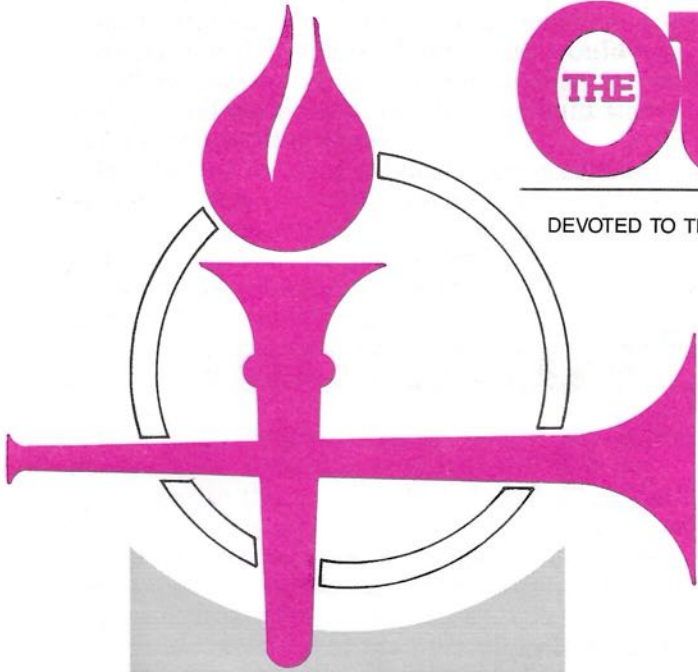


THE OUTLOOK

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH JULY / AUGUST 1987



Synod 1987

**Lord's Day
Refreshment**

**Christ's Church
Building**

Creation and Evolution at Calvin College

Randal S. Lankheet

On the evening of April 22, 1987, over 850 young and older adults nearly filled the auditorium at Calvin College's Fine Arts Center. What would bring that many people out on a weekday night? A lecture by Dr. Duane T. Gish from the Institute of Creation Research in California entitled, "The Scientific Evidences for Special Creation."

How this lecturer came to the campus of Calvin College may be of interest to our readers. Last year Professor Howard Van Till, teacher of physics and astronomy at Calvin College, published his book, *The Fourth Day*. In this book Van Till, among other things, states that the first eleven chapters of Genesis are not to be taken literally and that he would allow for the evolution of mankind from lower forms of life (see pp. 83, 258). Many concerned persons have spoken and written to Van Till and to his overseers on Calvin's Board of Trustees, expressing their disagreement with him and showing how his book radically departs from past synodical decisions, our Reformed confessions, and the Word of God.

The Board of Reformed Fellowship also disagrees with much of what Professor Van Till has written in his book. So, at a recent meeting, the Board discussed how it might help to bring about some clearer understanding of the issues raised in *The Fourth Day*. It was thought that a debate between Van Till and an equally knowledgeable scientist taking a different position would most quickly get at the heart of the issues involved. Besides, in a debate format, each scientist could marshal his evidence and show how he reached his particular conclusions. The audience would be able to judge whether the conclusions were warranted by the evidence each man presented.

So the secretary of the Board was instructed to write two letters: one to Dr. Van Till of Calvin College and the other to Dr. Gish of the Institute for Creation Research. Dr. Gish immediately respond-

ed that he would be happy to come and debate Dr. Van Till. However, Dr. Van Till declined the Board's invitation. So the Board scheduled Dr. Gish as the sole lecturer for that evening.

Gish began his Wednesday night lecture by surveying a number of atheistic, naturalistic scientists who say that they no longer consider evolution as a viable theory to explain the origins of the universe and human life. Listening to Gish, I found it curious, even strange, that the theories originally proposed by atheistic evolutionists and now being rejected by them are now enthusiastically embraced by so-called theistic evolutionists. Imagine—Christians eating the crumbs that fall from the tables of non-Christians!

By means of a sight-and-sound presentation, Dr. Gish went on to compare the definitions of evolution proposed by the atheist Sir Julian Huxley and that proposed by Professor Van Till. Both men, Gish noted, operated with the idea that matter itself has motion and process, as if matter itself has the inherent capability to develop, to progress, and to come to life. Hence, the universe is essentially viewed by both men as a closed system with no need for a direction-setting, history-shaping, life-giving God. Over against this perspective, Gish quoted from the Scriptures which explain in detail how God created the Universe and human life, not by mechanistic evolutionary processes, but by special creative acts.

Later in his lecture Gish used a study of mathematical probabilities to show how impossible it would be for the 124 elements of certain amino acid to be precisely arranged to produce just one molecule of that amino acid. What's more, these elements in the primeval universe would have been moving about in a random fashion. The incredible odds of having all these elements properly align themselves, without any outside control or direction, approaches sheer impossibility. And all

this just for one molecule! According to the evolutionists, the molecules would also somehow draw together and the groups of molecules would somehow start forming structures, and so on, until that evolved amino acid eventually would start talking and writing books!

In addition to many Biblical references, Gish also used facts obtained from scientific study. He observed, for example, that biologists never speak of good mutations in plant or animal life. Mutations are always bad; they produce deformities and imperfections which often lead to premature death. Yet the Darwinian evolutionists depend on mutations to explain how creatures gradually improved!

Likewise, physicists, in their second law of thermodynamics, have always maintained that the movement in the universe is from order to disorder (the stars, for example, are said to be burning out). How inconsistent, then, for the evolutionists to claim that the movement in the universe is just the opposite: from disorder to order.

Gish also referred to the field of geology. If, as the evolutionists insist, the earth is billions of years old, and if each species of animal life evolved from lower to higher forms with countless transitional forms in between, should we not expect to find millions, even billions, of these transitional forms embedded in the layers of sediment below the present surface of the earth? But how many of these transitional forms have been found? None! What we do find embedded in these rock layers, said Gish, are bats and dragonflies and birds, the same kind of bats and dragonflies and birds we find today. No bona fide transitional forms of half-bats or half-birds have ever been discovered. And, taking away the clever hoaxes and the wild reconstructions of skeletons on the basis of a jaw or a tooth, no transitional forms of human life have been discovered either.

I came away from the lecture with a profound sense of gratitude that in Dr. Gish and others we have scientists who are not afraid to take on the evolutionists on their own scientific turf. Surely, as a pastor, I have neither the time nor the expertise to study and to refute evolutionary theories. Thank God for men like Dr. Gish who have that time and expertise.

What saddens me is that we did not have the opportunity to hear the other side that night. How helpful it would have been for Professor Van Till or one of his colleagues from one of the science departments to respond to Gish's facts and to his conclusions. Yet, despite pleas from the Board of Reformed Fellowship for a public forum on these important matters, the science professors at Calvin College turned us down. Can it be that these are the same men who frequently champion the cause of free inquiry at Calvin? Or does their definition of free inquiry go only as far as the closed doors of the classroom where they can teach what they want in secret?

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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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'87 Synod A "Sleeper"

John Engbers

Synod 1987 is history. The gavel no longer sounds, the tables are empty of materials to review and debate, and the delegates have returned home. Only time will reveal whether the decisions made were wise. The sessions began at 9:00 a.m. June 9 and adjourned early Thursday evening, June 18. Those intervening days were filled with lengthy debate and tedious hours of committee meetings. In the minds of many this was a synod with a light agenda, but in the opinion of this delegate it was a synod which adopted many reports and advisory committee recommendations that will leave a mark on the denomination for years and in ways which were not visualized by the delegates who voted to adopt them. The delegates were confronted with issues they had not expected and which had far-reaching implications and that is why, in my judgement, it was a "sleeper" synod.

The synodical prayer service was held in the beautiful sanctuary of the LaGrave Ave. CRC on Monday evening, June 8, and those in attendance were stirred by the message of the pastor, Rev. J.D. Eppinga, the songs of the choir, and the service of prayer led by liturgist, Rev. John Steigenga.

On Tuesday morning the Synod convened on the campus of Calvin College and shared the facilities with member churches of NAPARC—(North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council). Over 1600 people representing five Reformed and Presbyterian denominations crowded the campus and the food lines. Groups in attendance were the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, and the general assemblies of the Presbyterian Church of America, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the Korean American Presbyterian Church. It was an enriching experience to interact with others of Reformed conviction from various parts of the country and with differing cultural backgrounds, and to have fellowship with one another around tables in the dining hall. Especially interesting was the joint worship services held on Sunday evening June 14 in which Rev. Stephen W. Brown from the Key Biscayne, Florida Presbyterian Church addressed the delegates to the five assemblies. Speaking of the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition in American Christianity, Brown issued this warning to the delegates: "The danger of being Reformed is the danger of being right, and the danger of being right is the danger of being self-righteous. . . . We are little as ecclesiastical matters go in the country, but we will grow. But we won't grow until we deal with our narrowness and our negativeness." Several of the delegates apparently listened well, for those sentiments were echoed several times in the debate of succeeding days. "We must change! We must not act or react in fear."

As the first order of business for the Christian Reformed Synod, under the leadership of Rev. J.D. Eppinga, president pro-tem, the 168 delegates elected Rev. Calvin Bolt, pastor of the 12th Ave.

CRC of Jenison, Michigan, president; Rev. Jack Vos, minister of the Covenant CRC of St. Catharines, Ont., vice-president; Rev. Morris Greidanus, pastor of the First CRC of Grand Rapids, Michigan, first clerk; and Rev. Peter W. Brouwer, pastor of the First CRC of Edgerton, Minnesota, second clerk.

In reporting on the sessions of synod, the comments and opinions are my own as one who was involved in the proceedings as a delegate. Others present as delegates or observers may well have reached different conclusions. Rather than report on day to day activities I shall follow the format of presenting the materials as they were introduced by the various advisory committees.

