and time.

"YOU ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH" (Matt. 5:13)

Allen Petrolje

Jesus said many things that are truly astonishing. It is good at times to pretend that we are reading them for the first time in order to feel the punch of them. Think carefully and seriously about this statement of Jesus, "You are the salt of the earth". That is a striking statement when you consider those people who first heard it. They were a motley group from many walks of life and hardly regarded as being any significant influence in the eyes of most. But Jesus saw what others were blind to. Because they were followers of Jesus, they were new people set apart from the world. They belonged to a Kingdom that is from above. They were forgiven of their sin and liberated from the bondage of the Evil One. Following their new Master, they became servants of righteousness. To such people Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth".

This statement implies a great deal about the world and the influence Jesus expects His people to have in this world. Jesus had no delusions about the goodness of man. As the only Saviour, He knew how desperately the world needs saving. He calls every follower of His to join Him in His saving mission. In the Spirit and power of Jesus, Christians are to resist and overcome evil. That is the primary meaning of calling them salt. The main use of salt in ancient Palestine was that of a preservative. If meat were to be stored, it had to be rubbed in with salt. Meat contains in itself the germs that will cause it to rot. The world is like meat. The sin that followed the fall of our first parents is at work, and if left to itself will spread loathsome decay throughout the life and culture of man.

What does this mean for Christians today? First of all it means that Christians should be able to detect moral decay when they are confronted by it. The smell of decaying flesh is unmistakable to anyone who has a sense of smell. So also the stench of moral decay ought to be unmistakable to any Christian worthy of the name. The society of modern America reeks with the foul air that rises from the rotting flesh of legalized abortion, pornography, homosexuality, broken marriages, child abuse, racism, drug abuse, etc. If one has smelled the sweet fragrance of the salvation of God, he can never become accustomed to the putrid odors of evil.

Yet it is not enough to know how bad our world is and to complain to ourselves about it. Perhaps the church has been content to do just that for too long and have treated the evils of our world with "benign neglect". Can this be the reason for the blatancy and the rapid growth of the moral decay that we have witnessed in recent years even while polls indicate that at least 40 percent of all Americans profess to be born-again Christians? Is there a direct relationship between how well Christians are acting like salt and the growth of moral decay? I think there is. Salt is not going to do what salt can do until it is applied to the meat.

How must Christians do that? Obviously they cannot hinder the spread of evil in the world if they do not resist and fight it in their own lives. With the daily grace of the Holy Spirit, they must walk in the paths of obedience to the Lord who bought them, and delight in His commandments. But their concern may not be only for themselves. They must commit themselves to Jesus' mission of saving lost people. They must reach out to them with the gospel of salvation, calling all men to repentance and faith in Jesus. Having done that, Christians must also realize that many will not return from their sin but will go bad to worse. May the followers of Christ stand by without aggressively opposing their evil pursuits? John the Baptist didn't think so. When he smelled the rot of King Herod's adultery, he confronted the king with the claim of God's law. John did not have the right of free speech which American Christians enjoy. He paid the ultimate cost of being the salt of the earth. What costs are we willing to pay? What will it take for all of America to hear Christians unitedly and loudly protest the moral corruption of our land?

Obviously American Christians are not opposing evil aggressively enough. Is it due to our lack of nerve? Or are we trying to be too polite? Does the approach of John the Baptist offend us? Or, more seriously, have we lost our saltiness? If the latter be so, our problem is greater than we may have ever thought.

Reprinted by permission from the Spring 1986 SALT TALK (Social Action Liaison Team, Box 8582, Grand Rapids, MI 49508). Rev. Allen Petrolje, writer of this guest editorial, is pastor of the Covenant Christian Reformed Church.

The Church that is Near Death

John Blankespoor

“To the angel of the church of Sardis write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember therefore what you have received and heard, obey it and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never erase his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my father and his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev. 3:1-6).

At the end of October we often remember the great event of the Reformation of more than 450 years ago. Why should we remember it? Of what interest or benefit is that to us today? We seem to be living in an entirely different kind of world. Everything seems to have changed. The truth is that basic things and needs of people do not change. The nature of man does not change; nor do many weaknesses of the church. Many sins and failures that were found in Israel and in the New Testament church have recurred in the church throughout the last 2000 years — also in the church preceding the Reformation.

The Roman Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation and throughout the Middle Ages was steeped in formalism and mere liturgical worship of God. The Bible was hardly known to the common people. The people's ignorance of the Bible was appalling. The “magic” use of the sacraments was taught and assumed.

Don't we find similar conditions in the church today? And often also in our own lives? Today the greatest weaknesses of the church are lethargy, formal church membership, lack of true spirituality and lack of interest in God's Word.

Today the church is often like the church of Sardis. She had a reputation that she was alive, but actually was near death. It is especially appropriate for

us to read the Lord's letter to that church as we remember the great 16th century Reformation.

The greatest gift of the Reformation was the return of the Bible to the church and the common people. Living by that Word through the Spirit, the church is a living church. She is alive, vibrant with the power of the Spirit. But that kind of church is quite different from the church at Sardis, and many churches like her throughout the ages.

Revelation 2 and 3 record for us the words of the exalted Christ to seven actual churches in Asia Minor. (These seven churches represent the one church of Christ throughout the ages, with her strengths and weaknesses. Here the Lord is speaking to the church at Sardis.

According to secular history Sardis was a city located in a rich plain in Asia Minor and noted for its wealth and luxury. This likely had something to do with the spiritual condition of the church of Sardis.

Sardis must repent. Repentance always has two aspects, a negative and a positive — like conversion.

The negative side is that by the power of the Spirit we turn away from sin. This means that we see our sins, are sorry for them, and turn to Christ for forgiveness, and a power to live a different life.

