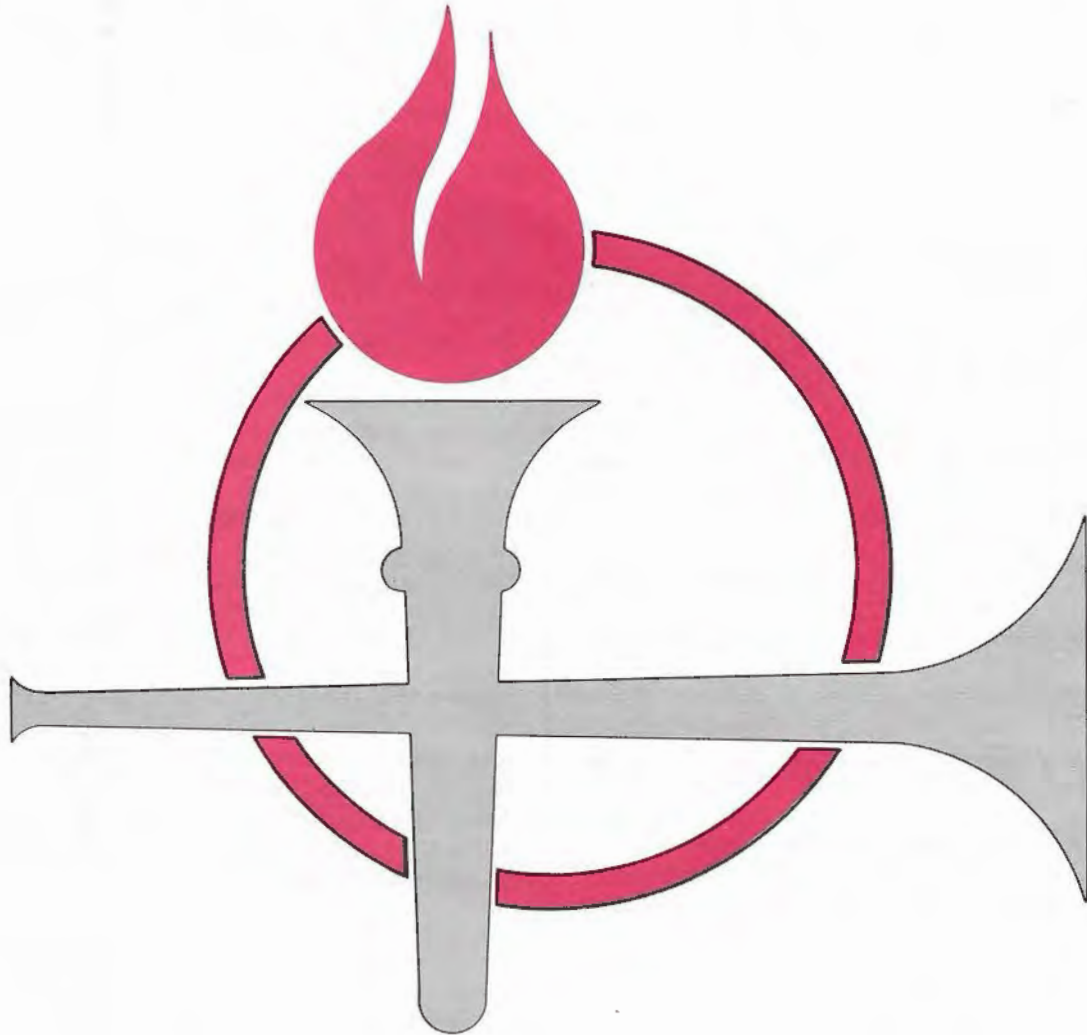


THE OUTLOOK

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

DECEMBER 1986



REFORMED CHURCH GROWTH IN ZAIRE
FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS
PEACE AND THE SWORD

Comment and Opinion

John H. Piersma

“Progress” Predictable? — People, such as this writer, who think the church in its traditional beliefs and practises was Spirit-led and biblical are called conservatives (the kind of word which makes the nose turn up slightly as reflection of some sort of disgust). People who want “change” are called progressives. That word stands for everything that is forward-looking, innovative, exciting and even “reformational” (after all, a truly Reformed church is by definition one that is undergoing continuous alteration and improvement).

There is a new teacher at Calvin Theological Seminary, *official training-school* for future pastors in the Christian Reformed Church. His name is Henry de Moor, recently promoted at the Free University, Amsterdam with the degree Doctor of Theology. Dr. de Moor addresses himself in his doctoral thesis (*Equipping the Saints*, privately published, available from the author c/o Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, MI) to the matter of office in the church.

This is not an attempt to review the book. That is done by Dr. Paul Schrottenboer, General Secretary of RES, in a recent issue of *Calvinist Contact*. We have his word for it that “de Moor chooses for admitting women to all the offices” since “Biblical revelation does not provide us with a rigid structure of role assignments (*sic!*) for all time” (Again *sic!*).

Evidently the Christian Reformed Church acting through the Calvin College and Seminary board of trustees has no objection to the teaching of this point-of-view to its prospective pastors!



The Future of the CRC — It is good fun to read the Calvin Chimes. One can learn a great deal from it. There is, for example, a raging controversy on the campus of John Calvin College about the re-institution of cheerleaders at varsity basketball games. (One young lady reportedly threatened to transfer to Hope

College if this significant feature of campus life was not restored — take that!) And so you know why Christian Reformed fans at basketball games are so quiet? Because of their Dutch roots and Calvinistic doctrines, that’s why! No wonder we can only despise both.

All kidding aside, Chimes does offer interesting reading by obviously talented young people, and it isn’t all about silly things. There is an important series on a truly important issue under the awesome heading “The Future of the CRC.” The writer is Editor in Chief, Patrick Jasperse. He takes it upon himself to ask various “leaders” in the church to tell him what they see in their prophetic crystal balls regarding the future of our beloved church. Their response is, I guess, encouraging. “Most of the leaders do not believe that there will be a schism in the Christian Reformed Church. Individual members (both those who oppose women deacons and those who believe women should be permitted to be elders and ministers) will continue to leave and a few congregations, such as Lynwood (IL), may break away. But at present the denomination as a whole is not threatened.”

My first observation is that this typical denominationalistic pragmatism, the kind of thing Chimes has been ridiculing for at least as many years as I have known it. Even though such impressive voices as Leonard Hofman (denominational stated clerk), Wilbert M. Van Dyk (now an executive officer of Calvin Seminary and long-time pastor of the prestigious Plymouth Heights CRC, Grand Rapids) and Jacob Eppinga (even longer-time pastor of LaGrave Ave. CRC, Grand Rapids, and recent president of synod) say that denominational loyalty and morale is just great. What difference does it make if the positions taken by the church are wrong?

A second observation I want to offer is that these articles (Chimes, October 3, 10) reveal another sickening characteristic. It is reflected in this kind of paragraph:

And, finally, and most interestingly, research for this article shows that the actual discontent in the denomination has been exaggerated. While the issues are constantly raised by periodicals such as *Outlook* and *Christian Renewal*, groups such as the Committee of Concerned Members of the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Fellowship, and outspoken conservative leaders such as Henry Vander Kam and W. Robert Godfrey, their mind-set represents only a small segment of the denomination.