RADIO AND PUBLICATIONS

CRC Publications informed synod that publishing materials in Braille was not the most suitable format to serve the needs of the visually impaired. Cost was also a factor: it was estimated at \$1,000 per student for each two-year course. Synod encouraged the agency to continue studying ways to assist teachers of visually impaired students with concrete advice, consulting services, and printed resources. Synod also discharged the Psalter Hymnal Revision Committee which has been working for ten years to revise the official hymnbook of the denomination. One wonders how well the new hymnal will be received by the churches, since several objections have been raised due to the deletion of favorite hymns and songs. The *Living Word* sermon series for reading services was approved for another year and synod requested the committee to look into the advisability of providing audio or video tapes as an alternative to printed sermons to be read. One wonders in this electronic age whether the time is approaching when church attendance will decline even more, and all we need to do is obtain a video of a worship service to be viewed in our home at our convenience. Synod appointed David Vander Ploeg of St. Joseph, Michigan, as executive director of the Back To God Hour/Faith 20 radio and T.V. ministry, replacing Ira Slagter who is retiring. In his interview before synod, Vander Ploeg stated the following goal: "It is my hope that people who listen to the Back To God Hour will always be able to say that what they are hearing is the gospel that's true to the Bible and that is helpful in their lives." The overture of Classis Grandville requesting the adoption of a statement on pornography was referred back to Classis for further study, documentation and reformulation. Synod agreed that such a statement is surely overdue, but we must speak clearly to our society about healthy sexuality, as well as condemn sexual perversion and exploitation. A personal appeal by two appellants from Kalamazoo was sustained by the synod. The appellants' specific concerns relate to the "Bible Studies" material on I Corinthians printed and distributed by CRC Publications. The basis of the appeal was the contention that neither the lessons nor the

leader's guide included suitable recognition of the understanding and interpretation of the "headship principle" expressed by the Synod of 1984. Since the Reformed Church in America is a subscriber to much of our publications materials, the Rev. Kenneth Bradsell, Minister of Education and Faith Development of the RCA, was appointed to a fraternal delegate position on the Board of Publications. Synod also adopted a timing procedure for making appointment to the *Banner* editor-in-chief position. The CRC Publications Board shall begin soliciting names of candidates for this position at least one year before the appointment term of the new editor is scheduled to begin. Nominations shall be presented to the following synod and the new editor shall begin the first two-year appointment the following September 1.

DOMESTIC MINISTRIES

The Christian Reformed Board of Home Missions, which coordinates mission efforts in the U.S. and Canada, asked synod to become involved in a numbers game by approving a plan for denominational growth. The plan aims at a total membership of 400,000 by the year 2000, which would improve the denominations's growth rate from one percent to two percent. One needs to ask, "Where is the Holy Spirit in all of this? "To mobilize and initiate programs is one thing, but to set numbers seems to ignore the sovereign grace of God through conversion. If one is truly committed to the sovereign power of God through His Word and Spirit, the goal suggested is far too modest. It would be a wiser policy to leave the numbers to the King of the Church and commit ourselves to preaching the gospel. At this point in the discussion a question was raised: Are we going to continue admitting "maverick" pastors and congregations in order to grow? This was an obvious reference to those who have been admitted and are saying things that some do not like to hear.

The synod also approved the addition of the following question to the "Questions Regarding the Whole Consistory" in *The Guide For Conducting Church Visiting* under Article 42 of the Church Order, "How does the consistory promote the full participation of persons with disabilities in the life of the church and the community in keeping with the 'Resolution on Disabilities' of the CRC?" It seems to this reviewer that this opens up an entirely new area of questioning, and that questions of similar nature could multiply in the future. The synod granted the request of The Committee for ministry with Retarded Persons to change its name to the Committee On Disability Concerns and broaden its mandate to reflect the church's concern for persons with all types of disabilities, with the assurance that the needs of persons with mental disabilities and their families will continue to be a major concern of the committee.

The recommendation of SCORR that the churches celebrate All Nations Heritage the weeks of September 28—October 3, 1987, and September 26—October 1, 1988 was adopted. The SIC was

authorized to appoint a committee to recommend changes in the Form of Subscription which will express it in more contemporary language for use in all the churches and assemblies. Grounds for such a change were two-fold: "A form in contemporary language would be a way to show sensitivity to the growing numbers of multicultural groups in the CRC which find the present language of the Form of Subscription difficult to understand; and since Synod 1981 approved a modified Form of Subscription for Classis Red Mesa, it would be preferable to have one Form of Subscription for all churches/assemblies of the Christian Reformed denomination." More change! Can't anyone understand simple English anymore? Synod also declared: "When in process of negotiation between a classis and a group considering affiliation with the CRC the need for exceptions to accepted order arise, such exceptions shall be permitted under the following conditions, "(a) Classis grants prior approval. (b) The exception shall be for a specified transitional period only. (c) The approved exception is reported to synod by the classis." Please take note that there are no synodical deputies involved, which seems to be a bit unusual.

WORLD MINISTRIES

Synod approved a request to call the CRC to pray for peace in Nicaragua and the Central-American countries, and to urge the governments of the United States and Canada to help mediate a peaceful solution to the Nicaraguan conflict. This initiated a long debate. Should we not insist that a peaceful solution to this conflict must also be a solution in righteousness and justice? By adopting this request synod involved itself in making a political statement. In my judgment the church should be concerned with peace worldwide and not limit its concern to a specific area and conflict.

The synod also continued the support of the CEPAD organization in Nicaragua by our World Relief agency in spite of evidence that it has become a Communist tool (Overture 44).

MEN AND WOMEN

Synod dealt with several overtures which resurrected the issue of male headship, which was a major issue in 1984 when women were permitted to be deacons in the CRC. The principle states that "males shall exercise primary leadership and direction-setting in the home and in the church." The overtures varied in nature, (two from Grand Rapids East and one from Classis Rocky Mountain) favored opening all church offices to women, which would not be possible under the current headship principle. The fourth request stated strong opposition to women holding any church office and asked that the earlier decision to approve be nullified. Synod did not adopt any of the four overtures, but instead, appointed another study committee to provide clear biblical and confessional grounds for an understanding of the relationship between men and women in the church. Here we go again! It is difficult to imagine that synod could approve such a recommendation with

so little substance to support its adoption. It is, however, a clear demonstration which way the current is flowing in the denomination. When nearly 50 overtures can be cast aside as having no new information (as was done in 1985), and then to proceed in the direction of a new study committee on the basis of the grounds given is beyond my comprehension. The only grounds given are that "significant questions regarding the basis of synod's decision have been raised which need to be answered. It is said that the decision on headship as a creation norm is without biblical ground and commits us to a theologically indefensible position." More than one voice was heard questioning whether the headship principle could even be applied in the home. Furthermore, it is argued, "the idea of male headship in the church, as set forth by synod, is wholly out of keeping with the historic practices of the Reformed churches, which have always strenuously resisted the interposition of any form of human headship between Christ and His church." No scriptural bases were given; no conflict with the Church Order was cited. The committee appointed to restudy this issue: Dr. David Holwerda, Dr. John Timmer, Dr. Carl Zylstra, Prof. Nelle Vander Ark, Dr. John Bolt, and Prof. John Van Dyk, are to report back to the Synod of 1989. One hardly needs a crystal ball to predict on which side of the issue the majority of this committee will take their stand.

EDUCATIONAL MATTERS

Synod approved several appointments to the faculty of Calvin Seminary. Rev. Stanley Mast was appointed to the position of Coordinator of Field Education. Rev. Robert De Vries, who has served as coordinator of field education at the seminary for the past ten years, was appointed to the position of Assistant Professor of Church Education, replacing Prof. Marion Snapper who is retiring. Dr. Richard Gamble was appointed as Professor of Historical Theology. Dr. Gamble has impressive credentials and since 1983 was Associate Professor of Church History at Westminster Theological Seminary. Synod also approved 48 seminary graduates as candidates for ministry in the CRC. The candidates and their families were introduced to synod. Each delegate receives a profile of the candidates containing personal data, a statement of faith, and reasons for desiring entrance into the gospel ministry. This procedure is an improvement over previous methods, but it still lacks the personal involvement of synod in what is perhaps its most important decision. As a matter of fact, synod became better acquainted with those who were denied candidacy than we did with the candidates themselves.

Synod normally approves all appointments to the staff of Calvin College and Seminary, based on recommendations of its board and a synodical advisory committee. However, concern was raised about the appointment of Dr. Henry De Moor as lecturer in church polity and church administration. Dr. De Moor believes that women should serve in all the offices of the church, which is

contrary to our present stance as a denomination. (This is true of a large number of those presently on the seminary faculty). Synod heard a plea from one of its delegates that the church needs a rest from the issue of women in office, and allowing De Moor to continue sharing his views with students will only cause struggle in the church. After discussing the matter in close sessions synod approved De Moor's appointment, though approval was by no means unanimous as newspaper reports indicated. Dr. James De Jong was reappointed as President of Calvin Seminary and Professor of Historical Theology, both with indefinite tenure. Dr. David Holwerda was reappointed as Professor of New Testament with permanent tenure, and Dr. Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. was appointed Professor of Systematic Theology with permanent tenure. Retirement was granted to Prof. Harold Dekker and Dr. J. Marion Snapper. Synod recognized the completion of twenty-five years of service of Dr. Theodore Minnema.

Synod did not accede to overture 21 from the First CRC of Lethbridge, AB, that the matter of licensure and declaration of candidacy be placed under the jurisdiction of the classes. This means that a board and not the churches are to examine fitness for candidacy. Neither did synod accede to the request that synodical regulations be altered concerning students trained in other seminaries. In this way the Calvin board can keep a tight hold on who is admitted to candidacy. It seems strange that some can be admitted into the ministry of our denomination without any formal theological training—as is the case if they represent a minority group) and the board never sees them, but if one is trained in another seminary and has all the required courses, then suddenly rules cannot be changed!

Laura Smit, a 1987 Master of Divinity graduate from Calvin Seminary, desired to apply for the ministry in the CRC. Her request was denied by Calvin's Board of Trustees. Ms. Smit appealed their decision, claiming that she was denied proper access to synod. Noting that synod has previously made exceptions to its own rules for candidacy, Smit claimed that the refusal of the board to process her application prejudged synod's decision and denied her due process. Following the recommendation of its advisory committee, synod allowed Ms. Smit to present her appeal personally before synod. There were many emotional speeches pleading for an exception, citing her gifts and abilities as a basis for such an exception. When a delegate raised the point about the teaching of Scripture on this issue it became painfully obvious that two individuals examining the same scripture passage could arrive at two contrary interpretations. Synod, however did not sustain her appeal that she be allowed to apply for candidacy. This decision was followed by a long list of delegates wishing their negative votes recorded. As Ms. Smit left the floor of synod, many delegates rose to give her a standing ovation. Those supporting women in all church offices

were smiling; Laura's appearance before synod gained additional support for their crusade. A procedural question to be asked at this point is, can an individual appeal the decision of a board directly to synod without following the prescribed ecclesiastical channels of consistory and classis? It is painfully obvious that a classis cannot do so. In a second plea to synod, Laura Smit submitted a petition to the judicial code committee. Here statement of written charges were referred to the standing Committee on Protests and Appeals. The committee will make appropriate recommendations to Synod 1988. The synod was also faced with a second appeal by a candidate whom the board of trustees had not recommended for candidacy. The advisory committee did not recommend his appearance before synod (but, of course, he was a male), and his appeal was not sustained.