Our Catechism says that conversion means to be genuinely sorry for sin, to hate it, and to run away from it more and more. And positively, that it is a wholehearted joy in God through Christ and a delight to do every kind of good as God wants us to.

The heart of repentance, of course, is to see the need of Christ. First of all for forgiveness of all of our sins, but then also to have the Spirit of Christ to be able to serve the Lord with joy in godly living.

If Sardis does not repent, Christ, who has the seven spirits, will come like a thief in the night and take away even the little life that is left. This is a dreadful judgment. The church may remain and congregational life may continue in some manner. She may even have in some measure a good reputation in the community. But the candle stick will have been removed, the spirit of Christ will no longer live there. Many churches there are like that today.

"He that overcomes . . ." This implies that God's people and church have a struggle. The church on earth is still a militant church.

He that overcomes will receive three things.

First of all he will walk with Christ and be dressed in white. White in the Bible is the color of purity and victory. White is the absence of impurity. Also, generals who had conquered in battle would return in historic times riding a white horse. In Rev. 6 Christ is riding a white horse. Here he who overcomes will be given fellowship with Christ, but also the assurance of victory and a taste of it.

Secondly, he who overcomes will receive the assurance that his name will never be erased from the book of life. Christ will never let him go.

And thirdly, the Lord will acknowledge his name before His Father and the holy angels.

He who has an ear, let him hear.

At this time of the year when we remember the great Reformation, its true children are aware of the constant danger of becoming like the church of Sardis.

They want to be a church that is alive by the power of the Word and Spirit.

The Lord says that He knows the deeds, the works of this church. The works of the church and of individual Christians are the undeniable evidence of the condition of the churches and people. Not from our words and formal confessions can it be seen what we really are. Our works are the real evidence. In Sardis there apparently are few, if any, virtues. The works reveal that the church is almost dead. There are only a few people who have not defiled their garments. By garments are meant their entire Christian conduct.

The church had the name that she was alive. This church had a good reputation. Possibly she was growing in numbers. She may have been a church with many activities, especially with social activities. She may have had a good sized budget, supporting a mission program and one for Christian education. Possibly also, the church of Sardis made an impact upon the community.

But in the eyes of the Lord, she is almost dead. Remember that the Lord Jesus also spoke of the mission work of the Pharisees. They would travel great distances to make one convert. How could Jesus say that this church was almost dead? The members did not have the fire, zeal and life of the Spirit. Everything was formal and external.

When the church is alive, the life and power of the Holy Spirit can be seen and felt. There is unmistakable evidence of it. We have no trouble in distinguishing between a dead and living tree. Who cannot see the difference between a dead and living animal? Or between a flower that is withered and dead and one that is alive and green? There is a similar difference between a dead sinner and one who is born again and possesses the Spirit of Christ. Jesus says that this new life can be seen in the works of people and the church.

Of course, this does not mean that such Christians are perfect. Far from it. But there is and has to be a beginning of evidence of the new life of the Spirit through the Word. When we possess the Holy Spirit, we show it in the kind of life we live, the kind of con-

versations we carry on, in what our goals are, in our love for the Lord, His church and our neighbor. These witness in some way of who and what we are as Christians. Live Christians struggle against sin and the old sinful self, faithfully use the Word, and pray individually and together.

In Sardis, behind its evident activity and reputation, such signs of real Christian life were lacking. Its kind of dry rot is one of the greatest dangers in our day and age. The devil lulls people into sleep, working this way without being detected. His encouragement of formalism is more effective than persecution in leading them to death.

Although there are a few members of the church who are still alive and have not soiled their clothes, the entire church is addressed and admonished in these words of Christ.

What must Sardis, and every church in that condition, do?

They must obey the Word which they have heard and repent. The Lord calls for repentance unto life by His Word. And remember that for us this is also the way back to life — the infallible Word of God! Listen to it! That is what Luther and our other Reformation fathers did.

Who Am I?

Glenn P. Palmer

Who are the mothers of Jacob's children? Rachel and Leah and their respective handmaidens, of course. I am the mother of Dan and Naphtali.

Because Ruben defiled his father's couch with me, his firstborn rights are nullified. Who am I?

In Paphos on the island of Cyprus, I lived as a man of contradictions. I am a Jew, yet an attendant of a Roman proconsul. Although Moses condemns sorcery (Lev. 20:22), I am described as a "Jewish sorcerer." Although my name means "son of Jesus," I am described as "a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right." Instead of, as "son of Savior," seeking to "save people from their sins," I never stopped perverting the ways of the Lord. As "son of Jesus" I should have brought "light for revelation to the Gentiles," but, when cursed, I was in mist and darkness. Who am I and who is the proconsul who believed when I was cursed?

Gen. 29:29; 35:22; 49:4
Acts 13

Translations of the Bible

Iain H. Murray

We have written nothing on this subject for some time but three letters in the Correspondence section of this issue are a reminder of how important it continues to be. Our first correspondent, Mr. Andrew Haylett, commenting on the switch in Bible versions (from KJV to NIV) in the ninth printing of John Blanchard's *Right With God*, asks if the change is Trust policy. The Rev. Ray Lanning, one of the younger ministers in Grand Rapids, Michigan, whose help in these columns is much appreciated, raises the same question. Our third correspondent on the same issue is a long-standing friend, Mr. John Grier, who is in close touch with book and Bible sales in the U.K. He points out the danger of Banner publications gaining an increasingly archaic image if Trust publications stay anchored to the King James version.

There are some things which seem clear to us:

1. We confirm that for the present, at least, the Trust lays down no requirements to its authors on the version of the Scriptures which they should use. Some have used the American Standard Version of 1901 (John Murray, for example, in *Redemption, Accomplished and Applied*, 1961) and others, more recently, the NIV.

