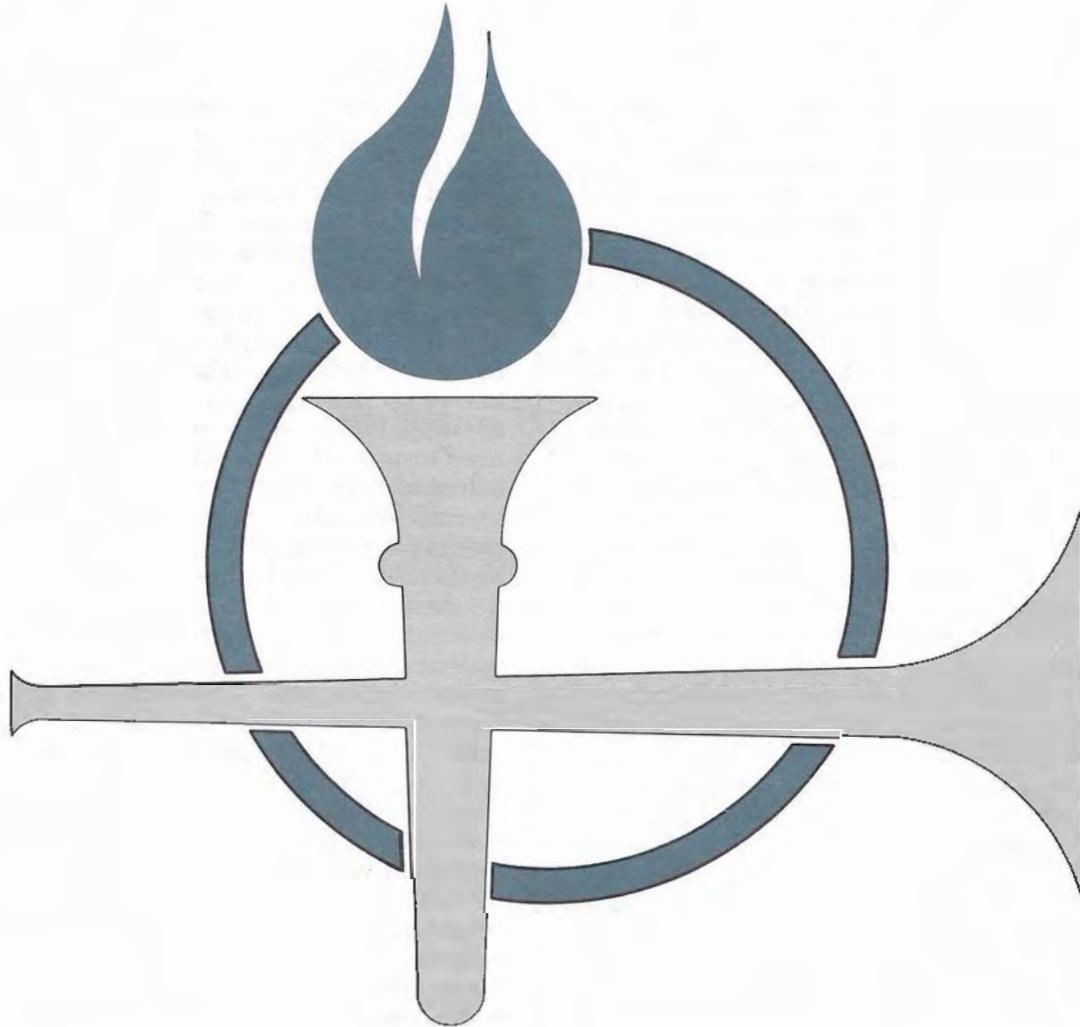


THE OUTLOOK

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

NOVEMBER 1986



**CONSTRUCTIVE CHRISTIANS
WHAT IS LYNWOOD SAYING?
MID-AMERICA SEMINARY**

What is Lynwood Saying to the C.R.C.?

Many readers may be aware that the Christian Reformed Church of Lynwood, Illinois has written to the consistories of other churches of the denomination about the current state of our family of churches. This has elicited a considerable volume of response. On August 27 Rev. Rein Leestma of the Lynwood church, at the invitation of the First Church of Rock Valley, Iowa, addressed a meeting of over 700 about this matter. He stated that when the Lynwood consistory began dealing with this subject it soon realized that there is "white water" ahead for our churches, and he sensed that the attendance at this evening meeting showed a comparable concern in the hearts of many in this area. It is a concern for our churches and ourselves, but even more for our children and grandchildren. Although it is important to all, it rests most immediately and heavily on consistories to whom God has given a "shepherd's" responsibility toward the rest. This concern drives us first to seek God's guidance. The current plight of our church family has resulted from the erosion of obedience to the Bible's authority. Our need to begin with the Bible may be illustrated by the way he once saw a skilled workman laying tiles in a kitchen floor. When he questioned the extraordinary care being given to laying the first tile, the workman explained that if that were not exactly right the whole job would become a mess and by the time the error became apparent the first rows of tile would be set beyond correction. In such matters the beginning has to be right.

The speaker recalled his seminary days when he and most other students were captivated by Karl Barth and Emil Brunner and had little time for Louis Berkhof and Gerhardus Vos. All were eager to become theologically respectable and to gain recognition. After World War II Barth was widely welcomed as a light from heaven, as he spoke of the Word of God and its doctrines. That Word he saw as spoken and then written — the Bible was a human "witness" to it. Barth's followers soon went beyond him, Bultmann saying that the Word needed to be "demythologized," freed from the "myths" that surrounded it. The speaker traced the influence of this way of thinking in our churches, in the seminary president's defense of a student who thought some parts of the Bible more inspired than others. John Sittema's little book on *Preaching with Authority* has highlighted the way Karl Jaspers refused to identify truth with the Bible but made it a relative and changing development in human experience — And so Calvin Professor Holtrop

could say at the Ontario conference, "Truth is something that happens." Thus, we see in a variety of ways the recurrence of the question the devil raised in paradise, "Has God said?"

In accepting the notorious "Report 44," the speaker saw our churches "laying the first tile crooked." The "problem" it faced did not arise from our churches, but came to us through the Reformed Ecumenical Synod from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands who had been influenced by the German theologians such as Barth and Brunner. The question of Report 44 (about the nature and extent of the Bible's authority) arises out of a false view of the Bible and of truth — really out of unbelief. Although the report said many good things, its question is contrary to God's Word and Covenant. If we receive the Bible as God's Word, who may interrupt and say that we need to appoint a committee to study the nature and extent of its authority? Doing this embodies the false assumption that the church may judge the Scriptures, treating it merely as a human book. In the cases of Kromminga, Stek, De Boer, Verhey, Dekker and Boer we have seen only a beginning of the resulting troubles. When the Bible is subjected to such questioning we get a new "pope" in the "expert" and a return to Luther's "Babylonian Captivity of the Church."

We are on a train rapidly going in the wrong direction, and face the question, "When shall we get off?" The speaker recalled a conversation in which he asked someone whether he could "be comfortable" with having women deacons. "Yes." With women elders? "Probably." With women preachers? "Probably." With homosexual preachers? If matters went that far he guessed he'd stop going to church. That has been the sequence in the Dutch churches — the approval of homosexuality — the "blood theology" (of the atonement) came from the bloody Canaanites — God can't be sovereign if He permitted a "holocaust" — We are on a train running on the same line. What will happen to our children and grandchildren if we, as a denomination, don't get off? If we stay on, we have no reason to believe that our children will hear the gospel at all. We have to get off and do so quickly. Especially fellow-pastors, elders and deacons need to listen to the warning of Ezekiel 33, that God will require the blood of the casualties of us if we fail to sound His warning. Can we excuse ourselves to God, saying that "we don't want to rock the boat," "be controversial," or endanger "getting a call?" In a church

discussion when someone ventured the suggestion that it might take 40 years to correct the church's course, a young mother retorted, "I haven't got 40 years and I have 4 small children!"