The synod also approved a large number of appointments and reappointments to the staff at Calvin College. This action is merely a rubber-stamping of a list of names, since the delegates know nothing about the individuals being approved. Recognition was also given to those who were granted emeritations as well as to several who have served Calvin College for 25 years. A testimonial dinner was held in their honor. The synod sustained the appeal of Classis Niagara against the decision of the SIC. Classis Niagara overtured synod to study the teaching of Prof. Clarence Menninga of the Geology Department to determine whether his teachings were in accordance with Scripture and our Doctrinal Standards. SIC determined that this should be processed through his consistory. Synod declared that since Dr. Menninga is not an ordained person, he is in the direct employment of Calvin College and as a result his teaching supervision is under the board of trustees and indirectly under synod to whom the board is accountable and not under the jurisdiction of his local consistory. Synod, however, *did not* accede to that part of the overture requesting the appointment of a study committee since the Board of Trustees has taken action which accomplishes the intent of Classis Niagara.

INTERDENOMINATIONAL/ CONFESSIONAL MATTERS

Synod debated, revised and finally approved an *ecumenical charter* which contained guidelines for establishing relationships with other denominations and organizations. The charter was developed out of what was considered to be a need to formulate some clear principles for ecumenical strategy. A key statement in the charter reads: "The unity of the church must become visibly manifest. The ideal form of such unity is not yet known. Until then we therefore earnestly seek the leading of the Holy Spirit into a unity which is one of mutual renewal and acceptance." The charter had been sent to the churches for reaction and response. There was very little indication on the part of the churches that they considered this document more than a statement of broad generalizations, and the responses were few. By its

adoption, however, the CRC is now ready to engage in whatever ecumenical adventures it may choose to explore. It opens the door to eventual membership in the World Council of Churches, which several on the committee have long espoused. Synod failed to heed the voices of those who warned against some of the unbiblical and unconfessional elements of the charter which is now to guide us in our relations with other churches. In separate action, Synod addressed the CRC's continued fellowship with the Reformed Churches in South Africa. Synod instructed its synodically-approved committee to express to the RCSA the CRC's rejection of apartheid as being unbiblical, unethical, and morally and theologically indefensible. Synod warned that without change, it will be impossible to maintain ecclesiastical fellowship between the CRC and RCSA after 1989. One shakes his head at the hypocrisy of those who live in a land that has struggled with the race issue for hundreds of years and then have the audacity to call on those in other lands to solve their race problems in a few years' time. The threat to sever relations with those who have not solved cultural and racial problems, while at the same time to embrace those who have radically departed from the Reformed faith as brothers in ecclesiastical fellowship, is the height of inconsistency.

The CRC may well apply for re-admittance to the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), a group with which the denomination terminated its membership in 1951 due to a lack of confidence in the NAE's programs. Synod received as information the recommendation of the Interchurch Relations Committee (IRC) to rejoin the association, and referred the matter to the churches for study. The IRC found that the NAE is an ecumenical organization which represents the evangelical Christians of the United States in matters calling for oneness of voice and unity of action. After 44 years of existence, the NAE includes four million Christians from nearly 75 denominations. Synod is asking the churches to evaluate the recommendations in light of the newly-approved ecumenical charter, and to respond to Synod 1988.

In other actions synod invited the Evangelical Presbyterian Church to become a church in ecclesiastical fellowship. Synod did not accede to overture 25 requesting that Report 44 be declared inappropriate and invalid; nor did it accede to overture 26 which desired that the creeds published in the 1959 Psalter Hymnal be recognized as official creeds. Synod also took note of the preliminary plans for the concurrent RCA General Synod and the CRC Synod in 1989.

CHURCH STRUCTURE

Vision 21 proposed a complete restructuring of the administrative organization of the CRC. Synod approved the concept of the proposal that would reduce the number of church boards as well as their size. At the same time it would create a central committee with executive power to oversee the church's work. There were several expressions of

fear that the proposed step would lead to hierarchicalism. Even though there was a great deal of negative response by churches and boards, synod bought the bill of goods; but it also appointed a new committee to study the concerns raised about the plan. Vision 21 is just another step moving away from congregational and consistorial involvement to a more centralized power structure. Several concerns were also expressed that ethnic minority representation on denominational boards would be diminished.

SYNODICAL SERVICES

An overture from Classis Orange City asked synod to revise a previous decision regarding churches and/or individuals who, as a matter of conscience, withhold quota money to protest a stance of the denomination. Synod denied the request on the grounds that withholding quota money "breaks faith with and erodes the unity and strength of the denomination." Another inconsistency! A professor or an editor may disagree with a stance taken by the denomination and, as a result, write or teach contrary to that adopted position; they do so under the umbrella of "academic freedom," saying that their conscience is only bound by the Scripture and the confessions. Isn't it a strange logic which says that this does not "break faith with" or "erode the unity and strength of our denomination," but the withholding of quotas does?

Synod was asked to take note of the Orientation Conference/Ethnic Planning Workshop and to approve the plan to schedule the conference for June 1988 during the first week of synod (at the cost of \$80,000 and a quota of \$1.00 per family, if you please!). Synod adopted the request from churches in northwest Iowa to hold the annual synod meeting at Dordt College within the next five years. The work of synodical deputies received a long hard look at this year's synod. In some instances their work was not approved; in others synod acquiesced. Criticism of their efforts ranged from "too legalistic" to "sloppily done." The denominational stated clerk was urged to hold regional conferences on the role and duties of synodical deputies.

SMALLER CHURCH MATTERS

For the past two years, a synodical committee has been studying valid ways for the church to show concern for the situation of smaller churches and their ministries. Synod adopted recommendations which would require smaller churches to pay less toward denominational ministries while retaining support from the denomination. Churches receiving aid from the Fund for Needy Churches (FNC) may be granted a reduced quota. The quota discount will in turn be offset by a reduction in the FNC subsidy paid to that church. Before a church can apply for FNC help it must have at least 30 families; churches which drop below 20 families lose their support from this fund. It may be necessary for such churches to resort to a bivocational ministry to continue its existence. The minimum salary for ministers of FNC churches was raised to \$20,500. Synod then changed the

name of the denominational Fund For Needy Churches (FNC) to Fund For Smaller Churches (FSC) in order to promote a sense of dignity for smaller congregations.

FINANCIAL MATTERS

Each family in the CRC will be asked to donate \$434.50 in 1988, providing 32 million dollars for denominational ministries. The figure is a \$16.75 per family increase from 1986. Agencies receiving the largest quota support include the Board of Home Missions—\$95.05; World Missions Committee—\$92.05; Back to God Hour/CRC-TV—\$72.00; and Calvin College and Seminary—\$70.25. Quota for Minister's Pension was reduced from \$42.35 to \$40.00. The Denominational Financial Coordinator reported that only 84% of quotas were paid in 1986.

CHURCH ORDER

Women may be deacons in the CRC as long as their work is distinguished from that of elders in governing a church. As a result of this decision of the 1984 Synod, a committee has been studying the authority and function of elders and deacons, and presented its recommendations to the 1987 Synod by way of a majority and minority report. The advisory committee also came with majority and minority advice. Synod spent several hours discussing the committee's proposals, which outlined both separate and shared responsibilities of elders and deacons, by amending, deleting and moving between majority and minority proposals. There was concern on the part of some that the direction-setting role in the church would remain the responsibility of the elders, while others saw no distinction. One delegate said: "If an elder does his work properly, it will have deacon components, and if a deacon does his (her) work properly, it will have elder components. . . . You cannot separate an aspect of the work of elder from that of deacon." There was more time spent deliberating about the authority and function of elders and deacons than any other single issue. Several significant decisions were made during the eight hours of discussion: (1) The work of elders and deacons was defined and the church order was changed to accommodate the decisions. By my count, at least 20 church order articles were changed. Such change has become a very common practice in recent years. (2) Synod removed the 1984 provision stating that the work of women deacons be distinguished from that of elders. The ground for this is that since the offices are now clearly defined, that statement is no longer necessary. It is the judgment of this delegate that there are other reasons for the deletion which will become painfully obvious in the near future. Synod took a surprising position of not delegating deacons to the broader assemblies. The vote was close, but for the time being only elders and ministers shall be delegated to those assemblies. You can be sure that will only be so temporarily. All the church order changes are in place and the offices have been defined so that deacons, male and female, will soon be seated at classis and

synod. We must also become familiar with the new terminology in distinguishing the offices: the *consistory* is now the gathering of ministers and elders; *deaconate* is the name of the deacons' meeting; and the *council* is composed of minister, elders, and deacons. Those tasks which belong to the common administration of the church, such as the calling of a pastor, the approval of nominations for church office, mutual censure, meeting with church visitors and other matters of common concern, are the responsibility of the council, according to the new Article 35a. Who says that the office of deacon is *only service and not government*?

Synod also approved a major change in the rules governing churches and their ministers by allowing the option of calling pastors for a specific term of service. It was argued that such an option would promote the mobility of ministers, and would encourage consideration of pastors without regard to their age. The call letter must designate the length of term and specify the financial arrangements for the pastor should his appointment not be extended beyond the designated term. After a period of two years it is possible for a pastor to be released from the ministry if he does not receive another call. This proposed solution creates more problems than it attempts to solve and it redefines and radically changes the whole significance and nature of calling. Consider for a moment the suspicion surrounding a pastor whose term call is not renewed. Perhaps a pastor who is extremely pleased with the place in which he serves would be very cautious not to disturb anyone lest he place his reappointment in jeopardy. Think of the candidate who, because of a growing distrust of the seminary, may be asked to agree to a list of do's and don'ts and positions before a call is issued to him. What has happened to our sense of calling? Where is the Holy Spirit in all of this? Is the internal call, which is confirmed by the external call from a church, something conditional, or is it only *real* call when the reappointment is tendered? I question whether this will in any measure do away with the problems which presently plague us.