2. The near-land-slide to the NIV across large sectors of the evangelical world is due more to "battle-weariness" over the versions issue rather than to the NIV's real superiority among the modern versions. In the 1950's many evangelical Christians tested the RSV and rejected it. The Inter-Varsity Fellowship in the mid-sixties was still treating the KJV — "the Authorised Version" — as the standard translation in commentaries. Yet now, despite deficiencies which could never be laid against the RSV, the NIV has been accepted near-blindly. (No doubt the weight of such names as that of William Hendriksen contributed to this but let anyone compare Hendriksen's own translation of the NT, in his several commentaries, with the NIV and see how widely the two differ).

The case against the NIV is really a broader one than Mr. Haylett's letter suggests. Certainly it appears free of any doctrinal bias (on the part of the translators) but there is the constant use of the principle of 'dynamic equivalence' which means, as R. K. Harrison says, 'that the translators presented what was thought to be the general sense of the passage, and not always a more careful rendering of specific words'. Let the serious student compare the NIV rendering of Romans 8:1-11 with John Murray's Commentary and he will see that at certain important points the translators actually impose *their* sense upon the text.

3. Except for the few who have the time and gifts to examine every version for themselves, we are all

very much susceptible to the claims of publishers. Unhappily, financial considerations are involved. The ASV is scarcely known because no publisher or Bible Society cares to push it. The NASB (also called NASV), possibly the best of the modern versions, also suffers from poor publicity. At present the success (in sales terms) of the New KJV is being contested — the publisher's claims for its circulation are impressive and R. K. Harrison (Professor of Old Testament at Wycliffe College, Toronto) can write, 'New KJV is favorite.* In some countries (Australia, for example) The Good News Bible has been so incessantly pushed by the Bible Society that people might be forgiven for supposing that other versions have already disappeared from the earth.

4. Issues beyond the text of the Bible itself are involved in this whole debate, for example the whole relationship of language to culture. How could the KJV hold its place for over three hundred years, imprinting its language on countless generations, while no purely 20th-century version begins to look like achieving real permanence? The issue of the preaching/teaching role of the church is also involved. Is it accidental that the boom in new versions runs parallel with low views of the pulpit and the necessity of preaching?

There is already something wrong with a version of the Bible which appears to make everything perfectly simple, and the role of the translator is viewed altogether too highly if it is supposed that he can eliminate what Peter calls things 'hard to be understood' (2 Peter 3:16). The first thing that is needed to make the Bible live is spirituality in the pulpit and in the pew.

5. It is beyond doubt that a great part of the richest Christian literature in the English language employs the King James version—from the Puritans and Bunyan to Spurgeon and Lloyd-Jones. For that reason — if for no other — the KJV will be read as long as that heritage in literature remains. Almost invariably those who are loudest in decrying the KJV are conspicuous in their neglect of this same literature. There is a very strong case for the modern version which genuinely transmits all that is best in the KJV. We hope that it will soon be widely seen that the NIV has gone too far and lost too much.

*Article in NFD Journal, Nov./Dec, 1985, p. 12. But the British version of the New KJV (named the 'Revised Authorised Version') has already been allowed to go out of print by its publishers.

Reprinted from *The Banner of Truth* May, 1986.

THE ORDER OF THE LORD'S CHURCH

Offices of the Church

Stephen M. Arrick

Do you agree with the following statement?

"The future of the Reformed churches and of the Reformed faith is in the hands of the office-bearers of Christ's Church!"

If so, how does the future look in your Church? What steps must be taken to insure that the Reformed faith and true Reformed Church government is maintained in those bodies bearing the name "Reformed"?

To a great degree, the effectiveness of pastors, elders, and deacons within their Church is dependent upon whether or not these men possess biblical qualifications for holding office and are trained for the specific task God has called them to do. Qualifications and training are two essential areas which must be addressed for the sake of the future of the Reformed Church and of the Reformed faith.

There are many qualifications which office-bearers may possess, but which spiritual, biblical and personal qualifications must they possess?

The spiritual qualifications that seem to be most necessary for effective service would be:

1. Born again—John 3:7-10
2. Filled with the Holy Spirit—Acts 1:6;6:3
3. Willingness to serve—Matt. 20:25-28
4. Spirituality—I Cor. 3:1; Gal. 6:1
5. Spiritually gifted—I Cor. 12:12-31; Rom. 12:1-8
6. Spiritually fruit-bearing—Gal. 5:22-26

The biblical qualifications that are required for nomination to office are:

1. A willingness to do the task—I Tim. 3:1
2. A maturity in the faith—I Tim. 3:6
3. Confessional integrity—I Tim. 3:9
4. Indoctrination in the faith—Titus 1:9
5. Knowledge of Scripture—Matt. 22:29; II Tim. 3:15
6. Readiness to defend and contend for the faith—Phil. 1:17; Jude 3
7. A knowledge of how to order, rule, and live in the Church—I Cor. 14:40; I Tim. 3:4, 15.

The personal qualifications required for office bearing are too numerous to mention specifically here. However, the Scripture does seem to teach that a thorough examination of a candidate's life in four major areas is required:

1. Marriage, including his relationship to his wife and hers to the Church—I Tim. 3:1, 12; Eph. 5:25-32; I Tim. 3:11; Eph. 5:22-24.

2. Family, including how well his house is ruled, his relationship to his children, and their reputation in the Church—I Tim. 3:4, 5; Eph. 6:4; Tit. 1:6; Eph. 6:1-3.
3. The Faith, including a knowledge and understanding of it, the exemplary demonstration of it, and the disciplines associated with it (Church membership, service, prayer-filled life, and study of Scripture)—I Tim. 3:9; Tit. 1:9; I Tim. 4:12; Eph. 4:1-16; I Th. 5:17; I Tim. 2:8; James 5:14; II Tim. 2:15; 3:16, 17.
4. Witness, including blameless Christ-like character in regard to use of alcohol, his temperament, the way he makes his money, his ambition towards riches, his potential for self-conceit, his truthfulness, hard work and testimony in the world. Witness, including a hospitable home, ability to teach, clear thinking, fairness, uprightness and self-discipline—I Tim. 3:2-13; Tit. 1:6-7; Matt. 25:14-30; I Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8.