A few quick observations (or questions):

1. What is this "mind-set" business? I happen to know both Vander Kam and Godfrey rather well. They are, I'm sure, people whose minds are set on being committed to the infallible Word and the historic Reformed creeds, a commitment they see as something required by their Lord. I do not believe that their convictions are born out of some peculiar set of character traits. To suggest that they are, borders on something less than kind and brotherly treatment.

2. Who ever said that those wretched and troublesome conservatives ever thought that their positions were the overwhelming convictions of the majority of Christian Reformed people? Who can be blind to the fact that confessionally committed people in the CRC have not won a single battle for a long, long time at synod? On principle I have always resisted people who say, "It is of no use to appeal to synod," and still do, but the facts in recent years are apt to make anyone who dares to resist the current trends very discouraged as to the mere possibility of receiving a fair hearing.

3. All of Chimes' "leaders" together do not convince me that they or I really know what the CRC will be ten years hence. When I see the resistance to almost every distinctive feature of CRC doctrine and practise, I worry, of course. I heard a bright, dedicated young mother say recently, "I left the Roman Catholic Church to come to the CRC because I wanted to be ruled by Scripture alone. When I see and hear what people are doing in our church with the Scriptures, I fear for my children." In the eyes of current CRC leadership role models (I use that term without endorsement) she is just another dissident without much following. That may comfort some, but it haunts me!

With a view toward the future development of the educational program at Mid-America Reformed Seminary, the Board of the Seminary has created the position of

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Route 2, Box 163
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THE OUTLOOK

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

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Peace and the Sword

John Blankespoor

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests" (Luke 2:14).

"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34).



Does this sound like Christmas, that Jesus came to bring a sword? A sword stands for warfare, bloodshed, opposition, a battle. And notice that the text doesn't say that the result of His coming will be the sword and bloodshed. No, the very purpose of His coming was to bring a sword. How paradoxical that the "Prince of Peace" should bring war!

I'm sure that not many sermons are preached on this passage in the Christmas season. Our children are likely never told to memorize this verse in school, catechism, church school or Sunday School. Why not?

The thoughts expressed here just don't seem to fit. The angels praised God in the highest heavens because this child would bring peace on earth.

Long ago the prophet Isaiah had prophesied concerning Him when he said: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of them that bring good tidings of great joy and come with tidings of peace!"

Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist, had prophesied that He would guide our feet in the way of peace.

Paul says in Ephesians 2 that Christ is our peace because He has "broken down the middle wall of partition."

That is the heart of the song of the angels!

Sinners, Christians, people living in this world are encouraged and given hope because He will bring peace in this troubled, sinful and hostile world,

delivering us from sin and giving us victory over death.

But here it seems to be different. We can ask all kinds of questions, or try to raise objections, but the truth remains that He came to bring the sword, war and death. Also these words are a part of the inerrant and infallible Word of God as they state the purpose of Christ's coming.



Jesus came as the Son of God, to save sinners. This we all know. We all also know that these sinners live in a world of sin. All of mankind is sinful, corrupt by nature. The devil is "the prince of this world." All sinners are slaves of sin, and can therefore do absolutely nothing by themselves to be delivered from this dreadful bondage. We all have mountains of debt which have to be paid, which no one can even begin to pay. Jesus came into this sinful world to save His sinful people from this dreadful slavery.

His coming meant that a battle would follow. That was the "sword." First of all He had to conquer and crush the devil himself. In His ministry we see this "sword" in His constant encounter with the opposing Pharisees and Sadducees. It was a bitter battle all of His life. Often He stood all alone, not even the disciples understanding Him, or giving any kind of spiritual and moral support. Think also of Gethsemane, "Here the wild bulls of Bashan" (Ps. 22) come enmasse to attack Him. (Visualize a herd of wild bulls attacking a person with the intention of mauling him to death). This took place spiritually in Gethsemane when the hosts of devils would crush Him as He was lying in the dust, sweating blood. This was His battle to save His people. He made atonement on Calvary and He arose from the grave, as victor. The

result was peace, wonderful peace. When sinful man by faith is justified before God, he has peace in His soul. That's the peace the angels sang of in the fields of Ephraim—first "the sword," then peace.

By His work of the sword, He brought peace to His sinful people. The power of sin had to be destroyed, and the devil dethroned. Jesus saw him "fall from heaven like lightning."

That's what Christmas is all about. "He will save His people from their sins," the angel said to Joseph.

Unbelievers and the world do not enjoy this peace. They are still "in their sins." They may have a formal celebration of Christmas, make a big ado about it, but the real Christmas with its wonderful peace they do not have.

How do we as Christians enjoy Christmas? Although many Christians condemn the Christmas commercialization, they do very little that is positive to observe it.

What the Lord wants us to do is to see His condescending love to come to wage this battle for us — how He fought sin as the holy One. He fought this battle even in His prayers and in His lonely life. He really was "alone in the crowd." None really understood Him while He was on the cross. Even while He was living His life on earth and doing His work, He was the "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," as He came with the "sword" to destroy the devil and the power of sin. That we must see anew each Christmas.

Take a second look, during this Christmas, at yourself as a sinner. Even though we have been redeemed there is still much sin in the most holy. Try to see anew the determination, love and dedication of the Lord when He came into our lives and our world to fight the great battle for us against the devil and our sin in order to deliver us.

And knowing now what He paid and that our salvation and victory are sure, we can have peace of which the angels sang.



When the Lord gives us a new birth and makes us Christians, He works this in our human nature that was controlled by the power of sin. The result is that we now have a new nature which fights against the old nature. This produces a continuing battle in our lives. Paul says that the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, for these are contrary to one another. This battle all children of God know by experience. Recall the words of Romans 7: "For the good which I would, I do not, but the evil which I would not, I keep practicing. . . Wretched man that I am. Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And the answer follows, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

It is in Him alone that we find wonderful peace, following the battle within our own natures and lives.



People of God who possess His Spirit and know Christ still live in this sinful world. It's the same

world in which Jesus lived. He said, "They have hated me, they will also hate you."

Jesus also prepares His disciples for this kind of life, as He in the 10th chapter of Matthew tells them that He is sending them "like sheep among wolves." What a picture — helpless sheep in the midst of a pack of vicious, hungry wolves! In the same breath Jesus says that that opposition of the world may become so strong that brother will betray brother to death and a father, his child, and children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. How intense is the hatred of the devil and the world for the cause of Christ!

Sometimes the Lord made the battle general for all Christians. He told us that in the world we shall have tribulation, but that we should be encouraged, because He has overcome the world.

Later in this same chapter Jesus makes all this very personal: "And anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

Many of God's children have experienced incredible suffering for their Lord, some giving up their lives. Let us not forget, that at this time there are large numbers suffering in prison and labor camps. In some measure, all children of God must and do experience this kind of opposition, beginning with the struggles against our old sinful nature. Ours is a life-long battle.

However, we are always given great encouragement. Christ assures us that He has overcome the world. The real victory has already been achieved. He promises that He will also give us a share in this victory in His time. These promises can give us inner peace.

The victory is sure!



However, Jesus' work with the "sword" still isn't finished. It wouldn't be finished even if we were already in heaven.