Synod also approved the option of allowing ministers to obtain primary or supplemental income by means of employment other than that of the church. This is intended for those serving very small congregations, and creates the possibility of pastors engaging in bivocational style of ministry. Such arrangements must be approved by the consistory and classis. The work carried on by the Ministerial Information Service has been assigned to the Pastor-Church Relations Committee. One more service centered in Grand Rapids!

Synod appointed a study committee to study the casting of the lot as a method of selecting office-bearers in the church. There was a plea for some type of guidelines, since the practice was becoming widespread in the church. Synod officially recognized the 25th anniversary of the CRWRC which has served as a worldwide disaster-response

agency of the CRC. The delegates viewed a slide presentation commemorating the anniversary and heard an address by executive director, John De Haan.

SOME OBSERVATIONS

To be a delegate to synod has several high points; there is the renewing of friendships with former classmates or colleagues with whom one served in former charges. The introduction of missionaries representing various missionary fields, chaplains serving institutions and military bases worldwide; meeting the candidates and their families—all of these are moving experiences. We were given excellent leadership by those who served as officers of synod. They were capable individuals who served us fairly and well.

This year was my sixth time as a delegate and I observed that each synod has its own personality and character. This year about 40% of the delegates were first-time delegates. This was also a younger synod than others I have been privileged to attend. While previous synods have been known for one or two major decisions, Synod 1987 has no such issues which caught the eye of the general public. This was reflected in the attendance at the open sessions: there was a very small gallery and few people took the time to attend the meetings of the broadest assembly of the church. Though there were few major issues, many small decisions concerning the ways in which the CRC will carry on its business through ministers, elders, and deacons will undoubtedly have long-ranging effects on the style and identity of the denomination. The "women's issue" surfaced time and time again in the debate and those who wish to open all the offices of the church to women could take great satisfaction and encouragement from the actions of this synod. In my judgment, the CRC will have women serving in all the offices in less than five years, and there are churches waiting in the wings eager to be the first to make such history. The roll call votes, of which there were eleven, were decided by small margins, usually five or six votes. The debate gave clear evidence that we are a divided house; in fact, one often wonders how it is possible for such widely divergent views to co-exist in the same denomination. This was a synod that had its mind already made up on many of the issues. Who did the speaking seemed to have more influence than what was being said. From my vantage point I could see delegates signaling to fellow delegates at tables across the aisle or stage with a "thumbs up" or a "thumbs down" gesture. There was not heated debate on any issue, though there was an indifference to some speakers and positions. As I listened to the debate, it became obvious to me that we need to review our ecclesiology and understand more clearly the nature and government of the church. For many delegates synod is an exciting and learning experience. It once was that for me too, but of late it has become an exercise in futility.

Rev. John Engbers is the pastor of the East CR Church of Cutlerville, MI, and a member of our Fellowship's board.

Partnership in the Gospel Conference

Laurie Vanden Heuvel

On Friday evening, April 24 and Saturday, April 25, a "Partnership in the Gospel Conference" was held at Geribee's in Grandville, Michigan and Calvin College Gezon Auditorium respectively. The Committee for Women in the CRC organized the conference. Sponsoring churches included: Church of the Servant CRC, Eastern Avenue CRC, First CRC, Grace CRC, Madison CRC, Neland Avenue CRC (Grand Rapids) and River Terrace CRC (Lansing).

PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL

The keynote speaker for the Friday evening banquet was Dr. Richard Mouw, a professor for seventeen years at Calvin College and currently teaching Christian philosophy and ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary.

Dr. Mouw introduced his speech by pointing out the fact that in Genesis 1 and Revelation 22, saints are placed in ruling positions. Genesis 1 gives to man (and woman) the task of having dominion over the earth. In Revelation 22:5, saints (men and women) reign with Christ. In both instances, God gives to both men and women, a task which mirrors His task as divine Ruler. Holding office is part of that ruling task according to Dr. Mouw. Therefore he concludes that women were created to rule and to hold office.

Dr. Mouw observed that the CRC through the years has taught its daughters about God's sovereignty and their duty to "rule" in God's name, but he also observed that when it comes to ruling positions in home, church and society, the CRC makes its daughters "eternally subordinate" to male headship. In a quotation from Abraham Kuyper that one human being may not "lord it over" another, Dr. Mouw chooses not to comment on Kuyper's stipulation in the same quote, that no person may impose upon another "except as God Himself has authorized it."

According to Dr. Mouw, "talent and character are the basis for authority in the Christian community." For the Christian community to take the royal priesthood away from one half of its members, is to say that one half of its members are not fully human, not full imagers of God—and "no

theological niceties can get the Reformed community off the hook on that point" says Dr. Mouw.

Dr. Mouw described the movement toward women in ecclesiastical offices in the CRC as a "journey." He admitted it has been a long and hard journey. He made some recommendations for the future. His first recommendation was to research notable women of the CRC in the past and popularize their stories to educate the CRC constituency.

His second recommendation was to draw on past theological resources. He referred to the current discussions on the masculinity and/or femininity of God. He said our Calvinistic theology has given us a male impression of God. We have ignored a lot in the Bible about God's "mothering."

Dr. Mouw's third recommendation was to draw on and be inspired by lessons of the past as we think of our ecclesiastical strategy. He pointed out that as a Reformed community we have a history of being "ornery" (stubborn - parentheses mine, LVH). He cited De Kock and Classis Hackensack in 1922 as examples. He said we have a history of complaining about the rules, pushing the rules, calling for reform of the rules, stretching the rules, breaking the rules. We must learn to imitate these actions.

He closed by confessing his personal grief over the insensitivity of the CRC to its hurting women. He said we prepare our CRC daughter for ministry and then we close the door on her. In a closing emotional appeal, he stated that "the CRC will never be a healthy church again until it calls back to itself the daughters of Zion who were forced to leave - Marchiene, come back; Neva, come back."

HEADSHIP - AN OVERVIEW

On Saturday morning, four panelists discussed the subject of headship: Dr. Louis Vos from Calvin College, Beth Bandstra, Jan De Waal (sister of Neva Evenhouse) and Rev. Marvin Hoogland.

In his presentation, Dr. Louis Vos pointed out that the constituents of the CRC live in two worlds, those who are for women in office and those who are opposed to women in office. He admitted that advocates of women in office were not

the average in the pew. He traced the dismal history of synodical reports and decisions. He observed that the Bible does not teach headship; it teaches that Christ is head, husband is head. Adding "ship" to "head" gives headship an official status the Bible never intended. He said that the CRC has erected signs for women in front of its pulpits and on its consistory room doors which say, "Do not enter" and "Wrong way."

Dr. Vos accused conservatives of referring to Christ's and husband's headship as head "over" when the Bible really says "head of." He maintained there was a major difference in the implications of the use of "over" versus "of" but when he was asked to enlarge on this in the question session, he did not offer any substantial answer.

Dr. Vos accused conservatives of capitulating to a demonic device to hold people (women in the CRC) in check.

HEADSHIP IN SOCIETY

Beth Bandstra as a member of the panel could not see why some opponents of women in office in the church are not opposed to women in leadership roles in the community. She sees no difference. The CRC must repent for barring women from office. Servanthood is the theme of Scripture, not headship. Bandstra assured the group present that truth and justice were on their side. Women's talents are being wasted. The day will come when their daughters will enjoy the opportunities for church office because God is on their side.

HEADSHIP IN THE CHURCH

Jan De Waal feels that the concentration of discussion on the issue has been theological and more attention should be given to the feelings and experiences of people. She thinks that some men feel threatened by women in the consistory. Some women oppose women in office because their lives are lived in the private sphere. They shy away from the accountability required of office-bearers. She emphasized that experience influences and changes how people think about issues. So if people begin to experience women leadership in worship and ruling aspects of the church, they will change their minds on women in office.

Dr. Hoogland spoke about "Headship in Marriage" and his remarks did not deal with women in church office.

JOURNEYS

The afternoon session opened with a running discourse on the "journeys" of three people who moved in their thinking from opposition to endorsement of women in church offices.

Rev. Donald Pols signed the majority report opposing women in office which came to Synod 1984. When that Synod restricted the headship principle to home and church, Pols began to rethink the whole issue. He could not escape the conviction that the Old Testament teaches a "patriarchal system." Male headship was a Biblical Given. But as Pols pondered the whole Sabbath Day question, he thought he could see a relation-

ship between it and the women in office issue. Pols reasons that the Sabbath is fulfilled in the New Testament and is therefore abolished. Every day becomes a Sabbath. Therefore, when Christ came, sex distinctions vanished (Gal. 3) and therefore the patriarchal system which excluded women from office can also be abolished. That is Pols "journey."

OBSERVATIONS

1) About 130 people attended the conference, few men and few college or seminary students. About 60 people attended the communion service at which Neva Evenhouse preached and served communion. Several CRC ministers and college professors were among the participants.

2) There was almost no discussion of Scripture through the day. Rev. Len Vander Zee (brother of Neva Evenhouse) led a workshop in I Tim. 2 but the exegesis was a mutilation of the obvious meaning of the passage.

3) There was a lot of talk throughout the conference about how much the promoters of women in office are "hurting." Quite honestly, I am weary of hearing this theme. They are not the only ones hurting in the CRC. Many of us have grown up in the CRC, have embraced its doctrines and positions not only because of tradition, but because we have examined the Scriptures carefully and found them to be true. We find that new views are being imposed on us which we feel are contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture and this hurts. We are called demonic and told to repent and this hurts. We cry too - and for better reasons.

4) Another recurring theme throughout the day was the number of talented, educated women in their ranks who are convinced of their position and need to be used. Again - I am weary of this theme. Believe it or not, there are very intelligent, talented women with fertile minds and advanced degrees who do not agree with women in church office.

5) Two items of strategy surfaced which we do well to heed. One is the attempt to furnish constituents of the CRC with positive "experiences" in female leadership in worship and official decision-making and the church will change its mind. This is an off-shoot of behavioral psychology and it is effective. Another item of strategy is Dr. Mouw's exhortation to imitate the rule-benders, the rule-breakers; again-a very effective strategy. "OK - most of the churches are doing it (when really only a few are) so we better change the rules to accommodate them." Does this sound familiar? Children and teen-agers use this strategy all the time and it works.