Ask yourself, "Do the men which we propose to nominate for office in the Church possess any or all of these personal, biblical and spiritual qualifications?" Or, "Are they trainable to meet the standards in these areas?" Quality is a teachable and trainable commodity, but the spiritual, biblical and personal potential must be there.

Another article will suggest a course of study designed to train office-bearers to be effective in their calling to serve Christ and His Church. ●

Rev. Stephen M. Arrick is the pastor of the Calvary Christian Reformed Church at Lowell, Michigan.

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION (Act of October 23, 1986, Title 39, United States code)

Filing Date: September 22, 1986

THE OUTLOOK (formerly Torch and Trumpet)

Published monthly at 4855 Starr St., S.E.
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506

The name of the publisher is Reformed Fellowship. The name of the Editor and Managing Editor is Rev. Peter DeJong, 4985 Sequoia, S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49508. The owner is the Reformed Fellowship, Inc. 4855 Starr, S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49506. Known bondholders, mortgages or other security holders owning one percent or more of the total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities are: None.

Total number of copies printed (net Press run) preceding 12 months 4917, last issue, 5050. Sales through carriers, dealers, etc.: none. Mail subscription average 4417, last issue 4550. Free distribution by mail averages 200, last issue, 200. Copies distributed to news agents; none. Office left over average 300, last issue 300. Total number distributed average 4917, last issue 5050.

I certify that the statements made by me are correct and complete.

MARY KAISER, Business Mgr.

THE PROBLEM IS THE BIBLE

Robert Grossmann

As the Gestapo Captain slowly waved the barrel of his Luger under the nose of my now aged Pastor friend, Rev. Heinrich Jochums, he made an astute observation. "Es geht hier um die Schrift," he hissed. "The problem here is the Bible!" "What could I say?" laughs Rev. Jochums today, as much with relief that the Captain did not pull the trigger as with wry humor. "The man was right, the problem WAS the Bible." The fact is that the problem ALWAYS is the Bible. When Satan tempted Eve he said, "Has God indeed said?" THIS question has rung down through the ages in every attack on the teaching of the Bible and is no less the issue at stake in the modern (and devilish) pusch to install women in the consistory rooms and pulpits of the Churches.

What is at stake here is at stake because of the nature of the Church, and especially of the Reformed Churches, as being formed upon the basis of God's word in the Bible. When we claim biblical authority for teachings which say exactly the reverse of what the WORDS of the Bible say, we are being most essentially the opposite of Reformed. Again, when we acquiesce to such teachings with the excuse that they have been approved by church councils and synods, we are being the opposite of reformational. Church councils can no more make a woman into a man than they can create a purgatory or release a soul from the same by the sale of an indulgence. What the Church says, it says ONLY by and with the authority of God speaking in the words of the Bible. When the Church speaks in accord with the words of the Bible, it car-

ries the authority of God; when it speaks contrary to those words, it is a tinkling cymbal.

The Lord Jesus Christ makes exactly this point in one of His last public speeches before His death. Having come to Jerusalem to die, and having proclaimed that fact, He openly called men to faith in Himself. The conclusion or heart of this call to faith comes in these words: "He who rejects me, and does not receive my words, has one that judges him, the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). Notice carefully that our Lord defines and identifies the rejection of His person as being not receiving His spoken words (Greek, "remata"). The separation that modernists and confusionists (my word for those who tell us the Bible does not speak clearly) make between the person of Christ and the words of Christ is by this text made absolutely illegitimate. You CANNOT accept the person of Christ without receiving His words. That is why reformation Churches have always proclaimed *solus scriptura*.

This point of the foundational nature of the SPOKEN WORD is reiterated and established upon even firmer ground in the very next verse of John 12. Here Jesus tells us that His words carry such weight because they are in fact also the words of the Father. The Father commanded me, He says, "What I should SAY and what I should SPEAK."

An Arminian Hermeneutic

"Oh well," someone will say with a yawn, "but it is just your INTERPRETATION of Scripture, that

women may not have authority over men." Now we need to immediately point out that such persons have already taken the Arminian approach to the Bible, an approach which emphasizes not what the words say, but how they are to be interpreted. That is the only way the Arminian can also say concerning predestination that the texts of the Bible say exactly the opposite of what their words and sentences mean. Isaiah of course gives us the antidote to that position when he declares, "To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." We are in the strictest sense not to interpret the Bible, but to listen to it. Far from man's interpretation of the Bible being valid, it is the Bible that is the only valid interpretation of man himself and his universe to man. Without the words of God spoken to man, also before the fall, man would have no idea of his own origin and purpose, much less of the God who made him in His image. With this in mind, we should not be surprised that Arminians and liberals often get along so well; they have the same hermeneutic.

It is what happens to the Bible when we consciously or unconsciously take the Arminian hermeneutic that is the issue before us. Historically, Reformed theologians have held not only to the inspired character of the Bible as God's words, but also to four "perfections" of Scripture, namely, its *Necessity, Authority, Perspicuity* and *Sufficiency*. It is in terms of the doctrine of inspiration and of these perfections of Scripture that we may see the devastating effect of the Church taking positions contrary to what the words of Scripture say.