He will return to give us new bodies and to create a new heaven and earth. He will overcome the devil and all his host. Death and all His enemies will be "swallowed up" in victory. What is "swallowed" is gone. All His enemies will be completely defeated. His work of the "sword" will not be completed until that is accomplished.

And in the new heaven and earth peace will reign forever. It will be a peace beyond the highest expectations any one of us on this earth can begin to have, beyond all human understanding and comprehension.

This hope, the great General and Captain of the hosts of all His people left with us, even before He died: "Peace I leave with you, peace I give unto you. I do not give you as the world gives." The world cannot give such promises and cannot keep what it promises. Christ can.

And then these words follow, "Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

UPDATE on the Reformed Confessing Church of Zaire

Maynard Koerner

I am thankful for this opportunity to report on the status of The Reformed Confessing Church Of Zaire. By the grace of God many exciting things are happening there which I am anxious to convey to the readers of the *Outlook*. This past summer Rev. Paul Treick, liaison to Zaire for the Reformed Church in the U.S. (RCUS) and myself, Rev. Maynard Koerner Chairman of the Diaconal Committee of the RCUS, traveled to Zaire and spent two weeks preaching and teaching and visiting the churches there.

For those who might not be familiar with this new reformed church in the heart of Africa, I would like to briefly review its short history. In 1984 under the sponsorship of the Reformed Church in the United States the Reformed Confessing Church Of Zaire was organized. This was a result of contacts made by Rev. Aaron Kayayan, French-speaking radio broadcaster for the Back to God Hour. This Church began with 10 members of a Committee of Directors which acted like a steering committee to form the church. Out of these 10, one minister and 3 elders were ordained. The headquarters of this committee is in the city of Lubumbashi located in the southern part of Zaire. Two of the elders are from the cities of Kananga and Mbuji Mayi, which are in the central part of Zaire.

The Reformed Confessing Church of Zaire is an indigenous church. This means that it is self-governing, self-propagating and self-supporting. The Reformed Church in the United States is sponsoring this new church to meet some legal requirements. We are also acting as advisors and providing help in the way of a diaconal minister. A number of Bibles in French, Swahili and Tshiluba have been made available. Elder Pasua of Kananga has translated the Heidelberg Catechism in Tshiluba. This has been printed and made available to the people in Zaire. Elder N'kulu of Lubumbashi is working on translating the Heidelberg Catechism into Swahili which will be printed as soon as possible. Last fall a shipment of over 4,000 pounds of clothing and medical supplies were sent to Zaire.

Since its beginning in 1984 the elders and pastor Kishimba have been busy organizing groups into congregations and planting new churches. Today, the church numbers about 4,700 members and is grow-

ing steadily. There are many new opportunities for growth, but travel and limited manpower make this difficult. There are eight congregations in Kananga, 32 in Mbuji Mayi, and eight in Lubumbashi. There are twelve elders and one minister now. Training classes for elders are held once a week and more ordained elders are anticipated soon.

In Mbuji Mayi there are now two schools being run by the church, one with 200 and another with 300 students. There is a crying need for more schools. There is also the hope of beginning an Agricultural Technical school in that area to teach the people how to farm for a living and how to raise garden produce to feed their families. There is interest in knowing the biblical teaching on family planning. It is common for many Zairian families to have at least 10 children, but not the means to care for them well. There is one dispensary in Kananga and another in Mbuji Mayi with three full-time nurses. The churches in the Kasai region appear to be very active.

They have an extensive preaching and teaching program. Elders are very active in leading the congregations and providing instruction. Instruction in each area includes worship, Sunday School, Catechism classes, membership classes, elder-training classes, as well as evangelistic meetings, and choir practices. To become a member, a person must attend and observe the church for three months. After that the membership instruction begins. It appears that Christian discipline is faithfully being carried out.

While there are many different aspects that testify that Zaire is a totally different world than America, the sharpest contrast has to be the poverty. The level of everyday life in terms of food, sanitation, and bodily comforts stands in sharp contrast to that which is taken for granted in our own country. There is no way that I can convey to you the poverty that is prevalent in Zaire, but I would like to report to you on the conditions of our Reformed brothers and sisters in Zaire.

The nation of Zaire has the resources to be very rich, but, because of the political situation, these resources are not being developed. As a result, jobs, or some means of earning a living, are very hard to come by. Approximately half of the members do not have a

steady income. Those that are able to find work or have small businesses receive a very small income for their labor.

Elder Pasua of Kananga says that the average monthly income of his people is 1000 Zaires (\$18). His Treasurer's wife rises up early in the morning and picks up a large basket full of bread. She carries it on her head for ten miles to deliver it, and then walks ten miles home. This takes most of the day and for it she earns a few pennies.

Ilunga Miluwa, a Christian in Lubumbashi, had been a school teacher. He earned 750 Zaires a month (\$14). He had to pay 500 Zaires for renting a house, and it cost 600 Zaires for one bag of flour for the month. His story is repeated over and over by many of the people in the church. To make matters even worse, the price of groceries and clothing is considerably higher than in the United States.

You might wonder how it is possible for anyone to survive under those conditions? They survive, but barely, by continuously scratching and bartering in order to eke out a living. Mothers with their children, often a baby on their back, can be seen at every street corner trying to sell or barter something, perhaps some flour, or sugar cane, or bananas, and often bread. On the morning that we flew from Kinshasa to Lubumbashi we had to leave the motel for the airport at 4:30 AM. As we were driving through the streets, women, some with their children, were already out walking with large baskets on their heads, going to get their day's supply to barter or sell on the streets. These women would be at this until 10:00 to 11:00 at night, every day. Life is a very hard, day-to-day struggle to exist.

It is easy to see that health problems abound under such conditions. In the congregations that we visited and with whom we held services, there were always many children. But it was very sad to see that almost all of the children had extended stomachs to some degree from malnutrition. There is no sanitation. Sewage is taken care of by an open drainage ditch. The average person in Zaire simply cannot afford any medical treatment. If any is received it is through the church. As an example of the extent of the medical problems, we were told that in the city of Lubumbashi, a city of nearly a million people, 65% of the population has tuberculosis.

We have all heard and seen on TV the stories of hunger and poverty in Africa. There is a lot that can be said about the sinful reasons why this poverty has come about. My intention is not to try to play on our emotions or to put us on a guilt trip because we are rich Americans. But the fact is, this is not just another story about poverty someplace in the world. These are our Reformed brothers and sisters who are greatly in need. I strongly reject the prevalent idea of redistribution of wealth, but clearly as Christians we have a responsibility to carry out a diaconal ministry to our Reformed brethren in Zaire.

I am convinced that a true diaconal ministry is much more than handing out medicine and clothing. These things are necessary, but there is a much larger picture that must be in view. We do not want to make the church in Zaire a welfare church and I am con-

vinced that they do not want that either. What they want is to become self-sufficient, but they need a lot of learning and training in order for that to be possible. Exemplifying their desire to help themselves, in the city of Mbuji-Mayi they are planting gardens on their church property to provide food for the poorest of the congregation. Elder Bankina has plans to start an agricultural school. Yet this is a new direction for them and they need help.