6) What impressed me the most was the depth of the chasm and the width of the gulf that divides us. Each side of the issue approaches the Scripture with a different hermeneutical stance (and the same thing is true in the creation-evolution debate) and never the two shall meet. May God grant strength and courage to go forward in the truth of His Word.

A Reformed Witness for Today

Henry Vanden Heuvel

When we think of this subject, the words of Hebrews 12:1-3 come to mind: "Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

The great cloud of witnesses refers to the heroes of faith listed in chapter 11. These witnesses surround us in our race that has been set before us.

Commentators question what "witnesses" here means. Some have suggested that these described in chapter 11 are spectators who watch us in our race. They line the course, and shout encouragement to us to keep on going. Although attractive, I think that this is wrong. While these people are witnesses, the idea of the saints in glory observing what goes on here on earth is quite outside Scripture. Rather they serve as witnesses in that they speak to and encourage us by the examples of their testimonies. They are not on-lookers, but they witness to us in the things they said and did. "By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man when God spoke well of his offering. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead." They are speaking to us from the pages of the Scripture which describe their faith.

This witness ought to inspire us in our Reformed witness for today. The witness that we must bring as a reformed people is precisely the same that was given by these witnesses whose lives and testimonies are recalled in chapter 11. Let's consider a Reformed Witness for Today using

the examples of the heroes of faith for our encouragement and our help.

The Nature of the Witness

The nature of our witness as it was the nature of that of the heroes in Hebrews 11, is faith. Faith in Jesus Christ, faith that is based on the Word of Almighty God, faith that enables one to persevere; that faith is at the heart of our Reformed witness today. Look, for example at the last part of Hebrews 10. We read, "So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a little while, 'He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.'" Then follows the great eleventh chapter of the book of Hebrews dealing with faith.

Why is faith absolutely necessary for a reformed witness today? The reason is that faith by definition is in the Word of God. Scriptural faith, biblical faith is based on the Word of God. As such, faith, by definition is belief in what is not seen, or as Hebrews 11:1 says, "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." But how can faith be sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see? There is only one possible answer. That answer is: Faith believes that the God who has spoken is true. Faith believes that the things God has revealed to us are true even though we have not seen them, nor are they yet fulfilled for us. Faith believes because God has told us. It is as simple as that.

Our Reformed faith is faith in the Word of God. This is the heart of our confessions. This is the foundation of our salvation. Faith is unique in all the virtues that the Christian must exercise because it is based exclusively on the Word of God. Apart from that Word, faith cannot exist. Apart from the Word, faith is just nonsense—merely a “following after wind,” as the Preacher in the book of Ecclesiastes says. Faith is at the essence of the Reformed witness because it is based upon the infallible and inerrant Word of God.

Nowhere else is this great truth so demonstrated and crucial for us today as in the doctrine of creation. It is extremely important and of great interest to us today that Hebrews 11 begins its treatise on the importance of faith with a statement on creation. In vs. 3 we read, “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.” This is one of the most vital texts in all of Scripture regarding the doctrine of creation. This text is to be seen in the light of the Bible’s account of creation in Genesis 1 and 2. The first thing this text tells us is that it is by faith that we understand. It is interesting and quite surprising that we are listed along side the heroes of faith in the eleventh chapter. Throughout this chapter the author speaks of these heroes of faith: Enoch, Noah, Abraham - all lived and died by faith. But at the head of the list you and I are named. “By faith we understand.” That says that the basis for our faith is precisely the same as that of all the heroes of faith that follow. That basis is the Word of Almighty God. The text is speaking of our faith that believes that God created the universe. On what does that faith rest? What is the basis for it? Of course, it is the same basis that all the others in this chapter rested upon: namely, the Word of God. However, there is a difference. Their faith was based on the spoken Word of God. Ours is based on the written Word of God. That written word that Hebrews is referring to is of course the text of Genesis 1 and 2. For that is our only basis for acknowledging that God created the universe. When Hebrews says, “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command,” the faith he is talking about is faith based upon the Word of God in Genesis.

The Content of the Witness

A second thing that Hebrews 11:3 says about our faith that God created the universe is that we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command. The word “formed” refers to the method of creation. Notice that the Bible says that God formed the universe at His command. What are we to understand by the “command” of God? The word that is translated “command” is different from the usual term used for “word.” We are familiar with the term “logos” which is translated “word.” We think of John’s description of Jesus as the Word of God in John 1:1. That is not the term used in Hebrews 11:3. Rather, the Greek word is

“rhema” which can also be translated “word.” Here in the NIV it is translated “command.” The emphasis in this term “rhema” is on the spoken Word of God. One of the best Greek-English lexicons says, “This word refers to what is said, a word, saying, expression, an order, a direction.” This is especially important here in Hebrews 11:3. What Hebrews is saying and emphasizing here is not first of all, that God created the universe through Jesus Christ the Logos. This fact, of courses, is true. It is taught elsewhere in Scripture as, for example, in John 1:3 where John says, “The Word was God. All things were made by Him.” John speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Word. But what Hebrews 11:3 is saying is that God formed the worlds, the universe by *His spoken word*. This refers then to the “how” of creation, not just to the “what” of creation. In answer then to the question, “How did God form or create the universe?” the Bible says, “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command,” that is, This is precisely what Genesis 1 and 2 says. There we read, “and God SAID.” As Psalm 33:6 says, “God spoke and it was so; He commanded and it stood fast.” This is an absolutely crucial point that we must understand. The Bible here in Hebrews 11 is corroborating exactly what Genesis 1 and 2 tell us. Genesis 1 and 2 speak of the spoken word of God calling into existence the universe, and Hebrews 11:3 speaks of the very same thing. If one says that Genesis 1 and 2 are “primeval history,” that they do not describe real events, then what about Hebrews 11? Does Hebrews 11, with reference to our faith of today, refer to non-historical things as well? What then happens to our faith? If the events described in Genesis 1 and 2 are not historical, and if they are the basis for our faith, what happens to our faith? It crumbles! There no longer remains a foundation for our Reformed Faith today. Faith in the whole Bible stands or falls together.

A third statement in Hebrews 11:3 strikes at the heart of the theory of evolution. Hebrews 11:3 says, “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command SO THAT WHAT IS SEEN WAS NOT MADE OUT OF WHAT WAS VISIBLE.” This statement says that what God created, He created out of nothing. “What is seen was not made out of what was visible.” The theory of evolution teaches that every thing came from pre-existent forms. Following the “Big-Bang” everything evolved from what was already visible. Eventually, all evolved from pre-existent material until after billions of years, biological life evolved, and then millions of years later, human life. This evolutionary theory is absolutely and diametrically opposed to what the Bible says. Here we read, “So that what is seen was not made out of what is visible.” Nothing could be clearer from this statement. It is almost as if the Holy Spirit intended this statement to be a broadside directed at the theory of evolution that is so prominent today, even in our own circles. If you or I, as creationists, were asked to write a one-sentence denial of the

theory of evolution, we could not come up with a more succinct and clear dismissal of the theory than this brief word. There simply is no room for evolution according to the Word of God. It places before us an either-or declaration which some of our proponents of theistic-evolution people hate with a passion. This text puts it as clearly as can be. Ours is either a belief that God formed the universe by His command, or it is the belief that what we see came about from what is visible.

Hebrews 11:3 states "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command." It is not by empirical study that we understand. Even the evolutionist's theory is not based on empirical study. He was not there to see what happened. Our faith is based on the word of the only One who was there, even Almighty God. He told us what happened and we must believe that what He said is true.

The Opposition to the Witness

A Reformed witness of today and the Hebrews 12 witnesses both share the same opposition. The biblical witnesses whose lives and testimonies still testify to us today, expressed their faith in the face of great opposition. We must do the same.

Consider the testimony of the "great cloud of witnesses" in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. We read in verses 23-26 of the faith of Moses' parents, and then of the faith of Moses himself. The Bible says, "By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw Him who is invisible."

The testimony and witness of these people was given in the midst of great opposition. They believed in the face of great danger. It was not an easy thing to act on the basis of conviction and faith. The key to the faith and action of these people is seen in the words, "Because he saw Him who is invisible." This clearly refers to God Himself. Moses saw Him who is invisible. How could he see what is invisible? The answer: "By faith." Faith makes what cannot be seen real. Faith in the Lord and in His Word gave Moses the courage to do what he did in the face of great opposition.

In verses 32-40 the author speaks of the many saints who through faith accomplished great things, or who through faith died gloriously. In the midst of opposition they lived and died by faith. God sustained Moses and all of the saints by His Word. Their faith enabled them to make a testimony for our encouragement today.

In chapter 12, Hebrews addresses us who are also living in the midst of opposition. But as

Hebrews 12:4 says, "In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood." That is true of us today. Yet we have grown weary, and as verse 5 says, "We have forgotten the Word of encouragement that addresses us as sons." So in our Reformed witness for today, we must remember the witnesses who throughout the history of the Church, both in the Old and New Testaments, exercised their faith in the face of great opposition. Let us resolve to continue in that line of courageous men and women who lived and died by faith in the Word of God and in Almighty God Himself. Our failure to act according to our faith and our convictions is often because of our unwillingness to suffer. We do not want to be outside the majority opinion in our churches. We do not want to be called naive when we hold to the truth of the Word of God. We want to be accepted by the leaders in the educational world today. Our self-interest has gotten in the way of our faith. The bottom line is that we would rather be accepted by the world than to suffer ill treatment with the people of God.

The Reward of the Witness

The Reformed Witness for today is based on faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, which, in turn, is founded upon the Word of God in the Scriptures. The example of this faith is our belief in the doctrine of creation as stated in Hebrews 11:3, "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command." We have seen that the faith and testimony of this great cloud of witnesses was exercised in the face of great opposition. Now we must see that this testimony was greatly rewarded. First, it resulted in the declaration by God that those who lived and died by faith were righteous. This testimony is made regarding Able and Enoch. Of Abel we read, "By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offering." And of Enoch we read, "For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God." A second and equally important result of their testimony is the blessing of the Lord. There is no question but that Hebrews 11 states that the way to true happiness, to God's blessing, is the way of faithful obedience. Every person listed in this great chapter received God's blessing by way of faith and the obedience that followed.