Hermeneutic and Authority

As we turn to the effects of the Arminian hermeneutic, I would point out the importance of having a consistently Reformed hermeneutic. Observe that the words of the Bible teach the subordination of women in Church government in the SAME WAY that the words of the Bible teach, for example, the resurrection of Christ. We do not accept any theory of the resurrection of Christ that does not confess that Jesus literally and bodily rose from the dead. Why? Because no other idea can be made to fit the words by which Scripture declares and applies this doctrine. We rightly condemn those who by verbal gymnastics or outright denial rob the Church of this precious and essential teaching.

However, the only REAL AUTHORITY we have to proclaim the resurrection of Christ is the written word of God. No scientific or social theory supports the resurrection. Indeed, all such theories cast doubt upon it, but we do not hesitate for a second to proclaim it because we KNOW that it is true, true because the words of the Bible are true. Now the teaching of different functions for male and female in the Church rests on the words of the same Bible, understood in the same way as we understand the literal resurrection of Christ from the dead. We have no more authority to proclaim, "He is risen!" than we do to say, "Let your women keep silence in the churches."

When we give up the authority to say, "Let your women keep silence in the churches," we throw away the authority to say, "He is risen." It is an interesting and sad fact that this is exactly what has happened to Churches which in the past have tried to give women the function of equal authority with men in the church. Go to a liberal Methodist or Presbyterian Church, count the number in attendance compared with the number on the rolls and then count the number of women in attendance in comparison with the number of men. The reason for this atrophy in attendance, especially on the part of men, is very simple: the Church no longer has authority to say anything! If that is what you want, full speed ahead and forget the torpedoes of warning from God's word. When man is a law unto himself, he soon ends up by himself.

Hermeneutic and Inspiration

As Reformed Christians, if that is anything more than a name, we believe in the inspiration and authority of the Bible. Furthermore, we believe in inspired words, not in inspired men, for while the Holy Spirit indeed inspired the men, He inspired the men specifically to write or speak, not to paint or drive race cars. They did not live inspired lives; they wrote inspired Scriptures, and at that, not all that they wrote is Scripture. We believe this too because it is according to the words of the Bible itself. (In this connection note particularly what is said not about men but about the words of Scripture in II Samuel 23:2; II Timothy 3:16; I Peter 1:25 [where "word" is "rema" in Greek meaning ONLY spoken and written word]; and II Peter 1:21). That is why we call Scripture the "self-authenticating word of God." As HIS word it does not need outside help to establish its nature and authority.

What happens to this Reformed teaching of the inspiration of Scripture when we hold teachings contrary to what the words of Scripture say? Either we change our doctrine of inspiration, or we begin to pick and choose which parts of Scripture are inspired and which are not. This is one of those cases in which NO ONE can have his cake and eat it too. There is no third way out of this dilemma and Church history is littered with the carcasses of those who have been impaled on either of its horns, not surprisingly, very often by deciding to open offices of authority in the Church to women.

Hermeneutic and Necessity

It should be quite easy to see that when we "interpret" the Bible to say the opposite of what its words mean, we are saying a great deal about "Necessity" as an attribute of Scripture. In this case what really becomes necessary to determine truth is not Scripture, but man's experience. Indeed, we do not have to travel far to hear the advocates of women's liberation deriding the Scriptures and declaring that the only way to interpret the Bible is "in light of the feminist experience."

It is this error which flows freely throughout the whole theological movement toward a view of Scrip-

ture as "culturally conditioned." The idea is that Paul was speaking some kind of hidden, "dynamic" and relative truth out of his cultural perspective, and we must understand that "truth" in the light of our own cultural perspective. It is amusing, but not edifying, to observe proponents of cultural conditioning deride the "static correspondence theory" of truth as they handspring their way to discovering in Scripture a "dynamic truth" which has no correspondence at all with what the words of the Bible say. If anyone is tempted to replace the "correspondence theory" of truth with the "non-correspondence theory" of the same, please be warned that such is rooted in the weed of Existentialism, which to this day has borne little but bitter fruit.

It needs very much to be understood that the "Necessity" of Scripture is an attribute of its CONTENT and not only of its usage. Indeed, the two cannot properly be separated. Scripture is necessary to tell man the truth about his spiritual relationship to God and the creation, even before the fall, because those covenant relationships are NOT discoverable in the physical makeup of things. To operate with the assumption, as do some, that the Scriptures are necessary only as a tool of the Holy Spirit in regeneration and that ALL truth is subsequently discoverable in creation itself by the regenerate mind, is in actuality to deny the necessity of Scripture in toto. This is the error of Neo-Orthodoxy, which openly declares that we "encounter" God in the Scriptures, though in themselves they may and do contain many errors of fact and doctrine.

It is exactly this hermeneutic of error which is in operation among those who today are so glibly telling us that the Bible means exactly the opposite of what its words say with respect to the exercise of authority in home and church. Those who hold to the historic Reformed doctrine of the Necessity of Scripture should never be intimidated by such misuse of Holy Writ. A brief reflection on the fact that it is the Scripture that is necessary to determine truth and not man's experience, should serve to stabilize our thinking of God's thoughts after Him and keep us from falling prey to every wind of theological and social novelty, no matter how attractive those novelties are to the world around us. Let us not forget that this "liberation" of women within the Church came only after the pagan society around us became married to the "equality means identity" principle. The Church for almost 2000 years studied the New Testament without "discovering" that God did not mean what He says in it. With the apostle Paul, our principle must be, "Indeed, let God be true, but every man a liar." If NO man on earth believes the Bible, the Bible is still true!