In the ensuing discussion the speaker explained that the Lynwood consistory, becoming aware of the urgency of the matter, had properly addressed the "highest" church assemblies, the consistories. (Synods and classes are only short-lived representative assemblies). A next appropriate step might be a suggested conference of the over 120 consistories who had expressed general agreement with Lynwood's concern.

Questioned about his own early change of views, the speaker expressed gratitude for a good mentor and fellow-pastors who, along with helpful reading, had been means the Lord had provided for his guidance. In our time, when, as in the past, people "perish for lack of knowledge," as many neither know nor care about what is happening, it is time for us to turn off the TV and pray for revival. We need to be guided again by the "Thus saith the Lord," not by "sharing" our collective ignorance. PDJ

Tapes of the address are available from Mid-America Reformed Seminary, Box 163, Orange City, Iowa 51041, for \$4.00.

NEW CHAPTER OF CONCERNED MEMBERS ORGANIZED

In June of 1986 representatives of the Board of Concerned Members in the Christian Reformed Church in North America met with a small group of men in Kalamazoo, who had invited the representatives to meet with them for the purpose of discussing the possibility of organizing a Chapter of CMCRA in that area. A Steering Committee was formed to organize a meeting of members and interested people, to draft a proposed Constitution, and to present a slate of candidates for officers.

In the evening of September 24 this meeting was held. The Secretary of CMCRA addressed the meeting relating something of the history, activities, concerns, and plans of the organization. Some thirty-nine people from more than a half dozen churches in Kalamazoo voted to organize the Kalamazoo Chapter of Concerned Members of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Elected to the Board of the Chapter were David A. Kloosterman, President; Rev. James Admiraal, Vice-President/Treasurer; and Dave Alkema, Secretary. The Chapter discussed and adopted the Constitution that was submitted and decided to hold a public informational and inspirational meeting in the near future, perhaps as a Reformation Day Rally.

We heartily welcome this new Chapter in our organization and commend them to the Lord's blessings. May they be a vital and energetic force in that part of our Christian Reformed Church!

Rev. Harry J. Kwantes

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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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CONSTRUCTIVE CHRISTIANS

in a Collapsing World and Church⁽¹⁾

2 Peter 1:1-4

The reader of Jude and 2 Peter 2 can hardly fail to see the similarity between these two passages, a similarity that gives critics something to argue about. By-passing such misleading criticism, to consider what each of these parts of the New Testament say, we will find in both of them, in their similarities and differences, exactly the kind of guidance that today's Christians and church need.

Need to Be Militant and Constructive

Jude, at the beginning of his letter, informs us that when he was intending to write a letter about "the common salvation," he faced an emergency which made it necessary to write instead urging the readers "to contend for the faith that God has once for all entrusted to the saints." Godless men had "secretly slipped in" to "change the grace of God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord." Such a hostile invasion called for Christian soldiers, not for celebrators. When fire is destroying the house the work of fireman takes precedence over that of painter and decorator.

The second chapter of 2 Peter shows us that the Apostle was dealing with the same situation with the same urgency as did Jude. Instead of, like Jude, plunging immediately into "contending for the faith," Peter first reminds us of what and how supremely valuable that faith is and how it is conveyed to us.

When the Christian faith is under attack, as it is in our time, which of these two approaches should we take, that of Jude or Peter? The Bible's answer is that we must not choose between these two, but adopt both of them, for they do not disagree, but complement each other. When some are telling us today that a Christian must never be negative or militant, they are simply wrong. When the Christian faith is under attack, God orders us to "earnestly contend for" it. There is a temptation, however, that in having to persistently contend against errors, we may become so preoccupied with the ongoing struggle against what the enemy is trying to do that we lose our own perspective on the extent and riches of the faith we are seek-

ing to defend. Harry Blamires in his splendid little book *The Christian Mind* has highlighted that danger. "We have accepted secularism's challenge to fight on secularist ground, with secularist weapons and secularist umpire, before a secularist audience and according to the secularist book of rules. Having done so, we look around in dismay at the discovery that our followers are few, our predicament misunderstood, our cause misrepresented." Instead of letting our efforts be "doctored to the secularist mentality" he urges that we "shift our ground" and "set about reconstituting the Christian mind." We must begin "by taking for granted the authoritative, God-given nature of the Christian Faith, and re-establishing within ourselves an unfaltering sense of the objectivity of Christian truth" (p. 117). This is exactly what the Apostle Peter does in his introductory chapter. Let us see how he does this, and then, in a following article see how Jude after the "call to arms" of his letter, concludes it with the same kind of positive outline of how we must seek to be "constructive Christians in a collapsing world and church."

Guarding Valuables

We observe first that the Apostle highlights the surpassing value of the Christian Faith. He speaks of a "precious faith" (v. 1), "whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises" (v. 4). Running through the whole Bible is a recurring stress on the values it reveals and conveys. "More to be desired are they than gold . . . than much fine gold" (Ps. 19:10).

Why do people who call themselves Christians and their churches lose their faith in our time? Isn't it often because they no longer consider these things important?

Would you let someone casually walk away with your wallet or purse? Certainly not! You'd lose credit cards and driver's license, as well as the money in it! If we are careful to protect even our wallets, why should we let anyone quietly deprive us of our infinitely more important faith? Let no one say that such a thing is imaginary. It is exactly what has been permitted to happen in most of the churches of our time. Some time ago a book described "the trivialization of

the United Presbyterian Church," as the Bible and its doctrines quietly slipped out of sight without the general membership realizing that it had lost anything. There are many indications that our churches, which traditionally share the same Biblical and doctrinal heritage, are undergoing the same kind of loss, although most church members are totally unaware of it. Peter's letter calling attention to the values of our faith is like the travel guide's alert to protect our wallets and handbags from pickpockets. It recalls our Lord's similar warning to a church, "Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown" (Rev. 3:11).

The Cure for the Disease

Just what is so "precious" in this faith and in these promises that impels us to hold on to them more than to anything else? Consider what happens to us if we do not have them. Without them, we are victims of "the corruption that is in the world through lust" or, in more common words, the "rotteness" that is in the world by "lawless desire." Throughout our experience in this world we encounter the problem of things rotting, rusting and breaking down. The Bible diagnoses our human plight as being, in a moral and spiritual sense, victims of a rot that is destroying everything human. That pervasive decay becomes increasingly evident in our current life and society in the breakdown of personalities, families and communities as honesty, decency and goodness seem to be rotting out of them. The cause of this pervasive rot the Bible identifies as "lust" or lawless desires. The revolt of human desires against God's order which the Bible calls "sin" is our real problem. Even if we begin to see or sense this, we do not in ourselves have any means to "escape" from it. The only way to escape from it is through the "precious" gospel "promises." They alone can free us from our enslavement to the pervasive "corruption."^{*}

Through the powerful gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ we completely escape from the "corruption that is in the world through lust." That is only one side of our deliverance, however. Positively, we are given "everything that we need for life and godliness." This is the familiar promise of Christ our Lord that "whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16), but it says even more. Through the knowledge of Christ, "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness." The Apostle assures us that through the knowledge of Christ we are so completely equipped that we do not lack even one thing that is needed for life and godliness! One cannot imagine anything that could be added to this complete and wonderful work of God into which we are brought as active participants.