We must remember this in our reformed witness today. We are impressed by immediate results. We want to see the outcome right now. But the very essence of faith is that it waits in hope for the result that God has promised. We must live in faith and hope in our Reformed witness. In our battles against the forces that seek to break down the Word of God, and the confessions of the Christian Reformed Church, we must not look for an easy or immediate victory. Indeed, as the author of Hebrews says, many of those in the eleventh chapter died martyr deaths rather than receive release from prison through compromise. Their victory was a better resurrection. So it may be for us. We earnestly want to see our Christian Reformed Church reformed and restored to its

original strength and purity. Perhaps that is not to be. Many of our number are convinced that this will never happen. Nevertheless, the better thing awaits us if we are willing to remain true to the Word of God. The blessing of God awaits those who persevere in their faith and the testimony of the Scriptures which alone is the basis for our faith and life.

The Encouragement of the Witness

We have been looking at the Reformed Witness for Today in the light of the great "cloud of witnesses" mentioned in Hebrews 12 and listed in Hebrews 11. The faith that those men and women exercised is the same faith that we must have, especially as described in Hebrews 11:3 as the faith in the doctrine of creation according to the Word of God.

Now look at the incentive, the encouragement to the faith that is to be the basis for our Reformed witness. That incentive or encouragement is stated in Hebrews 12:2, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

Notice how the author to the Hebrews ties all that he has been saying in chapter 11 with this great encouragement: He tells us that the faith that is the basis for our Reformed witness originates in Jesus Christ. He is the *author* and the *perfecter* of our faith. In our witness, we must fix our eyes upon Jesus. He is the author of our faith and, because He is the perfecter of our faith, He will bring our faith to sight. Jesus is the One who brings us from walking by faith to walking by sight. In order to make that great step, we must keep our eyes upon Him. We must follow Jesus.

Jesus gives us a personal incentive when He sets before us the fact of His suffering. Just as the heroes of faith exercised their faith in the face of opposition, so does Jesus Christ. It was "for the joy set before him," that He "endured the cross, scorning its shame." The book of Hebrews holds up our great Leader, the Lord Jesus Christ, and urges us not to grow weary and lose heart in our witness. It says, "Look at Jesus. Keep your eyes fixed on Him." When you do, you will find that Jesus suffered far greater opposition than we will ever face.

The Reformed Witness for today is a life and testimony of faith in the Word of God. Our discussion must always come back to this. The Word of God, the written Bible, is the bottom line in every issue that we face in the church today. It was the basis for the faith of the heroes of faith, and it is still the basis for our faith and witness today. Every deviation from doctrine in the history of the Christian Reformed Church has resulted from a failure to abide by the Word of God. Likewise, every real effort to reform the church has always been founded on a return to the Word of God. It is

not enough for us to claim to take the Word of God seriously. We must show that claim by our testimony, our witness, our life. It is our fervent hope and prayer that God will restore our denomination to a faith in the Word of God we have seen depicted in Hebrews 11. It is our fervent hope and prayer that with our eyes upon Jesus, we may "run with perseverance the race marked out for us."

Rev. Henry Vanden Heuvel is the pastor of the Bethel C.R. church at Zeeland, Michigan. This address was presented at the conference of concerned at South Holland, Illinois on April 28, 1987.

Who Am I?

Glenn P. Palmer

When you name your children, do you use Biblical names? My wife and I do, sometimes to the dismay of our parents because they are too Biblical. We have three children with such names as Rebecca Michelle (Michelle means "Who is like unto Jehovah"), Rachel Elizabeth, and Elijah Gideon (just born in January). But sometimes the translation of the name has an interesting meaning. For example, Rebecca (Rebekah) means "noose," although in most wall hangings (no pun intended) the name has been changed to "tied to," and Rachel means "ewe." Below is a list of some famous people in the Bible and the translations of their names. All you have to do is match them. Have fun. It's only a test.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1. Adam | a. Savior |
| 2. Eve (Gen. 3:20) | b. little |
| 3. Abraham (Gen. 17:5) | c. worshipper of Jehovah |
| 4. Sarah (Gen. 17:15) | d. lady |
| 5. Isaac (Gen. 17:19, 21:3-6) | e. possibly hairy |
| 6. Jacob (Gen. 25:26) | f. possibly red |
| 7. Esau (Gen. 25:25) | g. Egyptian "son" or Hebrew "draw out" |
| 8. Moses (Exodus 2:10) | h. English spelling of _____, Jehovah is gracious |
| 9. Joshua, Jesus | i. living |
| 10. Gideon | j. Jehovah is mighty |
| 11. Obadiah | k. father of many, (multitude) |
| 12. Joel | l. he grasps the heel, (fig. the deceiver) |
| 13. Martha | m. princess |
| 14. John | n. he laughs (laughter) |
| 15. Paul | o. hewer down |
1. f, 2. i, 3. k, 4. m, 5. n, 6. l, 7. e, 8. g, 9. a, 10. o, 11. c, 12. j, 13. d, 14. h, 15. b

Answering Today's Evolutionist

The book, *The Fourth Day*, has captured some public attention because it is the most forthright and outspoken effort we have seen on the part of one of Calvin College's professors to defend and promote the theory he and others hold of the evolutionary origin and development of the universe. What is most significant about this matter is not this book, but the facts which it highlights, that this way of thinking has long been promoted in a number of courses and that, as a letter from a reader in the June *Outlook* pointed out, a student who attempts to resist this kind of promotion may be ridiculed. Calvin's student publication, *Dialogue*, last January contained a little 3-page article by Dr. Howard Van Till clearly illustrating this technique of squelching opposition. It was entitled "The Dialogue of the Wooden Shoe." A student in the crowded "Wooden Shoe" restaurant, finding himself seated with the professor who has authored a controversial book, is soon trying to argue that one must accept either creation or a "big bang" origin and history of the universe. The professor replies that these are no more alternatives than our listening to the morning scientific weather broadcast is an alternative to believing in creation. Why can't we have both in our understanding of the universe, as we do in reckoning with its weather?

Neat, isn't it? I guess our professor showed that bumpkin!

But how shall we evaluate this argument, which seems to neatly dispose of student objections (as well as those of many others who are no longer in college)?

Before we let Dr. Van Till get away with this argument, let's consider that there is a significant difference between believing this morning's weather report, compiled from broadcasts about and satellite pictures of that weather, and accepting as more reliable than gospel truth what some scientists guess may have happened 16 billion years ago! (Incidentally, local weatherman Craig James, to whose daily reports Dr. Van Till alludes in his "Dialogue" argument, happens to be a very

eloquent opponent and lecturer against those unproved and unprovable theories of origins which Dr. Van Till advocates. In *Dialogue*, Issue #6 he answers Van Till showing the inconsistency of claiming to be a Christian while contradicting what Christ said about creation.) Accepting evident facts about the weather are no excuse for accepting evolutionists' groundless guesses about origins. The weather pictures don't contradict the Bible as the evolutionists' guesses do. Even though we make grateful use of somewhat more reliable weather reports than we could get 50 years ago, we all know that the conjectures of able local weathermen may be mistaken as often as they are correct.

Some recent news has been highlighting to an unusual degree just how undependable much astronomical theory really is. A sensation was created among astronomers when last February 23 an astronomer in Chile sighted a new "supernova," an exploding star, "the closest to Earth since 1604," and the specialists began to predict on the basis of their present theory what it might be expected to do. Van Till devotes a central part of his book to outlining the way in which, according to the theory, stars must develop from one stage to another, and makes it a foundation for his argument (see pages 139-190). "The computation of stellar history represents one of the major accomplishments of twentieth century astronomy. It is a fascinating story the evidence for which is sufficiently compelling and coherent that it clearly ought to find a place in any valid world view" (p. 159). "Does observational evidence give support to the processes of stellar evolution that I've presented? My answer is an unequivocal Yes. The technical and popular literature is filled with reliable reports concerning the observational evidence for stellar evolution. In fact, the computational models are continuously being tested by comparison with observations" (p. 160).

After all of the confident predictions about what the newly observed supernova might be expected to do, a *Grand Rapids Press* article on April 9

pointed out that the supernova was refusing in a number of ways to behave according to the scientists' predictions. Experts were "befuddled by its fluctuating brightness." "It's going to provide a lot of work for theoreticians, who will have to do a lot of revising," was one expert's comment. Whereas scientists had defined two types of supernovas, this actually observable supernova, the first so relatively accessible in centuries, didn't seem to be fitting into either category, so that fascinated astronomers were saying that "their theories will have to be rewritten."

An astronomy professor recently observed in a letter that "astronomy is such a fast-moving and such a fickle discipline that both the 'facts' and the theories are continually changing." Thus the new discoveries and tumbling theories in this area instead of leading us to accept them as Divine revelation, as we have been told that we must do, compel us to consider again the questions the Lord addressed to a critical Job, "Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" "Where were you when I made these things, and can you manage them" (Job 38:2, 4, 31-33)?

PDJ

Christ's Church Building

On May 16 a conference featuring speakers of the Mid-America Reformed Seminary at Orange City, Iowa, was held in Wyoming, Michigan. The day-long meeting dealing with the general theme, "Christ Will Build His Church," drew an attendance of about 90 people. Since the three professors were each presenting three lectures, each attendant had to choose between the three meetings being conducted in each period. A brief

report on the conference can convey little more than a general impression of the speakers and the material each presented.

Rev. Nelson Kloosterman discussed the subject of "The Church Order as a Biblical Blueprint." He raised the question—particularly relevant to the increasing anarchy becoming evident within our churches—whether the church order was intended to be a mere guide, or whether it was to govern the churches' organization and activity. He noted that the Order was to govern and regulate what the church was doing, and that it was subordinate to the Scriptures. He observed that the relationship between the Scriptures and the Church Order is at present under attack, so that we are threatened, on one hand, by a Roman Catholic-style of hierarchy, and on the other, by a congregationalism which assumes that people have the sovereign right to do as they please. When a woman demands the right to office because she "feels called," she is disregarding both the Scriptures and the lawful calling by the church. The speaker called attention to the decided shift already evident in the revision of our church order in the 60's away from the earlier stress on the Biblical offices and structure, to the churches' subjective action of "confessing," "acknowledging," and "desiring," which really put "the Church Order up for cultural grabs." (The speaker's observations helped to clear up any misunderstanding that there might be about why our churches become increasingly confused and divided. When the Word of God is dismissed as no longer decisive because of cultural changes, should anyone be surprised if "church order" gives way to "church disorder"?)