Hermeneutic and Perspicuity

When Reformed teachers say that the Scriptures are "perspicuous," they are making an interesting claim, one that needs a little explanation. Webster's definition of "perspicuous" reads: "Plain to the understanding; not obscure or ambiguous." This is indeed exactly what is meant; the Scriptures are plain

to the understanding and are neither obscure nor ambiguous. On the other hand, there are two things that some might falsely think are implied by this idea, but which are not. By saying that the Scriptures are perspicuous we do not mean that the illumination of the Holy Spirit is unnecessary to true faith. Just because the Bible is plain and unambiguous does not mean that everyone will believe it. Indeed, many men who think of themselves as Christians do not believe the Bible at all. They spend their time trying to explain away the plain teaching of the Bible about the supernatural while telling us that they are searching out the true and divine "kernel" of meaning within what they take to be only the words of men, full of error and falsity. In our day we call such teaching "liberalism" or "modernism," and rightly so, because such teaching simply uses the Bible as a false prop for man-centered and man-invented ideas.

The second thing which might mistakenly be expected from the perspicuity of Scripture is the idea that every part of Scripture must be equally plain. There are indeed, as the apostle Peter observes, some things in Scripture which are "hard to understand, which those who are untaught and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures" (II Peter 3:16). What this clearly means, however, is NOT that the Bible as a whole is hard to understand, but that there are places in the Bible which are difficult to understand. Thus the Bible's teachings are clear, even while there are passages in it that need other Scripture to make them clear. That is why Christian interpreters of the Bible have always operated on the principle that the difficult places are to be interpreted in the light of the clearer places. What has been happening in the present debate on women in office is that the passages which are clear on this subject are being called "culturally conditioned." At the same time, other passages, for whose interpretation we ought to depend on the help of the clearer passages, are being used to claim that Scripture as a whole is unclear on the subject. This is true for example in the cases of Deborah and of Philip's daughters, who exercise judgment and prophecy but who do not in any way violate the principle of submission to men. Indeed, simply because Barak insists on Deborah's accompanying the army (note, she is not asked to lead it), she proclaims shame upon him for not acting properly as a man.

The perspicuity of Scripture on the issue of the reservation of offices of authority to men is obvious both in the Scriptures themselves and in the lack of controversy about this matter in the history of the Church. The former is, of course, foundational; even if there were a great deal of controversy, as there has been on a number of theological issues, the Scriptures are clear, and the Church is bound to obey them, no matter what other men and even other Christians believe. Such controversy, of course, has simply not happened within the Church that takes the Bible seriously, that is, not until recent times when our heathen society has made a humanistic notion of equality its god. Thus the history of Christian doctrine itself witnesses very powerfully to the perspicuity of Scripture on this issue.

While it is not the focus of this article to survey the Biblical evidence, I would like to note a couple of important things about that evidence, particularly as it relates to the perspicuity of Scripture. First, the subordination of women in governmental authority is not an obscure doctrine in the New Testament. Not only are there several very clear and even extended discussions of this principle in which the language is unmistakable, but the collaborating evidence from passages dealing with the exercise of authority is completely consistent with the principal statements. Thus we find the official meetings of the Church addressed as "men, brothers," (Acts 1:16), the deacons are designated to be "men" chosen from among the "brothers" (Acts 6:3), and the passages listing qualifications for holding office include the requirement that officebearers be the "husband of one wife" (I Timothy 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6). To use passages like Galatians 3:28, where Paul talks about the unity of male and female in Christ, in an effort to contradict these other passages is not only illegitimate, but extremely dishonest. Paul speaks in this latter passage about unity, NOT about equality, and even if he were addressing equality, there is not a hint that he is discussing the exercise of authority in the Church. Only people with the very unbiblical presupposition that equality must mean identity of function can read into this a contradiction of those passages which do speak about the exercise of authority, and even then they must twist the passage to refer to equality rather than unity. Now then, if this latter mis-exegesis were right, what would happen to the Perspicuity of Scripture? Interestingly, this fits exactly with one of the claims of the new hermeneutic: "The Bible just isn't clear" on a lot of "those" issues, it is claimed. "Those" issues, not surprisingly, have a habit of coming up the same wherever we look in Church history. When a Church is becoming liberal, the first questions that arise concern the doctrine of creation and the historicity of Genesis 1-11. When it is becoming antinomian, the first issue that arises is almost always the Fourth Commandment, with the Seventh close behind. Liberalism and antinomianism are, of course, often close bedfellows. Always involved in such church degeneration is the perspicuity of Scripture, a Reformed doctrine which is most often unceremoniously dumped without even being mentioned by name.

Hermeneutic and Sufficiency

There can by this time be little illusion about what happens to the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture when teachings which contradict the words of the Bible are adopted. The Bible itself condemns the idea of its own insufficiency. "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take anything from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you," said Moses in Deuteronomy 4:2. When men contradict the Bible, they often do so under the guise of saying, "There is just so much more to the matter than we find in the Bible. Things have changed; we must understand that the Bible was written in the language of its time for the people of its time." This is just a clear denial of the sufficiency of Scripture as our ONLY rule of faith and practice. When we believe and practice things contrary to what the Bible demands, we simply shift ground, whether we are willing to admit it or not.

Certainly perfection of doctrine is never the salvation of any person or institution, for then no one would be saved. On the other hand, true faith is faith which believes the truth; sincere acceptance of the lie can only condemn. Saving truth comes only from the Bible, which ALONE is the Necessary, Authoritative, Perspicuous and Sufficient revelation of God's truth unto our salvation. The heavens declare the glory of God but only the Bible declares His saving truth. When our teachings contradict the clear statements of the Scriptures, we make those Scriptures out to be unnecessary, non-authoritative, ambiguous and insufficient.

Individuals and Churches may claim to be Reformed while they reject this Reformed view of the Holy Scriptures, but all their trappings and jargon then become only the outward disguise for an inward bankruptcy. Even the Reformed Creeds become empty vessels which cannot give life to those who deny the one authority on which those Creeds stand. Without the Bible, even those Creeds become only the voice of man speaking and echoing into and out of the abyss on his own puny authority. Is it any wonder that no one bothers to listen? ●

Rev. R. Grossmann is a professor at Mid-America Reformed Seminary at Orange City, Iowa, and a minister in the Eureka Classis, Reformed Church in the U.S.