Becoming Like God

After seeing all this, we might think that we have exhausted the possible portrayal of the gospel riches. Peter points out that they have still another dimension. Through these gospel promises "you may participate in the divine nature!" This sounds incredible! Is he even saying, as some heretics arrogantly claimed, that by this religion men become gods? Indeed not! But by the gospel we are saved and called to become "like

God" in the sense of "being renewed in knowledge" in His image (Col. 3:10), and "created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:24). Thus from following, resembling and sharing the destiny of the devil, this amazing gospel changes and calls us to follow, become like and share the eternal fellowship of God as His children!

Introduced by the gospel to such amazing riches, we are urged to engross ourselves in acquiring them. We are assured that if we do that, they will not only provide a rich and productive life here (v. 8), but also promise an exuberant royal reception (the Greek word suggests "provided with a choir!" v. 11) "into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Treasuring and Sharing God's Gospel

How are we to acquire these fantastic gospel riches? They are, from first to last, the gift of God, given by "His divine power" (v. 3; cf. also Eph. 2:8, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.") God grants us this gift by leading us to know Him through the gospel. That is why that gospel is all-important, worthy of every possible effort to spread it.

Considering its amazing claims, how may we be sure that they are true? That gospel is not composed of men's "cleverly invented stories" (literally, "myths," v. 16), but of the revelation of God, experienced by the apostles and attested by "a more sure word of prophecy" which never originated from men, but from the Holy Spirit (vv. 19-21).

This, in substance, is the way Peter prepares us for what we must do whenever the Faith and church are being wrecked by false teachers who replace God's gospel with their own opinions (2:1-3). We have to expose and oppose the false teachings, but we can do that most effectively if we constantly stress, as He did, the unimaginable riches of God's gospel. Entrusted with such treasures as these, how can one help but seize every opportunity to speak about and work with them? How can a church with such a trust squander a Sunday morning trying out liturgical trivialities (or dances!), or listening to a rehash of last week's news and columnists' opinions, or even to some budding scholar's guesses about how a Bible story (or doctrine) ought to be rewritten? One has to be, as Peter said (1:9), "blind," to be diverted into such nonsense. If brighter days are to come for us and our churches, we will have to wake up and realize anew "how vast the benefits divine which we in Christ possess" and devote ourselves "with all diligence" to them. "When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word, what a glory He sheds on our way!" PDJ

A little reflection at this point shows us why present efforts to modernize, "contextualize" or popularize the gospel by skipping any talk of sin and simply appealing to people's "felt needs" or natural desires, inevitably fail. How can a doctor successfully treat a disease if he will not admit that it exists? If the cause of all of our trouble is "lust" or "evil desires," how could anyone who is himself still ruled by and encouraging such desires help anybody else escape from them? As Peter wrote (2:19), "While they promise . . . liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption. . . .!"

Faithful Stewards

John Blankespoor

"It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (I Cor. 4:2).

"In the month of November we observe Thanksgiving Day, both in the U.S. and in Canada. In the U.S. it began long ago with our Pilgrim fathers. Abraham Lincoln was the first president to make this a national holiday. It has been the custom ever since. Even though our countries are by no means what they should be, morally and spiritually, we should be thankful that we have governments that set aside such a day.

In this Scripture we read about stewards, and the assumption that stewards should be faithful. The Scriptures often speak of stewards. Eliezer was Abraham's faithful steward. Jacob for a time was steward of his uncle Laban's cattle. Joseph apparently was steward in Potiphar's house. The role also seems to have been familiar in Christ's day. Every household of distinction seems to have had a steward in charge.

A steward generally had to manage the affairs of his master. Usually he was not a slave. He was entrusted with something, often much. Given charge of his master's affairs and business, he often faced the temptation to keep things for himself. He was always accountable to his master and at times had to give reports of his work and business.

The disciples were stewards of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says here that he was a steward of the mysteries of God. He had to take scrupulous care of that which was entrusted to him, and give it to others faithfully. This was his instruction from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christians are also stewards, "managers" of the Lord, of what He has given us. And that is, first of all, the great gifts of salvation, as well as many spiritual and material gifts. Of these, we are to be stewards for the Lord.



A good steward is one who realizes first of all that all he has is of and from the Lord. He has nothing of his own (Ps. 24). The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof. Our very life is of the Lord.

Let's consider this in the fall of the year, the thanksgiving season. The crops of the farmer, the

wages of the laboring man and all the financial returns of the business man are of the Lord. We might object to this by saying that we worked for what we received. True, but also the ability to work, to do business, was and is of the Lord. Remember that all you have is of the Lord.

But we are stewards. All these things were "loaned" to us. This means that they all are also for the Lord, not for ourselves. A good steward in Bible times wouldn't think of taking for himself what belonged to his master.

All of our earthly possessions, money, time, and talents are for the Lord. With them we must serve the Lord, in gratitude for the great salvation given us. That's what the Scripture means when it says that we are the Lord's. He is our Lord and Master.

Paul says to Timothy in another place that the Lord has richly given us all things to enjoy. While we may enjoy the good gifts given us, and have a "good" living, we must do this responsibly, serving the Lord with what we have and enjoy.

He doesn't want us to be robots, acting mechanically in this, but as rational, moral, responsible Christians. He wants us to do this with renewed and loving hearts and minds.



This verse of I Cor. 4 says that stewards must be faithful, trustworthy and reliable. No boss would consider "hiring" a man who he knew would not be honest and reliable.

God wants us to be faithful, dependable and always return to Him as He has given to us.

This has to begin in our hearts, thankful to Him and loving Him.

God has given us Himself in the gift of Jesus Christ. And as Christians He has also given us material abundance. Have there ever been Christians to whom He has given more than to us? And we are stewards. We must serve Him with it all.

We must do this daily, thanking Him for all His gifts. This implies that we may not murmur or complain, as the Israelites did in the wilderness.

We must serve God with converted pocket-books. Remember that at a time when most of us have received much, Christ's church and many kingdom causes urgently need financial support. And how much we read in the Bible of the need of helping the poor. This means more than giving in the offering plates once or twice a month for benevolent causes.

What kind of stewards are we in proportion to what the Lord has given us? How much do we spend for ourselves for clothing, eating out, and luxuries, compared with what we give? This principle of Christian stewardship also applies to those who have less, are considered to be poor, or are hard pressed farmers. They must see that their plight is also of the Lord. The needy farmer must see his present difficulties as trials of faith from his faithful Lord, and respond in faith.

Given little or much, a good steward is faithful. To people who are rich and millionaires in the church, the Lord has given much. Ought they now to give all away, and leave for themselves only a meager living?

How much should rich people give to the Lord? I remember a well-to-do church member "burdened" with that question.

In answer to the question we must see, first of all, that the Bible does speak of rich people. Men like Job, David, Solomon and others were millionaires according to our standards. The Lord nowhere condemns them for being rich. Neither does He instruct them to give away all they had. We do read of Barnabas in the first New Testament church, who gave all he had to the kingdom and was commended for it. But the apostles didn't further say that every rich person had to do this.

In the second place, we must see that the Scriptures do not give us an objective, mechanical answer about how much the rich, or in fact every Christian, should give to the Lord. The Old Testament had the rule of tithing, giving a tenth. Many people, I think, still use this as a guide-line. But it is not the final answer of the Bible. The answer of the Bible is, for all stewards, give from the heart, give as much as you love Him. For many or all of us, it might have seemed easier if the Lord had given direct, specific instructions. Why doesn't He? Because He wants us to be stewards who respond in love.

"Freely you have received, freely give" (Matt. 10:8).
Each must be a faithful steward.



Who can do this? How can we do this? Only through the salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ. Only when we truly know the Lord. Only when we know that as vile sinners we are saved by the wondrous elective love of God in His Son. Then we can say that we have the "only comfort" that we are not our own, but with body and soul, belong to our faithful savior Jesus Christ.