I am convinced that if these people receive the Reformed gospel with the Reformed world-and-life view and the Reformed work ethic, with the proper training and development they can become self-sufficient. I found them to be a very resourceful people.

The fact that in the city of Lubumbashi they are building church buildings with sunbaked clay bricks is another example of their willingness to help themselves. With just a little help to obtain property and some basic materials, they are very willing and capable of building their own buildings for worship.

As I mentioned earlier, it is impossible to really comprehend the poverty that is a part of everyday life in Zaire without seeing it first hand. Yet I trust that I have been able to convey to you at least a little idea of what the situation is. I would like to end this report by relating to you what an individual in Kinshasa told us on the day we left Zaire. Since our flight was not until evening we spent several hours in the Hotel lounge visiting with a friend. His name is Gisungu. He had brought with him a friend who could speak English, to translate for us. After we had visited several hours, Gisungu said that before he left he would like to have devotions with us. He turned to Acts 3 and read the story of the lame man at the temple who asked Peter for help. Peter said he did not have any money, but what he had he would give, and that was salvation. After he read this Gisungu said to us that this is what the church in Zaire also wants. Though the needs of the Church in Zaire are great, they are not just asking for rich Americans to give them a handout, but what they are asking for is the Gospel. We may not have abundant resources to carry out all sorts of large projects, but we have the Gospel. Certainly we can provide the Gospel for them.

How we praise God for the work He is doing in the nation of Zaire! Truly He has provided an open door for the preaching of the gospel in the heart of Africa. The needs there are great; yet we trust that the Lord will provide. If there is anyone of any group who would like some information on how they can contribute or in some way help with the ministry in Zaire they are welcome to write to the following address.

Committee on Diaconal Ministries
Rev. Maynard Koerner
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Sutton, NE 68979

Editor's note: A year ago the May and July-August Outlook reported on the beginning of a new Reformed church in Zaire, arising out of response to the French Back-To-God Hour broadcasts of Rev. Aaron Kayyan. Rev. M. Koerner reported on the way these new churches were being assisted by the Reformed Church in the U.S. A recent inquiry elicited this report from him about how the number of these new congregations has now increased to about fifty!

Constructive Christians in a Collapsing World and Church (2)

Jude 20-25

Jude, when he had intended to write a letter about "the common salvation," was driven, because of the attack on the Christian Faith by false teachers within the church, to write a different, more militant kind of letter. He had to urge Christians "to contend for the faith that God has once for all entrusted to the saints." He supported this ringing call to arms by recalling how the Lord throughout the centuries had rewarded such devilish perversions of His truth with the severest of judgments.

When as in our time, that kind of attack on the faith is prolonged so that Christians have to keep on fighting it off, they may be tempted, without realizing it, to have their own appreciation for and grasp on the faith somewhat narrowed by the continuing conflict. Harry Blamires, in his little book, *The Christian Mind*, shows how in having to fight secularism we have ourselves been "secularized," moved much more than we ourselves realize, to try to fight on the enemy's ground with the enemy's weapons.

A recent visitor to the Netherlands called attention to the fact that the activities of the orthodox "Concerned" people there had, to some extent, restrained the present slide of the Dutch Reformed churches into apostasy. Without their efforts, conditions would be worse. While such restraining influence is to be appreciated, we may never be satisfied with merely slowing down a movement in the wrong direction, if, whether rapidly or slowly, the church is still going in the wrong direction! There is no future for them or for us in letting ourselves and our families be carried along by an unfaithful church into its own apostasy. We may never be contented with merely "putting on the brakes" to slow down such a course. We, as well as the concerned brothers there, have to refuse to go along in the wrong direction — and we have to quit "buying the gas" that keeps the vehicle going in that direction!

Instead of letting ourselves be dragged where we ought not to be, we must, as Blamires said, "shift our ground" and "set about reconstituting the Christian mind" (p. 117). It is interesting and instructive to see

how both the Apostle Peter in the introduction to his (second) letter (as we saw last month) and Jude in the conclusion of his, guide us into such a constructive course.

Building on the Faith

Instead of letting ourselves and our families be carried along by false teachers into their own apostasy, Jude urges us to be "building yourselves up on your most holy faith" (v. 20). The word "faith" is and often may be used to mean either our act of believing or what we believe, and the prevailing tendency in the church of our time is to use it to refer to our actions, feelings and experiences. That is NOT what Jude means by "your most holy faith," for he says that we must "build ourselves up" ON it. That "faith" is not our actions, feelings or experience, but that mentioned in verse 3, "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" for which he was urging us to earnestly "contend." This "faith" is the revealed gospel reality on which we saw the Apostle Peter also focusing all attention in the first chapter of his second letter (November article). The most pervasive and destructive error in the Christian churches in our time is the shift of their foundation from God's revelation to human experience. Our Lord concluded His "sermon on the mount" by warning that only those who come to Him and hear and do His word will be building a house that will stand in a storm (Luke 6:47, ff.; Matt. 7:24ff.). When, as in our time, the storms of error threaten the churches and their faith, Jude urges us to work at that kind of building. To state it more prosaically, this means that the Lord's way to prepare Christians to withstand and overcome all kinds of error is by their studying, teaching and preaching the Bible and its doctrines. That is what built them up when they were once delivered from an ancient paganism; that too is the way they will have to be rebuilt as a resurgent popular paganism is currently sweeping them away.

“Praying in the Holy Spirit”

While the order to be busy “building up ourselves on the faith” stresses our activity, we must also remain aware of our own inability and our dependence from beginning to end on the saving grace of God. The Holy Spirit was promised to all who ask for Him (Luke 11:13) as the indispensable guide into all the truth (John 16:13). Accordingly, we must pray for His presence and guidance if we are to accomplish anything. “Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it” (Ps. 127:1).

“In the Love of God”

Our prayers are one side of the relationship with God into which He in His grace brings us. We are to “Keep yourselves in the love of God.” The Apostle John who stresses so strongly our need to abide in truth in the same breath stressed our remaining in the love of God: “In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. . . He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:9-11). The Apostle Paul who so stressed sound doctrine also warned, “If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed” (1 Cor. 16:22). The Lord Himself, while He praised the Ephesian church for its rejection of false teachers, also warned it that if it did not return to its lost “first love” it would lose its light (Rev. 2:1-6).

A Sure Hope

Living in this relationship with the Lord, brings a confidence about the future as we are to be “looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” This “hope” must never be reduced to a mere wish as the word often is in daily language; it is as sure as the promises of God. We are to anticipate, as we already begin to experience something of the reality of “eternal life” (John 3:36; 5:24).

An Evangelistic Outreach

While we are ordered to build up ourselves upon the Faith, we must not be preoccupied with self but must also look at all kinds of people around us. Although many of them may be strangers or enemies to the Faith, we are to see them as lost people who need the same grace of God as we do and we are to “have compassion” or, literally, “have mercy” on them. As we “look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life,” we are to have and show that kind of mercy or loving concern for them. We are to try to lead them out of their ignorance and “doubts” into the gospel that we have been given.