READERS PLEASE NOTE

THE OUTLOOK IN ORDER TO REDUCE COSTS WILL NO LONGER INCLUDE BIBLE LESSONS. IF THIS SHOULD CAUSE ANY INCONVENIENCE, PLEASE INFORM THE REFORMED FELLOWSHIP OFFICE, 4855 STARR ST., S.E., GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN 49506.

New Missions for the Gospel

According to a March 29 *Grand Rapids Press* report, "The Rev. Richard McLain is leaving Leighton United Methodist Church in Caledonia in June," to become "director of personnel of the Mission Society for United Methodists," a "conservative," "breakaway missionary organization based in Decatur, Ga." Although "he assumes the new job with the support of his congregation," his bishop, Judith Craig, disapproved the move because the 1984 General Conference had disapproved the organization of another sending agency in competition with the denomination's Board of Global Ministries. The new conservative mission agency had been formed in 1983 by conservative clergy and lay members who charged that the churches' official agency had forsaken traditional "soul-winning evangelism" and adopted "liberation theology." Pastor McLain explained that, while so-called liberation theology often emphasizes change in the social structure and doesn't focus primarily on personal conversion, the new agency was returning to the church's historic emphasis on changing a person's life with the gospel first and then helping him or her change the society around them.

This local news report reveals a situation among the Methodists very like that which prevailed among the Northern Presbyterians a half century ago, when Bible-believing Christians could no longer in good conscience support official missionaries such as Pearl Buck who held that her religion could be the same if Christ had never lived. Toleration of that kind of unbelief in the official mission agencies drove J.

Gresham Machen and others to organize an independent Board of Foreign Missions in 1933. For that he was suspended in 1935, and from that development there came the Presbyterian secession in 1936. The concluding chapters of Stonehouse's biography of Machen seem remarkably up-to-date in relating that story.

Reading about the current Methodist developments and the earlier parallel among the Presbyterians raises the question how far we are from comparable developments in our church agencies. Our missionary and educational institutions and publications are not without defenders of liberation theology who show more concern about correcting social and political conditions than about evangelism. Our missions are undergoing a forced merger with the relief organization which is preoccupied with giving material help, and have to complain in the *Agenda* that even in formulation of the basic mandates the priority of gospel proclamation is being overlooked (p. 126). The foreign board also "requests synod's assistance in making internal and external changes to regain the confidence of churches which is necessary for continued and increased financial support, . . ." (*Agenda* p. 130). The growing confusion about what we believe together with the denominational refusal to maintain our clear confessions of the gospel and the corresponding complaints of lack of confidence in and waning support of our official agencies suggest that we are rapidly "catching up" with the bigger "mainstream" denominations also in this way. P.D.J. ●



STUDY HELPS ON THE
HEIDELBERG CATECHISM BY

Norman L. Jones

Review by Rev. Richard J. Blauw, Chino, CA

Sometimes one finds a book which proves to be worth its weight in gold. Such is the case with the Rev. Norman L. Jones, *Study Helps on the Heidelberg Catechism*. If one wants to take seriously catechetical instruction in the church, this is a book that ought not to be overlooked.

The format is fairly simple. Following each question and answer of the Heidelberg, there is a brief commentary and then a series of review questions. The commentary although brief includes a number of Scriptural references. The writing is concise and touches on many larger issues. Thus in dealing with Q. & A. 52 concerning Christ's coming to judge the living and the dead there is a discussion of the various eschatological views of the millennium. In the questions on baptism (Q. & A. 69-74) we find an explanation of the Reformed view of the sacrament. In Q. & A. 83 dealing with the keys of the kingdom there is a consideration of various types of church government. An excellent outline of the catechism is found in the preface of the book and is most helpful.

There is more than enough material to cover a two year sequence in a catechetical program. It is probably best suited for high school students, although it could be used very profitably in a society or adult group as a refresher course on the catechism.

One other matter worth noting is that this *Study Help* is a spiral bound book. As such

it gives a certain continuity to the lessons and provides a point of reference that can be used long after the class has ended. Instructional material which comes in the form of weekly pamphlets is viewed with far less seriousness by students. Often it is given much the same consideration given a newspaper or magazine and usually ends up in the waste basket.

Although a different translation of the Catechism is used, and although the author sometimes reflects his denominational background (Rev. Jones is a Pastor in the Reformed Church U.S.—Eureka Classis) this book nonetheless can be heartily recommended and would make a substantial contribution to any congregation's catechetical or society program. For approximately \$4.50 (\$4.00 plus postage) it would be, as well, a rather inexpensive addition to one's personal library.

Copies of *Study Helps on the Heidelberg Catechism* may be ordered from Mr. August F. Docktor
P.O. Box 35
Venturia, No. Dakota 58489
Phone: (701) 684-7271

“NOT OLDER THAN FIFTEEN BILLION YEARS”

Aaldert Mennega

Several years ago a Christian astrophysicist gave an interesting lecture which evoked an extended discussion. In a conclusion that may have implications for today, especially for discussions related to the “Big Bang” theory, the point was made that scientists have calculated that the world is approximately 4.6 billion years old, and the universe about 15 billion years. Some scientific evidence was used to show how the figures of 4.6 and 15 billion years were attained. When the speaker was asked to spell out in detail the exact meaning and implication of these figures, he specified that, on the basis of the facts presented, the universe “could not be older than 15 billion years.”