By nature, we steal from God. All men receive many good gifts from the Lord. But the unbeliever doesn't know Christ and he doesn't know true, Christian love. The natural man robs God; he steals from Him daily. The one question that affects and colors all of his actions is, "What is there in it for me?"

Look at Jesus Christ. He was and is the very Son of God. He owned the world, which He had made. But He came into this sinful world in the form of a servant, a slave. All He ever owned was the clothing on His back. He gave Himself for His people in His atonement on the cross. And we are saved by His free grace.

Knowing this, I can say, "I belong to Jesus and Jesus is mine." I may be assured that I belong to Him forever. Nothing in the whole world can ever change that. What a comfort and blessing!

And knowing ourselves and our daily failures, we learn to know daily the grace that forgives again and again, according to His infinite mercies. He does not fail, even though we do every day. How precious this Jesus becomes, as we learn of that forgiving grace year after year.

By that grace we are to be responsible stewards of our wonderful God, faithfully using material things to serve and honor Him. May we be His faithful stewards in this thanksgiving season. •

Revivals and Altar-Calls

In the "Alive-85" campaign featuring Rev. John Guest, sponsored by local churches including many of our own, those churches found themselves participants in the kind of "revival" project that has characterized much of Christianity in America since colonial days. Although such revivals have long been accepted by many churches, they come as a relative novelty to many of ours. Since the campaign some of our churches are said to be introducing "altar-calls," the appeals for immediate, public response, into their services. (Another series of such meetings at Calvin College this week may further encourage this trend.) Since such meetings raise some important questions, this appears to be an appropriate time to give attention to them.

Controversial Methods

Forty-seven years ago, when my wife and I were introduced to pastoral life in the south-eastern corner of Texas, we were surrounded by churches that often relied for growth and sometimes even for staying alive on such annual special meetings. In an October 25, 1940 Banner article about these "revivals" I observed that, while "older and more conservatively-bent minds" among us would dismiss such practices as un-Reformed, others were attracted by the warmth, enthusiasm and emotionalism of such meetings or argued practically, "If other churches can grow by these methods . . . why should we not copy them?" We see the same diverse reactions today. How should we evaluate these "revivals" and their characteristic "altar-calls?"

1. We ought to welcome the growing concern about an evangelistic outreach into our church communities.
2. Although some have criticized appeals to come to Christ as inherently "Arminian" and "un-Reformed," God's Word does not support such a sweeping criticism. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church (2 Cor. 5:19f.) "God . . . has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God." And in Athens he announced to the pagan philosophers, that "God . . . now commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). Thus he echoed our Lord's own "Come unto me."
3. Paul wrote to the Philippian church that although some preached Christ faultily, "from envy and strife,"

in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; in this I rejoice. . . and will rejoice" (Phil. 1:18). Therefore it appears that we ought to appreciate efforts to bring the gospel in our communities, even though some of the methods used may be open to criticism.

Does this mean that we ought to join in sponsoring and working in such mass revival programs? It does not. We ought to consider more carefully than many do what is involved in our taking over these methods.

Conversions: Psychological or Spiritual?

Almost 30 years ago in 1957 Dr. William Sargant, a well-known British practicing psychiatrist, published a book, *Battle for the Mind*, with the sub-title "A physiology of conversion and brainwashing." Although he paid respect to his Methodist "religious upbringing," his preface stated that his concern was "not with the immortal soul, which is the province of the theologian, nor even with the mind. . . which is the province of the philosopher, but with the brain and nervous system, which man shares with the dog and other animals." Relying rather heavily on Pavlov and his experiments with dogs, he attempted to explain the mechanism of conversion. He said that he chose "Wesley for special study in the technique of religious conversion," "even if the hell-fire doctrine he preached may seem outmoded" and that he would discuss "only those physical or psychological stimuli, rather than intellectual arguments, which seem to help to produce conversion by causing alterations in the subject's brain function."

Because he considered this influential book "extremely dangerous," the famous London evangelical pastor, Dr. David Martyn Lloyd-Jones responded to it in a 1959 booklet issued by Intervarsity, entitled, *Conversions: Psychological and Spiritual*. In direct opposition to Sargant who tried to explain conversions by his mechanistic psychology, Lloyd-Jones showed how radically different real conversions, worked by God's Word and Spirit, were from the crude psychological manipulation Sargant made them out to be. Sargant had alluded to the American evangelist, Charles Finney who had tried to reduce revivals to a system of techniques for producing them, but Lloyd-Jones showed how wrong Finney, too, had been. Finney "(after his period as an evangelist and when he had become a professor of Theology)" had to admit, "The converts of my revivals are a disgrace to Christianity. . .," suggesting that "the tremendous pressure which this evangelist's methods brought to bear upon the will and emotions, produced only temporary results." Dr. Lloyd-Jones goes on to warn that we by our use of faulty, unscriptural methods must not encourage the kind of merely psychological "conversions" Sargant highlighted. He cites the Apostle Paul's insistence that the methods of bringing the gospel must conform to the message of the gospel (1 Cor. 2:1-5). "We are to 'beseech,' but we are never to browbeat." Our emphasis and dependence must be on God's Word and Spirit not on psychological and sales techniques.

A little familiarity with the methods and products of revivals underscores Lloyd-Jones' criticism. I recall

how one evening our friend, a pastor in whose church a meeting was being held, during the appeal shouldered three young men, one by one, marching them to the front. A fourth refused to go. What most impressed us as observers was that the man who did not go forward was the only one who had been awake during the sermon! And I recall the navy officer who told of having gone forward in such an evangelistic service. When returning home, he asked his mother what he should do next, she suggested that if he decided he meant what he had done, he should join that church; if he decided that he didn't, he should never go there again — and he never did!

Such methods, however well-intended, may hinder rather than help the work of the gospel. The revival system has tended to be an inadequate, quick substitute for the faithful, thorough covenant training of the children of the church in the Christian faith, which God's word commands. By filling church rolls and sometimes (for a little while) churches with unconverted, these methods have tended to break down rather than build up the morale and testimony of the churches, and they have tended to eliminate what there may be of the biblical practice of discipline.

Doing the Lord's Work in the Lord's Way

To my mind, the most convincing objection to the typical "altar-call" is the radical difference we noted long ago between it and our Lord's own teaching and example in Luke 14:25-35. The Lord had just said in the preceding parable, "compel them to come in" (v. 23) and with the "great multitudes" (v. 25) following him — an evangelist's dream — we would expect that this would be the opportune time for a most fervent appeal for converts. Amazingly, he takes this occasion to emphasize what conversion means — that to follow him we must "hate" father, mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even our own lives, and "bear a cross" — What is He trying to do? Scare people away? Note the explanations: Before building a tower one must consider its cost, rather than give up after laying a mere foundation. In beginning a war one must have the resources to fight rather than promptly make peace with the enemy. Isn't the trouble with the hasty revival-converts that most soon disappear, or make peace with the enemy? The Lord is certainly concerned about converts, but they have to be real. "Salt" that has no taste is good for nothing. We will never go far with new evangelistic techniques if we do not take the trouble to teach people — or even to find out what conversion means.