We are to try to save them “with fear, pulling them out of the fire.” That startling expression shocks us into considering what the real predicament of everyone apart from Christ is. In our time it is very unfashionable to say that every non-Christian is like someone caught in a burning building and needing to be rescued, but God’s Word says that that is the simple truth. As Harry Blamires observed in *The*

Christian Mind (p. 114), in our secular age people live with the false “pretense that, inside or outside, (the truth) conditions are pretty much the same.” God’s Word says that the non-Christians’ house is afire and we have to work with all of the urgency of a fireman trying to get them out of it.

Necessary Caution

Firemen must be constantly aware of the dangers of their work — Remember the local fireman who lost his life on the job. Therefore “fear” or caution is necessary. Because the error is so dangerous, threatening with “eternal fire,” Christians trying to help those who are caught in it must be careful that they themselves do not become victims of it. (How many “missionaries” have not themselves been lured into the very errors from which they were intending to save others? That has characterized the dreary history of many, perhaps most, modern missions!)

A different, equally striking illustration stresses the same point. We are to be “hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.” That expression recalls the Old Testament ceremonial laws about avoiding things that were “unclean.” Although those ceremonial laws are no longer applicable after the coming of Christ, their warning against the contagion of moral and spiritual error is at least as urgent now as it was then. Those ceremonial laws, incidentally, protected God’s people against what we in our time are beginning to understand as germ-caused diseases. In the light of current discoveries, the warning seems even more relevant than it may have seemed when it was given.

In hospital visits I have sometimes been surprised by unexpected orders that all visitors don sterile coats, gloves and masks. What was the reason for such awkward requirements? The staff had suddenly become aware of a spreading staphylococcus infection that must be stopped if the hospital would help rather than endanger its patients. A recent TV program highlighted Australian hospital studies that showed this to be a much more serious and difficult problem than had been suspected. It showed that doctors who neglected to wash their hands between visits to patients were some of the worst offenders! (Could it be that a similar carelessness among the churches’ theological “doctors” or teachers has often made them sources of heresies instead of healthful teaching?) At any rate, the important point that Jude makes is that if we are to succeed in building up the Christian churches’ resistance to destructive heresies, we will have to obey some elementary laws of sanitation and beware of spreading by our own carelessness the very thing we are supposed to combat. It is a sad-denying fact that in a time when we are increasingly alerted against the dangers of contaminated foods and drugs, educational and government leaders (abetted by Liberal churchmen) defend the free spread of much more destructive moral and religious teachings as a “civil right,” and then wonder why the troubles of our society multiply. If we are to bring the healing gospel to people around us we will have to stop spreading the moral and spiritual contamination that makes people sick.

Encouragement

Shouldn't this reminder of the size of our assignment and its dangers make us fearful and discouraged? It should not! Jude in ending his letter directs us to God "who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy." If we had only ourselves and our own resources, we would be as helpless and hopeless as everyone else. But the gospel is the help and hope that the Lord gives us. It is not an uncertainty, but a sure thing. In alerting us to danger, He is able to keep us from stumbling. By His gospel He is at work making each believer "faultless." And that future in His presence promises overflowing joy! Doesn't that sure prospect incite us to devote

ourselves with renewed enthusiasm to Christian building, praying and working, and to trying to bring the same wonderful gospel to the many around us who also need it?

Thanksgiving

The enormity of the grace that God is giving us prompts us to share ever more deeply in the enthusiastic thanksgiving with which this letter ends: "To Him that is able to" do all this,

To God our Savior,
Who alone is wise,
Be glory and majesty,
Dominion and power,
Both now and forever. Amen.

PDJ

The Order of the Lord's Church

THE OFFICES III

Stephen M. Arrick

If we are convinced that we must train office-bearers, what method should we adopt and how do we implement the training procedure?

Committing yourself to Training

Before we implement any training procedure, we must decide whether or not we are truly committed to training for effectiveness. We must count the cost. We either adopt a method and effectively implement it in the Church, or we don't.

If we make such a commitment, we must choose a method. How do we propose to train incoming and existing office-bearers? This is the most difficult question to answer.

Choosing a Method

Ideally, training incoming office-bearers will be done prior to their active service in consistory. This means that nominations, elections, and installations are held 3, 6, or 9 months prior to their active service in consistory. They are installed into a period of training.

For example, if a three month period of training is required, then an adequate amount of time must be given to each area: foundational, practical and experiential training.

These office-bearers are given the luxury and freedom to learn about their job before they begin actively doing it. This will instill confidence. It will build a foundation in each that can be built upon by less intentional means: retreats, workshops, conferences, books, articles, etc.

Workshops, seminars, conferences, and retreats can be extremely valuable. They, however, cannot measure the effectiveness of the trainee. They may present excellent materials and are a valuable supplement to the training procedure. But, to expect these methods alone to produce effective office-bearers is unrealistic. Each church must bear the responsibility of training its own nominees. They alone know the particular strengths and weaknesses of each candidate and the needs of the congregation, and can measure the effectiveness of their own training procedure.

The ideal way may not be your way. In any given church there are certain ways that work, as well as ways that don't. You may have a way specifically designed to build up your office-bearers that does not require they be elected 3, 6, or 9 months before they actively participate in the consistory. If it works, use it.

The Trainer

Your pastor may wish to hand-train each incoming office-bearer. However, his schedule may not permit it. Any minister, former office-bearer, or qualified teacher may train upon the consistory's approval.

The Resources

Foundational training is conducted in the area of knowledge of Scripture, doctrine, and creeds and confessions. It answers the question "What should I know and what do we believe?" Depending on the amount of training needed in this area, many resources are available and can be used to build an adequate foundation in this area.

Practical training will include a thorough discussion of the Church Order, the application of the major tasks of each office-bearer, and the corporate duty and function of the consistory. This training should answer the question, "What is my job and how do I do it?" It may use with *The Church Order*, the *Elders and Deacons Handbooks* (Bergehoef and DeKoster, Christian Library Press).

Christian Library Press is currently sponsoring and offering seminars throughout the Christian Reformed Church designed to provide some essential training in the practical field. Call (616) 949-9379 or write CLP, P.O. Box 2226, Grand Rapids, MI 49501 for more information.

Experiential Training should be led by experienced office-bearers or the pastor. This training answers the question "What kind of calls will I be expected to make, and what should I do or say?"

There will be an increased effort to provide booklets, seminars and workshops for the purpose of officer-training. The church which is anxious to meet the challenges of the ministry *today* will make a commitment *today* to train office-bearers for the effective performance of their task. Let each church bear this responsibility and provide the training to equip qualified men to rule and serve the Church in Christ's stead.

The future of the Reformed churches and of the Reformed faith is indeed in the hands of the office-bearers of Christ's Church. May their hands be disciplined and skilled by using every means at our disposal to train faithful men for the task set before them.

Rev. Stephen M. Arrick is the pastor of the Calvary C.R. Church at Lowell, Michigan.

God's Hand at Work in the Winter

Ken Yonker

If you looked across the country side in December, you would have seen a bright and peaceful picture of white snow with the skeletons of trees reaching toward heaven.

To some, this is a peaceful and beautiful time of year. However, for others, it is just a cold, depressing time.

On an ABC television news program (20/20), there was a story about winter depression. They found that

with shorter daylight hours, the human mind starts slowing down the body's metabolic rate to accommodate the longer night. It's amazing how God equips the human body to adapt to the season's different daylight hours by building an automatic slowing down process. So if you call me at 7:30 A.M. in the winter, and it's still dark, don't expect an answer; now I have a good reason to sleep until daylight. It's all part of the body mechanism that helps one cope with shorter days.