Rev. Robert Grossman discussed the subject of public worship, stressing the fact that God's Word not only commands Whom we must worship, but also how we must worship Him. Proper worship of God is therefore not to be degraded to "liturgical" experiments with varieties of entertainment but must be "in Spirit and in Truth."

Rev. Mark Vander Hart, professor of Old Testament, focussed attention on the way the book of Malachi called people to return to obeying the God of the Covenant. The plight of the people then, as also now, was a consequence of their breaking covenant with God. Symptomatic of their unfaithfulness to God's covenant was their faithlessness in entering religiously mixed marriages and in breaking their marriage covenants by divorce. God detested such unfaithfulness, and called them, as us, to repentance and renewed faithfulness.

It was interesting to observe the variety of presentations, addressing a common theme of church rebuilding. Especially prominent in all of them was a constant emphasis on what is more and more glaringly absent from the decisions and activities of our denominational establishment, obedience to and proclamation of the Word of God. That emphasis bodes well for the new seminary as it attracts more students. Let's pray for and support it.

PDJ

The Lord's Day Refreshment

Warren H. Lammers

Exodus 31:13

Our world is in a hurry and too busy for the Lord's Day. All around our land on Sundays there are stores open for the shopping of those who are too busy the other six days. Many restaurants open to feed the Sunday crowd, many gas stations open for thirsty tanks and many stores open for whatever sudden buying urge might grab the consumer. And churches have to try to compete on Sunday and even on Sunday night? Over the next 100 years do you think the churches or the stores will win? In your family do you think the world or the Lord will win?

In the coal mines of Pennsylvania years ago, where mules hauled the little coal cars, men that tried to work their mules seven days a week found out it did not pay. If the mules stayed too long in the mines, they began to go blind. One day a week the animals had to be grazed out in the sunlight pasture, so that their eyes would continue to function as normal eyes should. Likewise, if human beings go week after week without the light of the Lord shining in their life and correcting the vision, blindness will naturally result.

Consider the fourth commandment through the words of Exodus 31:13. "You must observe My Sabbaths. This will be a sign between Me and you for the generation to come, so you may know that I am the Lord, Who makes you holy." Notice The Lord's Commandment and The Lord's Sign.

I. The Lord's Command

The Lord's command is stated in a deliberate way. In today's environment many preachers proclaim commandments 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10, but drop the fourth. And some people say Christ fulfilled the fourth commandment, which they take to mean that He abolished it. That cannot be. We may not say that the Lord Jesus came to destroy the law, for He said that He did not come to abolish it (Matt. 5:17). Christians may not swear. They may not kill, they may not commit adultery. And Christians are required by the Lord to honor this fourth commandment as well.

When the Lord led the children of Israel out of Egypt through Moses He also gave them the Sab-

bath Day. These former slaves in Egypt didn't have a Sabbath day. Slaves don't get sabbaths. But after they had been freed from slavery and gathered around Mt. Sinai the Lord did not want them to forget the redemption that He provided: therefore He gave them the fourth commandment (Deut. 5:16).

Whenever you see a society that is drifting away from the Lord, there you begin to see a neglect of the fourth commandment. Even if a person was raised as a child in a Christian family and taught not to work on the Lord's day, if that person drifts away from the Lord he will more and more ignore the fourth commandment. The Lord's Day will mean less and less to him because the Lord Himself means less and less to him. A society that does not know the Lord will slip back into a slavery. It will feel compelled to slave seven days a week. A store manager who is enslaved to money will have his store open on Sunday. And a factory worker who is enslaved to pleasure, will push the Lord out of the Lord's Day in order that pleasure may enslave him or her seven days a week.

It should not surprise us that stores open on Sunday - it merely tells us the condition of the hearts.

To many, the Lord seems much too serious about the fourth commandment, for verse 14 says, "observe the Sabbath because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death." Anyone who works on the Sabbath Day is to be put to death? That sounds much too stern to our ears. We read in Numbers 15:32 that a man went out on the Sabbath Day and was caught gathering sticks for a bonfire. For only gathering sticks, he was put into prison, and the Lord's command was, 'put him to death.' Put to death for gathering firewood? How shocking!

As I remember how I fail to live up to the injunctions of the Lord in the fourth commandment, I may only conclude that I have to turn to the cross of Christ. By faith I must take as my only hope of forgiveness the fact that Jesus my Savior came into the world in order to perfect the law in my behalf and in order to undergo my death penalty. For without Christ, there is no redemp-

tion. Thank the Lord for His unspeakable gift, Jesus Christ; without Jesus Our Lord, we could not live.

We are warned that the Lord's Day has to be "kept," "guarded," preserved, or it will slowly be taken from us. That day has to be dedicated to the Lord and kept holy, or Satan will little by little, take it from you. He finds all sorts of excuses to "rob" parts of the day from you until nothing is left. Likewise for a society, the Lord's Day must be preserved or Satan will have people back into seven-day-a-week-slavery.

Throughout history there has always been a bitter battle between Satan's people and God's people for possession of that one day in seven. Nehemiah found that on the Sabbath Day the local market opened for business. Salesmen were eager to give their pitch to ladies out on a Sabbath afternoon stroll or to men after synagogue services. (Maybe they even gave discounts—offered fresh fish from the sea, or a quick snack so ladies would not have to cook.) But godly Nehemiah came along and ordered the gates locked. And when the merchants still sat around, he chased them away with the threat of arrest (Neh. 13:15-21).

Our God is serious about our keeping His day Holy.

II. His Sign - His Purpose

We need to keep in mind the Lord's purpose for this commandment. The Lord has good reason why He wants this commandment kept. The text says, "This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come." When Christians honor the Lord's Day it is a sign to the Lord and to the world that these people belong to the Lord. When 2 young people "go steady," she wears his ring. If he is really interested, he buys her a pearl. If she becomes engaged she wears a diamond. That is a sign to the world that her heart has been attached to this young man. The Lord desires that if your heart is full of love toward Him, you will use His day as a sign between Himself and you. If He means something to us, we will keep it. If He doesn't mean anything to us, we will not keep it. If two young people "break up," she takes off his ring. And if the Lord no longer means much to people, they will naturally get away from the sign of His day.

The purpose of the Lord's Day is that it is to be a sign between the Lord and you, "for generations to come." On this score, our children will have a much much tougher time with this fourth commandment than their parents ever did. Parents, are you aware of that? Our grandparents had it relatively easy. When they were young, most of them did not see commercial streets miles long with stores open all the way. They did not know a shopping mall could compete for Sunday's attendance with the church. If present trends continue, each Christian child who wishes to honor and respect the Lord's Day will have to make deliberate bold choices; some so obvious that the world will be forced to see that this day is a sign between Christians and their God.

The society we are entering will fight us every inch of the way to seek to take Sunday from us.

Why should you keep this Lord's Day holy? Exodus 31:13 says that our Lord wants this day kept dedicated to Him so that we may know Him. If instead, people do not keep the Lord's Day holy—they are busy washing cars, mowing lawns, making double time, flying around town, chasing everywhere else—if they do not reserve the Sunday to be invested in their relationship with their God, then after a while they will not "know" Him any longer. In a marriage when mates do not talk to each other, after a while they don't know each other either. So too the Sunday is the safe-guard to our relationship with the Lord.

Verse 17 reads; "On the seventh day the Lord abstained from work and rested." He refreshed His soul. That is what He intends for us with this seventh day, that we keep it holy. And while we rest, we refresh our souls. We pause to breathe fresh air, to take in spiritual nourishment and we are invigorated for the week ahead. In a busy world like ours, this is more necessary than ever.

Rev. Warren H. Lammers is the pastor of the Dutton C.R. church at Dutton, Michigan. This article is the substance of a Sunday evening sermon of Dec. 14, 1986 on Heidelberg Catechism LD38, on the 4th Commandment.

Concerned Members Conference

REFORMED WORSHIP

The growing confusion about worship was the occasion for the address of Dr. John R. Sittema, of Pella, Iowa, at the April 28 South Holland Concerned Conference. Noting that the similarity in worship that used to characterize our churches has disappeared, he found reasons for the change in a variety of influences. Prominent among them were the sensational style of television evangelists tending to turn worship into a show with the preacher as star and the congregation into an audience to be entertained. Charismatic movements have tended to downgrade Holy Scripture as our guide and its proclamation as the center of our worship, and to replace it with individual human experience. The Bible, instead of being accepted as the authority

that it is, has been relativized by "scholars" who want to filter everything it says through their "interpretations" in the light of its own and their "cultural conditioning." Under the influence of a relativism exemplified by Karl Jaspers, they lose all sense of an absolute and unchanging truth—to become today's kind of "blind leaders of the blind." Thus preaching of the gospel gives way to "discussion." Most lamentable is the fact that even traditional and conservative churches have tended to separate their Sunday worship from their way of living. Instead of being guided by God's Word and Spirit, we tend to be ruled by the "creeping secularism" that conforms to our world.

From this current demoralization of our worship we need to be rescued by listening to God's Word. It summons us to worship Him, not our own "experience." That worship must be "covenantal," responding to God's revelation of His works and words. As such, it must include the children who are part of the covenant which God made with believers and their children, and who must be taught His gospel. Reformed worship is guided by God's Word and therefore must be dignified and authoritative, featuring the proclamation of the text of God's Word. Such preaching characterized the daily labors of John Calvin. Elders must insist on such preaching and support it by exercising the discipline of that Word. They must require music and liturgy that serves that Word rather than that competes with or replaces it. Church members need to demand of preachers and elders such faithful preaching of God's Words, and if they cannot obtain it in one church, seek another that will provide it.

WHAT KIND OF CHURCH?

In an address entitled "A Reformed Work for Today," the following morning, Dr. Cornelis P. Venema, of Ontario, California, spoke about what Reformed Churches must be. As churches called to listen to and confess God's Word, they are to be free from enslavement to opposing authorities.

I. A Listening Church

"The first mark or indispensable feature of a Reformed church is that it seeks always to listen reverently and obediently to the Word of God in Scripture. A Reformed church is 'born of the Word of God and listens not to the voice of any stranger.'" Martin Luther, when called to recant by hostile church authorities, appealed to the Bible, saying that his conscience was captive only to the Word of God. Calvin in his commentary on 2 Peter 1:20 observed that one cannot properly read the Bible except with "the conviction that it is God who speaks with us and not mortal men."