While we were still in seminary a well-known local evangelical minister told the student body of how he almost had a man talked into being saved when the devil made someone ring his door-bell and his prospect got away. Although we must try to "persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11) with the gospel, one who acknowledges with the apostle that only God changes hearts (1 Cor. 3:6, 7; Acts 16:14) will have a different approach from one who assumes that he must in Arminian-style "talk people into being saved." Let's pray and do all that we can to spread the gospel, conscientiously trying to do the Lord's assigned work in the Lord's way. We can't improve on that. PDJ

1986 Mid-America Reformed Seminary Board Meeting and Seminary Festival

Arthur Besteman

The last week in August was a beautiful time to be in northwest Iowa. The weather was delightful, the fields were rich with crops ripening for harvest. There was abundant evidence of God's blessing. It was an appropriate setting for the fall meeting of the board of Mid-America Reformed Seminary and the annual seminary festival which is held in conjunction with the beginning of a new school year. Board members from various professions and with a rich background of experience gathered from California, Washington, Iowa, Illinois, Michigan and the province of Alberta.

I cannot recall having attended a board meeting of any institution or agency at which there was manifested a more positive attitude and greater excitement about the faithfulness of God. Throughout the sessions of the board meeting reference was made again and again to divine guidance experienced and blessings received beginning with the meeting at which the idea of Mid-America Reformed Seminary was conceived to the time of her founding and throughout the first four years of her existence.

The business of the board was conducted under the capable leadership of the Reverend Edward J. Knott, vice-president of the board. Early in the meeting a request from the Reformed Church of the United States to have representation on the board was considered. The R.C.U.S. has for the past several years sent an observer to the seminary board meetings and a member of her clergy is now on our staff. The R.C.U.S. is also encouraging her ministerial students to attend Mid-America. A very cordial relationship exists between the seminary and the R.C.U.S. The executive committee was instructed to study the request in conjunction with our by-laws and to prepare a recommendation.

The board approved the position of Coordinator of Educational Resources. The person occupying this position will, among other duties, serve as theological librarian, develop a library of audio-visual resources as well as a library of catechetical church education resources. The faculty development committee was also instructed to give priority to securing the services of a full-time faculty member in the field of systematic theology.

A crucial issue before the board for consideration concerned the question of the autonomy of the seminary. After careful study and lengthy consideration the following statement was adopted:

"Whereas the practice of placing licensure and candidacy matters under the authority of a board

violates Reformed church polity, in that the authority of consistories and classes is displaced, "Therefore we the Board and Faculty of Mid-America Reformed Seminary pledge ourselves to work in cooperation with consistories and/or classes to have this matter brought into line with proper Reformed church polity by having classes license and examine candidates.

and

"Whereas our current academic curriculum and Ministerial Apprenticeship Program constitute an adequate seminary preparation for the work of the gospel ministry, and whereas our educational program meets course and field work requirements pertaining uniquely to the Christian Reformed Church (polity, history, catechism preaching, etc.), and therefore additional training is superfluous,

"Therefore we the Board and Faculty of Mid-America Reformed Seminary pledge ourselves to work in cooperation with consistories and/or classes to have the synodical rule requiring additional training changed with regard to graduates of Mid-America Reformed Seminary, and we also pledge ourselves to work in cooperation with consistories and/or classes to secure licensure and ordination for those of our students who aspire to the ministry of the Word and sacraments in the Christian Reformed Church."

May the king of the church who has so richly blessed the founding and beginning of Mid-America Reformed Seminary bless also the implementation of this policy.

On Friday afternoon members of the seminary association gathered from several states for the annual business meeting. It is always encouraging to note the commitment of our constituency whose generous support not only enables us to meet our budget of nearly a quarter of a million dollars but whose added gifts during the past summer also permitted the installation of a computer system at the school. By the time installation was completed all the funds needed for payment had been received.

The seminary chapel was filled to overflowing for the convocation exercise which was held following the business meeting. The processional hymn "Praise to the Lord" was a joyful expression of the theme which filled the hearts of those present for this im-

pressive service. The convocation address given by Professor Nelson Kloosterman was entitled "Clement of Alexandria's Ethic of Wealth as an Ethic of Grace." The presentation demonstrated not only Professor Kloosterman's ability as a scholar but also his deep-seated commitment to the Reformed faith.

The chicken supper which has become a popular feature of Sem Fest was once again well attended. It was followed by the inspirational rally which was held at the Calvary Christian Reformed Church of Orange City, Iowa. A large audience heard the Reverend Rein Leestma speak on the subject "False Questions and False Answers."

Professor Mark Vander Hart of the seminary faculty spent the past summer studying on the east coast. His experiences of the summer were reflected in his report as administrative dean as he wrote: "What impressed me after these summer studies out east is the utter spiritual bankruptcy of liberalism in its various forms. Liberalism had nothing to say to the world since in its rebellious autonomy it rejects the Bible as the written Word of God. I am convinced that the academic program which we offer at Mid-America is fully adequate for preparing men for the ministry of the Word. An ongoing challenge facing us is to get the message out to all concerning what we stand for and what we can offer."

God grant that the challenge may be met. ●

THE ORDER OF THE LORD'S CHURCH

Offices of the Church (II)

Stephen M. Arrick

To train, or not to train. That is the question. Last month we pointed out the need for qualified office-bearers, stating that office-bearers must be selected and nominated based upon their possession of certain spiritual, Scriptural, and personal qualifications.

It is my conviction that qualifications and training are needed to produce effective office-bearers. After all, we do believe this about ministers, don't we?

Let's consider more closely why, what, and how to train office-bearers.

Why train potential office-bearers? The answer is simple: So they will know what their job is and how they are to perform it.

The rich culture and traditions of the Reformed faith used to be the training ground for the future office-bearers of the Church. Scripture, doctrine, and familiarity with Church Order and practice were part and parcel of life.

That rich cultural and traditional heritage has rather rapidly been eroded by life in the modern world. Only in a few areas does culture and tradition provide an adequate training-ground for future office-bearers.

We need to train office-bearers to build them up in areas that are essential to effective service, to insure that these offices remain and function as God intended.

But what areas must we address? Basically, there are three, each necessary wherever weaknesses appear. In other words, if the office-bearers appear to be weak in any of these areas, build them up!

The first area is what we might call *Foundational*. Foundational training builds office-bearers up wherever their foundation appears to be weak, in such matters as:

1. *Knowledge of the Scripture* — Do they understand and are they students of the Bible?

2. *Knowledge of Doctrine* — Do they know and understand the Reformed doctrine of Scripture, of Salvation, of God, of Christ, of the Holy Spirit, of the Christian life, of Last Things, of the Church, of the Sacraments, just to mention a few. These doctrines cannot be promoted and defended by those who do not know and understand them.

3. *Knowledge of Creeds and Confessions* — Do they understand our catholic and apostolic heritage? — the Ecumenical Creeds. Do they understand our Calvinistic heritage? — the Canons of Dordt. Do they understand our Evangelical heritage? — the Heidelberg Catechism.

We cannot afford to merely assume that qualified office-bearers possess a knowledge and understanding of these essential foundations. Knowledge and understanding is discernment, and the Church needs discerning officers.

The second area of training is *Practical*, designed to help the office-bearer know his job and how to do it. There must be practical training in the Church Order, visiting the membership (pastoral, family, crisis, benevolent), synodical issues, evangelistic calling, committees (what they are and how they function), parliamentary procedures, and leading Bible studies.

The third area of training is *Experiential*. This is training conducted in teams. Early in the office-bearer's experience, either the pastor, an elder, or deacon, should be sure that new office-bearers experience a hospital visit, a spiritual concern call, an evangelistic call, and a benevolence call.