During these longer and colder nights, God created a system for the plants to survive also. The trees that you see, look quite dead in the winter, and technically, they are, in the above ground part of the tree. In the winter, there is no water flowing up the trunk being fed to the branches and finally to the leaves. Once in the leaves some of the water is evaporated into the atmosphere and some is transformed to starch, where then it runs down the trunk to the root systems to be stored for the winter survival.

God has made the buds on a tree as an insulated and protecting shell for the dormant baby leaves and flowers inside. They are waiting for the required hours of freezing temperatures, that their species needs, before the longer days and warmer temperatures start to activate their emerging process. This is a clever way God protects cold-sensitive plants from budding in the middle of a January thaw. The more sensitive the plant is to cold, the more hours of freezing are required. The evergreen family (Pines, Spruces and Arborviteas) have very little leaf surface area and they are covered with a cuticle-type membrane to prevent moisture loss. Because moisture loss is so limited and the needles or scales area is so protected, they can survive the cold weather without going completely dormant, which also makes them very tolerant to the dry conditions in the summer months.

Under the sparkling, soft, cold blanket of snow, is the earth, and under the soil is the root systems of these dormant trees and shrubs, which are filled with food for the spring season to bring the upper plant back to life.

The root system has a two (2)-part function, besides anchoring the plant. The fat corky roots are a storehouse to store the starch that the tree reserves for the spring. The small fibrous roots and the microscopic roots are responsible for the water and nutrient absorption for feeding the rest of the plant.

In the winter, the feeder roots are constantly pushing and growing through the soil using some of the food stored to feed the active cells. When spring comes and the plant puts out 8"-12" of new growth, the roots are ready to supply the extra water and nutrients needed to support the new growth.

The really amazing thing of this is that there is no brain of any kind to tell these plants when or how to prepare themselves for the colder season ahead. Without the snow, the cold temperatures can freeze the soil and make things very uncomfortable for the roots. Even though one may dislike the snow, the plants love it.

It is awesome to think of how God created the earth. A slight tipping of the earth away from the sun creates a complex chain of reactions. The earth tips, the days

become shorter, the weather gets colder, the leaves turn bright colors, and eventually, they fall. The snow comes and the earth takes on the appearance of being in a deep sleep. But under it all, is a creation preparing for the reverse reaction when God tips the earth back and the days get longer, the weather warmer, and the plants burst with joyous color in their flowers and leaves, rejoicing with new life for the season ahead. It's a wonderful world God has created; it's beautiful and purposeful. Its purpose: to glorify God, its Creator.

The Psalmist says it well in Psalm 66:1-5a: "Shout with joy to God, all the earth! Sing to the glory of His name; offer Him glory and praise! Say to God "How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies cringe before you. All the earth bows down to you, they sing to your name." Come and see what God has done." ●

Kenneth Yonker lives at 6855 Willard SE in Cutlerville and is a deacon at the Lakeside Church at Alto.

Peppered Moths

Aaldert Mennega

It has been customary in Biology textbooks to cite the peppered moths of England as a good example of organic evolution. Solbrig and Solbrig, for example, in their book, *Introduction to Population Biology and Evolution*, say about this industrial melanism that it "has been recognized as one of the most interesting of evolutionary phenomena." (1)

This species of peppered moths, named *Biston betulario*, comes in two forms - white and black. The white form is mainly white, but is peppered with a number of little grey dots. Hence the name "peppered moth." Textbook photos of white moths on a dark tree and black moths on a light tree clearly show their vulnerability to predation. But moths that blend in with the bark of the trees can hardly be discovered because of their good camouflage. (2)

Before the industrial revolution in England the white form was predominant on the trees in the parks and woods. The explanation for this predominance is that these moths would blend in well with the light-colored lichens on the bark. They would be well camouflaged, and would-be predators were less likely to pick them off.

Not so the dark form of this moth. Dark ones could easily be spotted against the lichens by predator birds. Thus there was a strong factor selecting against these dark moths, reducing their numbers. Even though the

dark form is genetically dominant, this factor is not very significant in this situation.

During the industrial revolution the situation changed, however. Because the new industry produced soot, as well as air pollutants which killed the lichens, the bark of the trees became darker. This in turn made it easier for black moths to be camouflaged, but white ones would stand out sharply against that dark background. As a result, the white moths then decreased in number because of this selection factor, while the black form became the predominant. Such reversal of relative numbers of white and black forms of the moths was considered an evolutionary response to the environment.

What happened subsequently, however, is that control measures were initiated to reduce the air pollution caused by the industry. Because of this pollution control, the trees again became lighter as they had been before the industrial revolution. Now predation shifted back to the black moths and reduced their numbers, while the white form was again able to survive better because they blended in well with the light, lichen-covered bark.

So what happened to the so-called evolution of the peppered moths? It turns out that this is not at all evidence for evolution. Actually, what we see here is a case of change in gene frequency due to selection against one form of the species - first against the black, then against the white, and finally against the black form again.

No evolution occurred. No new genes were created. No mutation occurred to cause the frequency change. It is simply a matter of one phenotype (black or white) being better able to survive predation by birds in this particular environment. And that is all there is to that.

We need not be too overly impressed with the claim of many evolutionists that there are clear proofs of the evolutionary process. Organic evolution is not a fact, and a number of secular evolutionists openly admit this. Strictly speaking, organic evolution is a theory, or hypothesis, which is needed by those who reject the concept of supernatural creation by Jehovah God. It is their alternative which they hope will help them to make sense out of all that they observe in nature.

But those who take God's biblical revelation seriously, also as they do their science, do not need an alternative, because all that we see around us can indeed be explained scientifically within a biblical framework.

It is your starting point and your most basic commitments that make all the difference. Being consistent with your commitments, with your world-and-life view, is not only essential but also most rewarding. On the other hand, compromise between biblical and secular concepts leads to unnecessary scientific, theological and philosophical problems. In order to be able to properly fulfill our task as stewards of God's creation, synthesis must be replaced by the antithesis.

(1) Solbrig, O.T. and D.J. Solbrig. 1979. *Introduction to Population Biology and Evolution*. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company. p. 200.

(2) *Ibid.*, p. 39.

Fellowship Anniversary Meeting: "FILLING THE GAP"

by Arthur Besteman

reported by Henry Vanden Heuvel

This was the topic of the timely speech of Rev. Arthur Besteman at the 35th Annual Meeting of the Reformed Fellowship held October 9, 1986 in the Kelloggsville Christian Reformed Church. The title and subject were taken from Ezekiel 22:30, "I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but found none." The question asked by the speaker was, "Is there a need for such a man to fill the gap today?" In answering this question, he compared the situation that existed 35 years ago at the founding of the fellowship with that existing today.