The difference between this and the claim that the universe actually is 15 billion years old may at first seem trifling. But, on second thought, it may be a clue to a better understanding of the actual state of the “Big Bang” hypothesis. Saying that the universe started 15 billion years ago gives the impression that we know this to be scientific fact. And many scientists and non-scientists want it to be understood that way. But we don't know this. Saying that the universe could not be older than 15 billion years gives us only an outer limit on the basis of certain facts. But other, additional facts may give greater or lesser limits.

Let me illustrate with a simple example. If upon entering a room we find an ordinary candle burning, we might ask how long ago the candle had been lit. Observation of the candle shows that it gets smaller at a certain steady rate. Calculation can then indicate that a certain number of hours ago the candle would have been of such and such a length. But which length of time is compatible with actual fact? It is obvious that the candle could not have been lit so long ago that its calculated length would be greater than the distance to the ceiling. This then poses one restraint on the time the candle could have been lit. But to say, then, that the candle was lit when it was as tall as the ceiling would be unreasonable. And not many people would accept such a claim. It is not difficult to conceive of other restraints that apply to such a candle. We know that ordinary candles are not made to have a length of some six feet. Therefore we would have to look for more restraints to come to know the original length of the candle and thus to calculate the time the candle was lit. We would not be able to say

with certainty how long ago the candle was lit without some additional, factual input. However, when the owner of the house tells us that he himself lit the candle an hour ago, then we know for sure, because we have the testimony of the one who did the lighting.

The same reasoning applies to the calculation of the age of the universe. It could not be older than 15 billion years. True enough. The candle could not be taller than the ceiling, either. This means then that we are saying very little of factual import when we make the claim that the universe is 15 billion years old. Honesty and integrity demand that we specify that we mean that it could not be older than that. And just as we only attained certainty about the time of the lighting of the candle through the testimony of the owner of the house, so we can have certainty about the age of the universe and our world only upon the Word of the Owner, Who is the Creator, the Almighty God, Jehovah. What He says about the age of the cosmos is true. Whatever details or precision we look for in His Word, but do not find, may leave the answer forever uncertain. We are told all that we need to know.

This does not mean, however, that we can reason, as some of our scientists in the Christian community have done, that since the Bible does not give us exact answers to our questions, we can go to science to learn the exact details. Scientists cannot give us all the answers, especially not those related to questions of origins and the age of the universe.

We should be content to admit that we do not know, and cannot know the exact age of the earth and the universe. And there is no reason why we should feel that we ought to know, either. Only for atheistic scientists is there any urgency to arrive at such answers, because they seek an alternative to the only true answers to these basic questions. Why should we join them in their search for truth when we already have it? We need no alternative. What we have to do instead is to get on with the job of being good stewards of God's marvelous creation which He entrusted to us. ●

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

A THREAT OF FUNDAMENTALISM

J. Tuininga

This magazine has often warned against liberal trends in the CRC. That is good and necessary. But let's not overlook another danger that is threatening us — that of fundamentalism. If we have to choose between the former and the latter, no doubt we would choose the latter. But I don't want to choose, and we don't have to. The Reformed faith has a richness all its own, and we don't have to import ideas and practices from the fundamentalist camp in order to make it exciting. It has a built-in excitement. All we have to do is believe and practice it.

Examples of the inroads of fundamentalism among us are not hard to find. In the 70's many of our people were influenced by neo-pentecostalism, and some of the after-effects are still with us. Today we see it in the "altar-call" at a recent Young Calvinist convention, and in the invitation of some of our Grand Rapids area churches to have a certain Dr. Guest speak for them. Twenty five years ago the late J. K. Van Baalen wrote in *The Banner* that "we have relatively more people who do not know the difference between a Reformed gospel call and preaching that departs from the doctrine of election and reprobation." If that was true then, it is much more so today. Radio and television evangelists (the electronic church) have slain their thousands, also among our own members.

Look at the music being taught in some of our Christian schools, and the musical programs put on by them, and by other groups of our people. Too often it is music borrowed from the evangelicals and fundamentalists rather than from Reformed sources. And how does Psalm singing fare in many of our churches? Judging by several bulletins I see, not very well. Many churches sing far more hymns than psalms in the worship services. Several of these hymns are taken from books other than the *Psalter Hymnal*. A look at some of these books will reveal songs that have no place in a Reformed church. But we seem to sing them without any qualms at all. Some years ago Prof.

Hamersma of Calvin's music Dept. wrote in *The Banner*: "While we have not adopted the evangelistic service, we have adopted the evangelistic-service approach to the evaluation of our church music." A bit later he writes: "As a denomination we have a specific theological position: the Word of God interpreted in our doctrinal standards. . . . Does the music in your church suggest that you have another starting point?"

A lot of the hymns sung by our people are man-centered rather than God-centered. The songs emphasize my soul, my experiences, my happiness, etc. The psalms, on the other hand, emphasize much more what God has done for my salvation. Subjectivism and experientialism are real dangers among us today. Even a song approved by the synod of 85 is not free from it: "You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart." Already years ago the late Prof. Henry Van Til warned about the non-Reformed content of those words. Today we have lost some of those Reformed feelers and we go more by how well we like the song and how well we can sing it (also on the floor of synod). We need to heed the admonition of the late Prof. J. G. Vos which he wrote some years ago in *Blue Banner Faith & Life*:

The trend of modern hymnbooks is largely toward the over-emphasis of the subjective experience at the expense of the objective foundation. . . . The Psalms are balanced, they are free from all one-sided emphases. They have stood the test of time. Let us hold on to them, love them, glory in them, sing them heartily, and never, never apologize for them or be ashamed of them.

While we continue to warn against the inroads of liberalism, let us not overlook the real danger of fundamentalism. Living as we do in the church-environment of North America, where fundamentalism is rife, the latter may be a greater threat to some of our churches than liberalism.