Do we have any alternatives to training? Not an acceptable alternative. Without office-bearers who are trained to do their job effectively, the problem of increasing professionalism in the Church will continue! Without discerning office-bearers, decisions of assemblies will be left solely in the hands of ministers, boards, and paid professionals! Without equipped office-bearers, the arguments for women in all offices based on "functional equivalence" will continue to rage! Next month we will investigate ways to implement the training procedure. ●

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

Joining a Common Apostacy

By now many readers of this magazine will know that prior to the latest meeting of the Council of the Christian Reformed Churches in Canada (held in New Westminster, B.C. Nov. 12-15, 85) a conference was held on the topic of "Trends in the Christian Reformed Churches Compared with Developments in the Geref. Kerken in the Netherlands." Two speakers, Dr. Paul Schrottenboer and the Rev. Jacob Kuntz, gave special attention to the question: Is the CRC 25 years behind the Geref. Kerken? Their conclusion (and that of the Conference as a whole) was that there is very little comparison between the two churches, and that the phrase "25 years behind" is neither accurate nor helpful. Respondent Kuyvenhoven, editor of *The Banner*, agreed: He doubted whether the question was even worth a conference, since "those who make the charges are not so young and fewer in number." Rather than comparing ourselves with the Gerefermerde Kerken, we should concentrate on facing a more serious threat which we have in common, namely, "the global cancer of secularism" which is all around us. So the Conference concluded.

I don't share the view of the speakers. Rev. R. Sikkema at the meeting of the Concerned Members in the CRC in Chicago addressed the same topic as that of the above-named Conference, but he came to quite different conclusions. I would urge readers to purchase this tape and to listen to it personally and in various groups and societies. Sikkema did a thorough analysis of his subject, using (among other writings) a booklet written by the late Prof. Dr. K. Dijk in 1964, entitled, *Koerswijziging in onze kerken?* (Change of direction in our churches?). Note the date of this booklet. Sikkema made the point that the speakers at the Conference in New Westminster should not have compared the present CRC with the Dutch churches today, but rather with those churches 25 years ago (around the time Dijk wrote his booklet). Then the speakers might have come to a quite different conclusion, for when one does this (also by reading Dijk's booklet) then he finds that the similarities between the two churches are very striking (not to say disturbing). Trends present in the Geref. Kerken at that time later became developments in those churches, and Sikkema warned that similar trends in the CRC today could very easily develop into disasters, as they have done in the Geref. Kerken. Even Kuyvenhoven was reported to have said, after

listening to Sikkema's speech, "It worries me." And well it might.

Let me give a summary of some of the trends that were present in the Geref. Kerken in 1964, as given by Dijk:

a) There were changes in church life: new song books, much more emphasis on liturgy, more experimentation in worship, decline in catechism preaching, diaconal work becoming more like social work in general.

b) Changes in life-style: from an identifiable Reformed ethic to one quite indistinguishable from a worldly one. Previous strictures with regard to Sunday observance and a Christian life-style were considered narrow-minded. One could now do pretty much as he pleased on Sundays, even watch commercial sports either at home on T.V. or at the arena; dancing, card-playing, a form of lotteries at school and church bazaars were all considered "fair game" for Christians. One writer of those days said "the Reformed ethic" had disappeared.

c) Changes in confessional outlook and allegiance: a questioning of the Canons of Dort, particularly with regard to reprobation; revoking the decision of 1926 with regard to the first chapters of Genesis; underlying this was a different hermeneutic.

d) Changes in ecumenical outlook: Closer ties with the Hervormde Kerk and a desire to join the World Council of Churches, with a resulting widening of the gap between the Geref. Kerken and other smaller confessional bodies (Christelyke Gereformeerde, Vrijgemaakt, etc.).

It should not be necessary to make the "application" to the CRC. Anyone who cannot see the striking similarities to the situation in the CRC today is quite blind. One has but to mention names like Boer, Stek, Verhey, Menninga, the Reformed Church of America, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, etc. to make the connection. Dijk also mentioned the women issue — first voting-rights and then office-rights, and the dwindling attendance at the second service on Sunday. The similarities are too obvious to deny. Seen in that light, "25 years behind" appears to be quite an accurate judgment. Anyone who still doubts it, should read Dijk's list of trends again.

About our common enemy, secularism, does one have to say anything more? Are not the above-mentioned trends (present in both churches) evidence

of a thorough-going secularism in the churches and among their members? What else is that but a "being conformed to the world" and following the spirit of the age? If this is not secularism, what is it?

It is nice to posit "secularism" over-against the clear manifestations of it that are present in both church communions. As if the two are quite different. Most people will be quite ready to agree that "secularism" is our enemy today, provided you don't make it concrete by mentioning our own synodical decisions and ecclesiastical trends. We're all against "secularism" as long as it doesn't touch down close to home, as long as it is not further defined. Such a declaration is quite harmless and therefore useless. Says Schaeffer: "To accommodate to the world spirit about us in our age is the most gross form of worldliness in the proper definition of the word." and that is exactly what the trends in the Gereformeerds Kerken 25 years ago and those in the CRC today boil down to: gross worldliness, hence secularism. And unless we are transformed by the renewing of our mind and heed the warnings of I John 2:15-17 and James 4:4, both in our personal lives and in the corporate life of the church, the salt may soon lose its savor and become good for nothing. ●

J. Tuininga, Lethbridge, Alta.

Anglicans and Scripture

The theme of this year's Anglican Evangelical Assembly was 'Rightly handling the Word of Truth.' The first speaker was Dr. J. I. Packer who presented the approach to Scripture that had been used in the past by Evangelicals in which the Bible is treated as God's Word written — the objective revealed truth of God — and men are directed to understand that truth with the help of the Holy Spirit and to apply it to their contemporary situations. That is Dr. Packer's own position as he had stated it 30 years ago in *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*. He contrasted it with some contemporary approaches to Scripture.

The other speaker was Dr. John Goldingay of St. John's College, Nottingham, who spoke on the interpretation of Scripture. He emphasized the diversity and complexity of material in the Bible as coming from the differing standpoints, backgrounds and proclivities of the authors. Also we and the Bible have

separate histories and we tend to interpret the Bible from the position we occupy, e.g. middle class, white and protestant. We should not be content with such an interpretation but must open our understanding to truth with wider horizons. We do this, he said, by learning from other interpretations, from liberation theology, from radicals, from the reformers and so on. All this, he supposed, would help us to understand the diversity of Scripture better, for Scripture speaks with more than one voice on many questions.

Dr. David Samuel reported on the Assembly in *Cross + Way* which is the little quarterly publication of the Church Society (Whitefield House, 186 Kennington Park Road, London SE11 4BT, L1.50 p.a.). He wrote in the Spring 1986 edition:

"We must point out that the Evangelical approach to the Scriptures has always pre-supposed the objective and unitary nature of God's Word written, i.e. that the message and truth of the Bible are one message and one truth because it is inspired by the one mind of the Holy Spirit, however diverse the individual human authors and their backgrounds might have been. Because of this supernatural element, the limitations and "horizons" of the human authors did not hamper the essential unity and harmony of Scripture as a whole. The new interpretation and approach, put forward at this Assembly and elsewhere, lays greatest emphasis upon the human authorship, its diversity and heterogeneity, with the result that Scripture is fragmented and is often made to speak with several different voices which do not necessarily agree with each other.

"This diversity is compounded when our partial standpoints and horizons are added to those of the authors of Scripture. The corrective that is advocated, viz, seeking to widen our horizons by learning from all and sundry, seems to be a counsel of confusion. Surely, the only proper path to the interpretation of Scripture is to seek the mind of the Holy Spirit who is the true author of all Scripture [2 Tim. 3:16]. If people are conscious of their spiritual condition, they do not approach Scripture, primarily, as middle class, white protestants but as sinners in need of God's grace. If they come full (i.e. simply as middle class, white, protestants or anything else like that) they will go away empty, but if they come empty (needing Christ and His grace, which is what the Bible is all about) they will go away full.