Dr. E.J. Young, formerly professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, in an early issue of *Torch and Trumpet*, showed the need for Reformed Fellowship because of the spreading virus of not accepting the authority of the Word of God, but treating it like any other book." Rev. Besteman pointed out that since "Report 44" on the Bible's authority was approved by the 1972 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church, this virus has spread. Divergent views in the churches all appeal to Report 44 for their justification. The emphasis is almost exclusively upon the human authors of the Bible rather than the divine Author. This was substantiated by reference to a recent editorial in *The Banner* in which Editor Kuyvenhoven stated that there is no question that the apostle Paul disapproved of women in church office. Paul is very clear on this issue. But, says Kuyvenhoven, the position of Paul is merely a temporal and local position, and is not to be read as being applicable to the church for all time. Is there then a need for someone to "fill the gap" today as there was 35 years ago? Indeed there is.

In the first issue of *Torch and Trumpet* Dr. William Hendriksen wrote that the most dangerous person in the church is the one who eagerly accepts Barth and Brunner, but knows nothing of Bavinck, Kuiper and Warfield. Rev. Besteman said that today this situation is unchanged. There is an eagerness to appeal to the times in which we live rather than to the Scriptures. The treatment of the issue of women in church office is a case in point. Those who press for women in office appeal to everything but Scripture. The Bible is

virtually ignored in the eagerness to open all the offices to women. The situation is exactly as it was 35 years ago when Dr. Hendriksen wrote his article. The Bible is ignored even though there is a profession of its authority.

But what have we accomplished over these 35 years? There has not been a return to the foundation of the Word of God. The question the speaker placed before the audience however was, "Who knows where the Christian Reformed Church would be today if it had not been for the birth of Reformed Fellowship 35 years ago?" Is there still a need for a man to "stand in the gap?" Yes, there certainly is a need!

Rev. Henry Vanden Heuvel is the pastor of the Bethel Christian Reformed Church of Zeeland, Michigan and President of the Reformed Fellowship.

For Such a Time as This

By Stephen M. Schlissel

Rev. Stephen M. Schlissel has for some time been pastor of the independent Messiah's Congregation, a mission church in Brooklyn, NY, which includes a goodly number of members who, like himself, are converts from Judaism. Drawn to the Reformed faith,

he became a member and elder in the Jamaica, NY-Queens CRC, and was an elder delegate to the last CRC synod. Recently Messiah's Congregation was received into the denomination and he was received as an ordained pastor. Invited to speak at the 35th Anniversary meeting of the Reformed Fellowship, he brought something of a fresh perspective on the role of the fellowship. He compared it with that of Esther whom her uncle reminded was assigned a strategic place in a very critical time, saying, "who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:12).

After he was admitted to our ministry, one minister hardly knew whether to offer him congratulations or condolences. For himself, the speaker found it difficult to understand the reason for such uncertainty. If it was because the Word of God is under full-scale attack in the denomination today, he saw in that situation an infallible indicator that here the covenant of God was to be found, and the word of that covenant. That situation is somewhat like the threat that confronted the people of God in the 5th Century B.C., when they were under the intense and diabolical attack by a powerful madman named Haman, who had determined to exterminate them.

What Time Is It?

This time is like every other since that of the Garden of Eden. Wherever the covenant of God is, the word of God is. The Apostle Paul stated that the chief advantage of the Jews as God's covenant people was that they had been entrusted with the very words of God (Rom. 3:2), so that they were the bearers of the Word. The speaker saw his forefathers as deprived of this privilege through unbelief, urging that we not also lose it by doubt. The choice target of the devil has always been the Word of God and the people to whom it was entrusted, from Eden until today. All of the Scripture is the story of the triumph of the Word of God over all would-be perverters, distorters — in fact, over all its enemies. The speaker then traced the attacks of the devil on the Word of God since the seduction of our first parents, and the way the Lord, at each turn of the attacks, promised and brought deliverance when there seemed to be no hope, fulfilling His purpose according to His almighty plan. At every junction in the history of the covenant when it looks as if it is over, God says, "What's the matter with you people? . . . This is My plan and My Word! Nothing can be victorious against Me! Believe in Me!" Look at Goliath, the living monster — at David — who sinned, at Solomon — who sinned — at the divided kingdom — at the captivity — Was there ever a time when the kingdom of God was easy, when progress was made without effort and blood?

Are these New Testament days of the church different from those of the Old? Certainly not! See how we find the devil on a rampage against the church — the emperor of the mightiest empire on a rampage against the church, unbelieving Jews bringing confusion into the new covenant people, and everywhere false teachers who would pervert the Word and covenant of God. What's new in this respect about the times in which we live? There's nothing new about it!

God's "Antithesis"

Through all this our Saviour says, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." This is a time for battle and for faithfulness. To be faithful and to do battle requires that we maintain the antithesis (opposition between true and false, right and wrong, God and the devil), which is the foundation of God's covenant dealings. God introduced "enmity" before He introduced the promise of the Savior (Gen. 3:15), putting a rift between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light. Satan's goal is to obscure and destroy this antithesis, as he tries to deny any distinction between covenant-keeper and covenant-breaker, between obedience to God and man's insistence on managing his own life. The devil's third temptation of our Lord was a plea for pluralism — "There's room in this world for both of us . . . Why can't we live together?" "You have your kingdom . . . Just worship me and we'll get along fine." Relativists can't understand why these Reformed people are so narrow-minded. They are willing to live with us conservatives. Why can't we live with them? But in the battle between absolutism and relativity, compromise is always a victory for relativity. In a choice between health and illness, compromise equals illness. Those who advocate compromise in our church want us to give up the idea of absolute truth. They are always saying, "Do it my way." When we refuse and say, "Do it my way," we are the narrow-minded bigots who are splitting the church! The antithesis of God created in Genesis 3:15 requires truth, faithfulness and obedience, for the unity of the covenant people. Relativists always press for unity apart from truth. It has been observed that all the struggles in Dutch Reformed church history seem to have involved struggles against (1) human ideas opposed to Scripture and (2) hierarchy — as they do in our churches today. The Reformation was born out of opposition to these and we have been called by God to engage in the battle against them today. Today's errors, stripped of their sophisticated language, still amount to the old "Has God said?" "Don't be so sure . . . so dogmatic . . . so closed to the Spirit's leading!" Charismatics are saying, "The Word of God is not complete!" and Liberals are saying "It isn't quite true!" The Banner says, "It is not clear!" The Eastern Avenue Church says, "It's not binding!" The synods say, "It's not always relevant!" The attack is on and it is on the Word. "Thy Word is truth," Jesus prays. Therefore every attack on it as truth . . . is an attack on Christ Himself and is of the Antichrist, of the father of lies, who seeks to seduce us away from the Word. The short-range goal of Satan is to reduce the Scripture to a kind of "apocrypha" — useful to read and for instruction, but not adequate to "confirm any point of faith or of the Christian religion." That is their position in a nutshell! The Bible is profitable and ought to be read, but "is far from having any binding authority!" That was precisely the sin of the Pharisees who opposed Jesus Christ. That is exactly the status to which they relegate the Scriptures, in deference to human tradition. That is exactly how some Christian Reformed ministers, churches and

synods use the Scriptures. When the Scriptures are displaced as our standard to determine what is true, our standard becomes reason, culture, the latest liberation movement — Discerning readers of *The Banner* see these presuppositions in operation in virtually every issue, so that our denominational weekly appears to become “a Reformed version of the Donahue show” where “everything is open to discussion.” A *Banner* article recently cited a Southern Baptist convention report that the higher one’s level of education the less apt he was to appeal to Scripture as inerrant. Instead of seeing this as revealing the corrupting influence of American higher education and showing the need of Christian education, the article cited it with the evident purpose to encourage the remaining ignorami in the CRC who believe in the Bible’s inerrancy to “get smart” and realize that the Scripture is not inerrant. We encounter “a seemingly endless barrage of that kind of poppycock” — of cowardly attacks on our heritage. Let these men come out and say where they stand. If you are going to be a heretic, be a bold one! Christ said that those who are “neither hot nor cold” will be spit out. They will not say that they believe in evolution, for example, but adopt the tactics of the 80’s, practice guerilla warfare, and, like snipers, pick off the next generation of Christians. Seeking to be “relevant,” they commit what Professor Murray called “the capital sin of our generation” when they take their starting point in the world rather than the Word. Whether on women’s lib, or alcoholism, or abortion, or egalitarianism, they let the world set their agenda. And then they delude themselves into thinking that hauling in a load of Biblical citations proves their fidelity to the Bible, forgetting that Satan is adept at citing it. The question, however, is, “Do you believe the Word of God?”

What Must We Do in such a Time as This?

1. We must (like a respectable and long established business institution) not change our principles or faith, but we must become more aggressive. We must clean our own house. Is not a part of our current predicament traceable to our own sins — our own inactivity and lack of interest? Do we love our confession, the Lord’s covenant, and the Lord Himself with heart and soul, mind and strength? Or is ours a mere intellectual and perhaps arrogant tradition? Have we been trying with hearty enthusiasm to communicate to our younger people the beauty of our Faith? The speaker suggested that his young congregation in Brooklyn needs the benefit of our gray hairs, but we need young people who have caught the enthusiasm for the Lord and His Word from us. Our Reformed churches have often failed to communicate a passion and excitement for God’s truth. “We’ve always done it that way” is a totally inadequate substitute for “What does the Bible say?” Are we more committed to our connections than our convictions? The enviable bond of love in our churches must move us to practice the Lord’s discipline, not to neglect it. Our fellowship with those of like mind must not be a substitute for our testimony to those who are not of that mind. Where were the expressions of the widespread criticisms of *Banner* policy at our last synod?

The speaker called for much more vigorous protest against what is happening to the denomination, instead of defeatism concerning it. Until we have done everything that we can do to change what is wrong, we have no right to “throw in the towel.”

Our testimony must be much more than merely negative. We must come out much more positively for what we believe, envision and support.

2. The speaker suggested the need for a division of labor, with individuals selecting objectives for their special efforts, and united sharing of information and strategic planning on the part of those who are committed to the Bible and confessions as true. He urged the need of action, letter-writing and, if continued official blasphemy makes it necessary, picketing the denominational building.

3. We must pray — perhaps have prayer meetings with special prayers for the denomination, teaching our children to pray for the salvation of the CR Church.

4. Pick your fights carefully. We can’t concentrate all efforts on every issue, but need to select the most urgent — The drive for non-sexist language in the Heidelberg Catechism, he saw as a “do or die” issue that compels us to fight. “In that proposed abomination,” he saw “every satanic presupposition . . . evolutionary ethics, continuing revelation, egalitarianism, obliteration of God-created distinctives, salvation by equality rather than blood and grace, denial of headship, hence, the denial of the covenant . . .

5. Among the speaker’s suggestions for the *Outlook* were included announcements, increasing subscriptions, a more attractive format and illustrations, satirical cartoons to show how ridiculous some of these things are, continuing hard-hitting articles, naming names, accepting advertising, including stirring stories of great heroes of the faith, seizure of every opportunity to serve by all who share this fellowship of faith, insisting on an accounting to consistories by every church agency we support — “no answer, no bucks” — establishing faithful discipline in the local church and restoration of preaching the reality of judgment and salvation — as Jonathan Edwards did. Use God’s Word faithfully and He will deliver — Learn the appeal and confidence of Christ in, “It is written!” Perhaps we as a fellowship were raised up for such a time as this to speak for all God has commanded and stand against the assemblies of infidelity in the confidence that God still says, “I have appointed you to stand. They shall fight . . . but they shall not prevail against thee, for I am with thee . . . to deliver thee.” “Let us believe in God.” PDJ

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Doon, Iowa 51235

Consistorial Conference

"On October 23 and 24, a consistorial conference of about twenty churches, called by the consistories of Lynwood, Illinois; Dutton, Michigan; and First Rock Valley, Iowa, met to discuss and evaluate trends in the Christian Reformed Church and to propose a positive plan of action to call the denomination to faith and obedience to the Word of God.

The evening session on October 23 was devoted to fellowship and committee assignments. The morning of October 24 was devoted to committee work dealing with five specific areas of concern.

The afternoon meeting was devoted to a discussion of the issues and recommendations and resolutions of the conference for recommendation to the various churches. Those recommendations are as follows:

The Consistorial Conference affirms that the Holy Scriptures are the authoritative Word of God for all times and that believers are unconditionally bound to submit to their supreme authority. (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21; Belgic Confession, Articles 5 & 7)

Further, we affirm the Three Forms of Unity to be the clear and faithful exposition and expressions of the inspired and infallible Word of God; and that these define the historic Reformed Faith, and are our guide for all ecclesiastical decisions.

Particularly, we affirm, without reservation, the doctrine of Scripture, Church, and Office, as specified in the Belgic Confession (as published in the 1959 edition of the Psalter Hymnal) since these are in complete harmony with Scripture.

Therefore:

1. We reject any method of Biblical interpretation which allows the culture of any age to determine the meaning of Holy Scripture and thus undermine its authority. (Cultural considerations illuminate the meaning of a text, but may never determine the meaning.)
2. We reject recent synodical decisions which contain elements that have eroded the historic Reformed Faith and represent the result of a process which compromises the nature and extent of Scripture's authority, such as:

- a. Ordination of women to ecclesiastical office (Acts of Synod 1973, Report 44; Acts of Synod 1984),
 - b. "The Contemporary Testimony" (Acts of Synod, 1986),
 - c. The definition of homosexuality (Acts of Synod, 1973),
 - d. The recent guidelines on divorce and remarriage (Acts of Synod, 1980).
3. We call upon all consistories to overture synod to state clearly the Reformed view of Scripture and to reverse the decisions which have shown a weakening of its authority.
 4. We encourage all consistories to withhold financial support for those Synodical agencies which determine our confessional integrity.
Ground: God alone is Lord of the conscience and no one may be forced to support causes which violate his conscience.
 5. However, we encourage consistories to continue to support those agencies which are worthy of their support.
Ground: Participation in the denomination obligates a congregation to contribute toward the services it receives from the denomination.
 6. We urge all consistories to monitor the policies and programs of those church and mission agencies, both denominational and other, which they are considering for support to assure themselves that they can recommend the cause to their congregations in good conscience.

Throughout the conference a spirit of cooperation and holy excitement prevailed. It is our prayer that the King of the Church bless the efforts of this conference. The next conference will be held in early 1987."

Sincerely,

Rev. Stuart C. Pastine
Recording Secretary of the
Consistorial Conference