"If we do not keep before us the view of Scripture as essentially supernatural — inspired by the one mind of the Holy Spirit and likewise interpreted properly only in its true sense by the same Spirit to those whom He enlightens then we shall inevitably get lost in the labyrinth of pluralism that now seems to dominate current thinking on this subject. Would it not be better to acknowledge that the new approach to understanding and interpreting the Bible is radically different and marks a new departure? Its compatibility and continuity with Evangelicalism is nowhere evident." ●

Reprinted from the "News and Comment" column of the July, 1986 Banner of Truth, Iain H. Murray, Editor.

Preaching in America Today

R. B. Lanning

Ministers in America receive endless numbers of mailings from businesses of all sorts hoping to make a bit of money out of some service they want to provide to churches and the clergy. A good many are simply ridiculous. Some, however, are quite disturbing because of the nature of what they are selling. Businessmen tend to search out needs to fill, or at least whatever it is that large numbers of folk may think they need. Several mailings received this past year indicate that some entrepreneurs perceive a market to exist among the clergy for ready-made sermons.

Two such mailings are before us as we write. One man offers to provide the subscriber with all the makings of a sermon, rather like a cake or pudding mix in a box. All you do is mix and heat, and you have your sermon. For the harried preacher who doesn't have even that much time, another firm will send the sermons all ready to take to the pulpit and serve. All at reasonable prices, too! To convince the doubting, sample materials are provided. As an enticement to the thrifty, bonus coupons are enclosed. To protect weaker brethren we shall give no further details. Our purpose in writing is to examine these materials to see what can be deduced from them with regard to preaching in America today.

Now the first thing to be deduced is that there must be a good many men in the pulpit today who lack an adequate training for their proper work. This, despite the proliferation of M.Div. degrees and scholarship in general! Such is the general ignorance or indifference regarding doctrine that anyone can use these sermons in any church. With regard to Biblical exegesis matters are just as bad. "The average pastor is not well equipped to deal with the latest scholarship available for exegesis." So we are told; and the elementary nature of the "insights" offered in these materials suggests that the case may be even worse than is proposed. In fact, "the average pastor" evidently does not even know what is in his hymnbook. The same service that will furnish him with exegetical "insights" and homiletical "resources" also offers to send along a complete selection of hymns, introits, offertories, and doxologies.

A second great failing in these specimens of contemporary preaching is the artless dependence upon illustrations to do the work at hand. Illustrations seem to be the great thing nowadays. One service claims to provide

... a wealth of intelligent, fresh illustrative and background material every week — sharp, human interest material that hooks and holds attention.

Illustrative material sparkles with unusually-stated insights, literary references, anecdotes, from the amusing to the deeply moving — all skilfully selected and honed to the text and theme.

The samples included bear this out, at least as to the abundance of material provided. In thirteen paragraphs we are given twelve illustrations! Reference is made to a Hollywood movie, a French novel, and a Broadway musical. Here is a pearl snatched from the lips of an Episcopal bishop:

And oh, Lord, let us not be like porridge, stiff and hard to stir, but let us be like cornflakes, crisp and ready to serve.

All the more remarkable is this prayer, forasmuch as the man who offered it is said to have done so and lived.

Someone may say, what is wrong with these illustrations? In themselves, many things. The man who can describe the details of scenes from movies, or plots of novels, or else recite snatches of lyrics from the Broadway stage, shows plainly that he has not spent his time in the serious pursuits involved in preparation for the preaching of the Word of God. And if the preacher thus continually evidences that he spends a great deal of his time at the movies or reading novels, then the man in the pew must be confirmed in the belief that it is alright for him likewise to squander the precious stuff of life on these and similar pursuits. And likewise neglect the while to study and to pray!

Moreover to feature such things in a sermon surely caters to the desire for entertainment so increasingly evident in our churches today. We have no doubt that these illustrations "hook and hold" attention. So does the average television "sitcom" or "soap opera," and for many of the same reasons.

But the most serious objection to be entered against these illustrations is the false concept of preaching which they pre-suppose. Clearly the purpose of sermons made from such material is psychological. The point is to get at the people where they live, get them to take a good look at themselves, and to feel good about what they see, and maybe even (for Jesus' sake) try to do better. True preaching on the other hand is expository. The task at hand is to expound the Scriptures as given by God for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. Illustrations (if used at all) should be used sparingly, and be drawn from sources appropriate to so serious a task. This is confirmed by every instance of apostolic preaching recorded in the Book of Acts.

A final deduction to be made from these materials is that there must be many ministers today who have lost sight of their true calling. The man who produces some of these materials was recently quoted in the press as saying that

Some ministers are running pre-schools, building campaigns, or are active in community affairs. There just isn't enough time anymore for a clergyman to do an adequate job preparing a sermon.

Surely this man has put his finger on the problem. His solution is to aid and abet this criminal neglect of the great task to which every minister of the Word is called. The busy ministers may now get on with their preschools and community affairs secure in the knowledge that the makings of next Sunday's sermons are in the mail. Far better would it be were these ministers to empty their hands of these little sidelines and devote themselves to the great apostolic labour of prayer and the ministry of the Word. By no other means will the day dawn among us when the Gospel shall be preached "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power".

Reprinted from the May 1986 Banner of Truth.
Rev. Ray B. Lanning is pastor of the Bethel Christian Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Who Am I?

Glenn P. Palmer

"The HOLY SPIRIT", Third Person of the Trinity, brings what images to mind? Perhaps Pentecost? Perhaps a thankful heart — for without His working in your heart you would never have believed. When I think of the Holy Spirit, I think of POWER — power that is greater than this world.

About me the Bible writes: The "Spirit of the Lord began to stir him," and three times that, "the Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power." This power enabled me to do spectacular deeds, to the dismay of my enemies.

Once I seized the jaw-bone of a donkey and killed 1,000 men — more than Rambo, more than Shamgar who killed 600 with an oxgoad.

Once I killed 30 men to pay off a bet.

Once I killed a lion.

Three times the Spirit of the Lord came upon me in power, or as the Dutch translate, "grabbed hold of me," and three times I killed the enemies.

Who am I?

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You might say that we are like "two peas in a pod," for rarely is one of us mentioned without the other. We are two very powerful kings whose kingdoms are east of the Jordan River in the land of the Amorites. The account of our defeats in the book of Numbers is only 15 verses, but don't let the shortness of the report belittle the disaster, for that is mentioned 18 times in 5 different books of the Bible. Why were we defeated?

Calvinists are to blame! The Bible says about the first king that "the LORD your God made his spirit stubborn and his heart obstinate" (Reprobation?).

Were the Israelites stronger than we? No, we were no match for them, because, as Moses said, "the LORD our God gave us all of them" — Calvinists again!

Then Moses took all the towns and completely destroyed them. There were no survivors. So died my beloved friend, King _____ of Heshbon.

I fought against Moses — unafraid, because I am a giant. Some of my clans are famous — Goliath and his brother, Lahmi. I invented the king size bed — 13 feet long and 6 feet wide! But the Calvinists struck. Read what their leader writes at the end of his report, "The LORD our God also gave into our hands, _____ king of Bashan and all his army. We struck them down, leaving no survivors. At that time we took all his cities. . . . We completely destroyed them."

Who am I and who is my neighboring king?

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Judges 13:25—15:16.

Numbers 21:21-35; Deuteronomy 2:24—3:11.

A POST-REFORMATION DAY RALLY

Thursday, November 13, 1986
7:30 P.M.

Grace Christian Reformed Church
612 S. Park Street
Kalamazoo, Michigan

Speaker: Dr. Lester DeKoster
Theme: "Sparks From the Reformation"

Sponsored by:
The Kalamazoo Chapter of Concerned Members
of the Christian Reformed Church

NEWS and VIEWS

John H. Piersma

CALVIN SEM GETS NEW DEAN IN SPITE OF A NAUGHTY DAUGHTER — "CRC PICKS VAN DYK AS DEAN OF CALVIN SEMINARY." This is the headline of a page 1 article in the Grand Rapids Press of June 14, 1986. If you know anything about newspaper coverage you would recognize immediately that the Press regards this item as of considerable significance. This time the Press is right.

The Rev. Wilbert Van Dyk, long-time pastor of the prestigious Plymouth Heights Church in Grand Rapids, was nominated by the Trustees of Calvin College and Seminary for the position of academic dean and professor of preaching. The CRC synod is required to ratify such appointments. This the 1986 Synod did by a vote reported to be no less than 136-24.

That the Rev. Mr. Van Dyk is competent, experienced, well-meaning goes, I guess, without saying (I have no direct, personal knowledge of him).

Why, then, is the news of his appointment so significant in the eyes of people?

The answer is that once again the Christian Reformed Church, through one of its major boards and its synod, has placed in a position of strategic influence a person whose express position on a very important matter of current dispute which is (a) contrary to existing denominational positions, and (b) contrary to the deep convictions of a sizeable segment of the membership of the CRC.

To make the story complete we'll need to back up a bit.

Van Dyk has a daughter, Leanne, a pre-ministerial student (so far as she is concerned), formerly a student at Calvin Seminary, and returning to get her degree.

Leanne was discovered to be doing something which, for the time being at least, female members of the CRC are not allowed to do, namely, conducting church services (before the Crenshaw CRC in southern California).

This was especially embarrassing for her father because he was at that time secretary of the Board of Trustees of Calvin Seminary, and he had to profess ignorance of this whole business. Leanne is hardly a child (she is reported to be thirty-one years of age), and I suppose one might easily imagine that she didn't tell Dad that she was doing things "obviously against church rules."

All of this was discussed by synod when it interviewed Van Dyk. Naturally Van Dyk was asked to reveal his opinions on the issues involved. What did he say?

(1) His daughter was wrong. "I am unhappy with what my daughter did. She knows that. I sent her a long and vigorous letter. What she did was obviously against the rules," Van Dyk said (as reported by the Press).

(2) This does not mean that Van Dyk thinks Leanne's conduct was more than a violation of the church rules. "I don't believe it is a sin for women to preach, although it is against our regulations." Van Dyk is reported to say that he personally leans in the direction of opening up church offices to women.

Dr. James DeJong, with or under whom Van Dyk will work in his new position at Calvin Seminary, is quoted to say that he is "delighted" with the appointment of Van Dyk. "He is a superb administrator, a loyal churchman, and a fine teacher," said De Jong.

A VOICE FROM THE PEW — Once in a while one hears a testimony from a so-called "ordinary member" in the church (I know how objectionable and obnoxious this kind of language is!) which makes more than an ordinary impression. It requires no explanation:

We are also concerned and alarmed in the trend of some of our churches. _____ is following the trend, and I predict that not too long in the future we won't know why we are a Christian Reformed Church.

There is an element of Pentecostalism, a bit of Arminianism with a sprinkling of ecumenism leading us down the path. No doctrinal emphasis from the pulpit, the younger element must be confused like people are at Christmas time, Santa or Christ. I believe that apostasy comes from the top down, from the pulpit, not out of the pew.

I heard a good minister (not CRC in this instance) say at the recent conference of "the Concerned" in South Holland, IL, "It's high time all of us ministers got down on our knees to beg God for forgiveness of our sins." This was not said bitterly or negatively, but sincerely.

I agree. ●

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STONES FOR BREAD (*The Social Gospel and Its Contemporary Legacy*), by Harry Antonides. Published by Paideia Press, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada. Reviewed by Rev. Jelle Tuininga, Lethbridge, Alberta.

This book by the director of research and education of the Christian Labor Association of Canada traces the rise of the social gospel movement in Canada at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century against the background of similar movements in England and the United States. Although the book's main focus is on Canada, it should be read by Christians everywhere, for its message is necessary and relevant for all those concerned about the integrity of the gospel in its confrontation with a secular world. Professors, pastors and other leaders in the CRC should especially read it. A Christian labor leader gives us a keen and thorough analysis of the social gospel, as it arose in the past and continues to have

influence today. Antonides defends the Biblical, orthodox faith in a forthright and capable manner. He has seen the devastating results of the social gospel's perversion of the gospel in Canadian society:

The social gospel and liberalism must be seen for what they are: a tragic surrender to the spirit of secularism, which contributed significantly to the further spiritual impoverishment of the people. And this is the worst evil that can befall any nation (p.42).

I first heard a condensation of this book in a series of lectures which the author gave to an all-Alberta gathering of CRC ministers in 1982 (Cf. *The Outlook*, Oct. '82). I'm grateful that an expanded version of these lectures is now available to the public. The book deserves wide reading and discussion.

Here are a few of the chapter titles: "The Churches and Social Reform in Canada;" "Church Union and Ongoing Secularism" (a chapter that deals with union endeavors which resulted in the United Church of Canada, and which has significant things to say about World Council of Churches' theology); "From Social Gospel to Political Theology;" "The Shift to the Left in the Roman Catholic Church;" Liberation Theology" and "In Defence of a Christian Mind" (in which the author sets forth his biblical alternative for a real Christian witness in society). The author is not a "fundamentalist" who is interested only in "soul-saving." He is one of the founders of the Christian Labor Association of Canada, a Christian union whose impact on Canadian society has been considerable, notwithstanding its relatively small size. But he is concerned about a social witness in society that is scripturally oriented, and that does not put the cart before the horse:

The church never can presume to eliminate the heart of the gospel message and replace it with a prescription for political and economic reform. This is not an argument against political and economic reforms; it is an argument for seeing such reforms in their proper relationship to the gospel. When people truly believe in what the Scriptures say and so turn to God, the result will be far-reaching changes in the political and economic structures of our society. Renewed hearts always result in new deeds of mercy and

justice. This order cannot be reversed: political and economic reforms will not create the "new man." (p. 133).

What the social gospel adherents have really done in the past and are doing today is identifying the gospel with humanism. "In so doing, the central message of the gospel vanishes; the significance of Christ's work of atonement is denied. This is not the religion of the Scriptures, but the new religion of humanity (p.109). "Liberal Christianity has continued to espouse the view that the Christian religion is primarily a means by which one can strive for a better world and express solidarity with others" (p. 107). This type of Christianity is characterized by a "profound relativism." And the author contends there is ample evidence to show that this type of Christianity "has gained momentum in recent decades." He sees it in the activity of liberal churches today, "especially as those activities are channelled through a variety of church taskforces." Antonides is not happy with the involvement of the Canadian CRCs in some of these taskforces via the Council of Christian Reformed Churches in Canada. "Their statements and recommendations reflect a strong bias that is, broadly speaking, anti-American, pro-socialist, pacifist and 'soft' on the evils of communist regimes" (p.111). Though most of the adherents of the social gospel are lovers of socialism and are strongly influenced by Marxist ideology, they have great difficulty pointing to a socialist nation today where their "humanitarian" dreams have been fulfilled. Nevertheless, says Antonides, "hope springs eternal" in the hearts of these advocates:

Even today, despite overwhelming evidence that communism has failed, many Christians whose theology is liberal and whose politics are socialist continue to ignore or soft-pedal the true nature of communist regimes. There is something within the very nature of liberal Christianity that not only blinds its adherents to the true message of the Scriptures but also to the plain facts of history (p. 100).

I could write a great deal more about this book, but I hope this is enough to whet your appetite and make you decide to purchase it. You will not be disappointed. It is a book whose message must be heard today, also in the CRC. ●