Since the real church is marked by its listening to the Word of God, (1) the only measure of its reformation or progress is its faithfulness to the written Word. We need to see our many church problems in the light of this principle. The issue of women in office is a vexing one because it is being promoted in defiance of what the Bible says

is the law of God, the practice of Christ's church and the order of creation (1 Cor. 14:33-38; 1 Tim. 2:11-3:15). The current abuses of our quota system are objectionable for the same reason.

(2) "We must reject any appeal to the 'leading of the Spirit' which comes outside of or apart from a careful listening to the voice of the Lord in His Word." In the Reformation time Roman Catholics maintained that the Spirit given to the church speaks beyond the Scriptures through church decisions—the idea assumed by many of our church members, that we must unconditionally accept whatever a synod decides. Against this error the Reformers properly insisted that the Word of God is the exclusive authority in the church. Against those who claimed that the Spirit was giving new light and revelation beyond the Bible—a notion equally prevalent today—they also insisted on the written Word of God as the only authority—It is the "sword of the Spirit."

(3) We may never adopt a higher-critical approach to the Scripture. The vitality and well-being of the church depends on its obedience to God's Word. By that word we are "born again" (James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23) and by it we must grow (1 Pet. 2:2; 1 Thess. 2:13). To depart from that Word is fatal to a church (Isaiah 8:20).

II. A Confessing Church

A Reformed church is distinguished as a "confessing church." Its unity and mission is founded on its common confession of the Word of God. It does not depend on its history or ethnic character. It holds that "no Scripture is of private interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20), and its common statements of faith in that Word in its creeds are its "forms of unity."

(1) Such a confessing church must require its teachers to defend and promote the truth it confesses. This requirement may not be challenged, as it is today, by appeal to an assumed "academic freedom." A teacher called to teach what the church confesses has no right to attack that confession, as many among us are doing today.

(2) We cannot continue to be united in what we do if we are no longer united in what we believe and confess. Mere common traditions, "denominational loyalty," customs or habits may not keep together people who no longer share a common faith. People who deny our confession may not demand our support.

III. A Free Church

Because a Reformed church listens only to the voice of its Head and King in His Word, and is united only by its common confession of that Word, it remains free from obedience to anyone or anything that contradicts that Word. This Biblical teaching is echoed in the Belgic Confession Article 32, in which "we reject all human inventions and all laws which men would introduce into the worship of God, thereby to bind and compel and conscience in any manner whatsoever."

This compels us to oppose every kind of

developing church hierarchy. It moves us to recover and exercise locally the high office of ruling elders and teachers in the church. It is not their duty to impose upon the churches whatever decisions a denominational assembly may try to order. These are to be obeyed and acknowledged only if they agree with the Word of God and promote the unity and good order of the church.

We need to face the question whether some features of our "quota" system are not an "unlawful" imposition upon the consciences of free sons and daughters of Christ who is the only

King over His people.

The church reformation and renewal for which we need to pray is one of obedient listening to the confessing the Word of the Lord and of liberation from every yoke but that of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was the recurring note sounded by Dr. Venema and other conference speakers. PDJ

Tapes of the Concerned Conference addresses can be obtained for \$3.00 a piece (\$24 for all 9 of them) + \$1.00 for handling and postage.

*Address: CMCRC Tapes, 16304 South Park Ave.
South Holland, Illinois 60473*

Evolution at Dordt College

Professor Richard Hodgson, Professor of Astronomy at Dordt College, recently defended evolution in a debate with Dr. Duane Gish of The Institute for Creation Research. The debate took place before several hundred students at Hillsdale College, Hillsdale, Michigan, on April 10, 1987. Professor Hodgson concluded his lecture with the following remarks (as transcribed from a tape of the debate):

"Do animals, for example, have a common ancestor? Do all taxonomic phyla and kingdoms go back to a single ancestral line? These are good questions, and they are not easily answered. On the basis of presently available scientific evidence, I think we cannot be totally sure. The study of the earliest mammals and birds, too, for that matter, show strong reptilian skeletal structures, indicating a highly likely reptile ancestry.

"Again, a transition of fish to lung fish to amphibians does, to some extent, seem to be in evidence in the discovery of some species that have been found.

"Furthermore, if we look at the history of earth rocks, and some micro-fossils go back more than three billion years, we are confronted with the fact

that the simpler kingdoms . . . occurred before the more complex forms of life. So there seem to be gradual divergence over time into more and more complex life forms. The earliest life forms were exceedingly simple and did not even have nucleated cells. More recent life forms have been, of course, multi-celled, with some very complicated organs that are involved.

"So to summarize the point, I would like to say the following: The case for evolution, I believe, is a good one on the basis of available scientific evidence. The possibility, however, of divine creation of some basic life forms, particularly of higher taxonomic levels, over widely spaced intervals of time, not just a few thousand years now, is a possibility which cannot be ruled out on the basis of present scientific observational evidence. And, so, I think, that is about where we really have to leave it. I think that there are some things that strongly suggest evolution as an explanation for a lot of the varieties of life that we find. Whether it will explain everything, of course, will remain somewhat for the future to discover!"

Professor Hodgson is a minister of the Orthodox Presbyterian church.

Augustine - Calvin - Van Til

Steve M. Schlissel

When Dr. Cornelius Van Til was eighty-eight years old, I asked him, "Now that you are old, what do you believe to be the most important thing in life?" I had expected to hear something like, "Spending time with my family and friends," or some such answer that would focus on the blessed but often overlooked and undervalued graces of God to His people. Instead, without hesitation or consideration, he cocked his forearm and punctuated his answer with his index finger: "To be FAITHFUL to the end." And that he was.

Faithful from the Beginning to End

To the very end of his life, Van Til was a man who ate, lived and breathed the Word of God. He was often unable, due to his years, to keep to a specific subject in conversation. He was prone to wander. Yet even his wandering was in terms of the Word. He would often quote verse and chapter from Joshua or Revelation in the middle of discussions. When he was semi-conscious, he could be heard uttering the Lord's Prayer in Dutch. Faithful to the end.

But I suggest that the unique contribution of this man of God to the Church of Jesus Christ was his call to be faithful from the beginning. Van Til's greatness can be seen in his attempt to be consistent all along the route. He dealt in systems of thought. This accounts for the difficulty many have in understanding him. You may pick up any book by Van Til and find on any page that he is not requiring his readers to accept one or two particular points of doctrine. Rather, the reader is asked to swallow the WHOLE truth, as God has revealed it in His Word and as the church has understood it in its Reformed confessions, and then, to apply it as it is, without modification. Consequently, just like the Word of God, and (not coincidentally) just like the Reformed creeds, any part of Van Til's apologetic implies the rest. It is an understanding of the faith found in the Bible, insisted upon by Augustine, systematized and developed by Calvin, and presented to the unbeliever in a wholly consistent form by Van Til. Faithful from beginning to end.

The Gospel Message Must Determine the Method.

Van Til reminded us that there is a necessary and inseparable connection between our message and our method. Are we telling unbelievers that they are basically OK but need to add Christ to their lives to be complete? If so, the apologist might assume an integrity of thought on the part of the unbeliever and would try to persuade him to use his "impartial" reasoning faculties to examine the "evidence" for our particularly Christian claims, hoping that the unbeliever would come to see the overwhelming probability of the truth that

belongs to the Christian faith alone, and finally, accept Christ as his personal Savior. But our faith is not "very probably true" it is absolutely, certainly true, and perfectly capable of proving itself to be true against any and all rivals.

Therefore, "Uncle Case" exposes the error of this "blockhouse method" (of assuming intellectual neutrality, then "proving" probability of God, of Bible as true, etc.). That mistaken method is principally consistent with Roman Catholicism and not Reformed faith, despite its good intentions and despite the imprimatur given to it by the able men of Princeton, most notably, B.B. Warfield. For Van Til had learned from Abraham Kuyper that the antithesis between light and dark is complete. One may not presuppose the impartiality of the unbeliever's reasoning, for this carries with it a host of implications which would actually undermine our ability to bring him to faith in the Christ of Scripture. Besides, the Scripture clearly says that unbelievers are not neutral. If that were the case, their unbelief would be "God's fault" for not making Himself clear. No, the problem with neutral man is not what he doesn't know, it's what he does know yet suppresses (Romans 1:18).

It was just here that Van Til corrected Kuyper who, in recognizing a total antithesis, wrongly concluded that there was no point of contact and that there could, therefore, be no fruitful reasoning with him. Dr. Van Til relied on the ineradicable image of God in man as that which gains entrance for the Word. "Deep down in your heart you know very well that what I have said is true." (*Why I Believe in God*, p. 18) Van Til's method would then continue to confront the unbeliever with even his epistemological sin, in which he has enlisted reason as a servant in his rebellion against the Most High.

Dr. Greg Bähnsen (Van Til's choice to succeed him at Westminster Seminary, though his wishes have not yet been honored) outlines Van Til's procedure as follows:

- I. We deal in WORLDVIEWS (not a piece-meal approach)
- II. We conduct an INTERNAL CRITIQUE OF OPPONENT'S SYSTEM
 - a) Logic impossible on their principles
 - b) Generalization of scientific laws impossible on their foundation
 - c) Universally binding moral precepts impossible on their presuppositions
- III. We conduct an EXTERNAL CRITIQUE of their system

Their worldview neither fits "the facts," nor can it account for them. In other words, they don't really believe it. They don't even live like they believe it.

IV. CHRISTIAN THEISM ALONE JUSTIFIES KNOWLEDGE, ETHICS, ONTOLOGY.

The Church of Jesus Christ is greatly indebted to Augustine and Calvin for going to the Bible and explicating just what faith in it as the Word of God implies for systematics, for teaching us our reasonable faith. We also owe a debt to Dr. Cornelius Van Til for showing us what we can do with it. Through him, God has given us the key to understand that we need never betray our theology in bringing the gospel to the world, nor do we need to retreat and keep our faith to ourselves (which amounts to the same thing). The transcendental apologetic of Dr. Van Til takes the Triune God of Scripture as the INDISPENSABLE

presupposition of any and all intelligible predication. It avoids the Scylla of rationalism and The Charybdis of mysticism-fideism. This vigorous and potent method of defending the faith once for all delivered, enables us to consistently believe all that our confessions teach, and to do all that our King has commanded. With the Bible in our hand we need never grovel for intellectual respectability. The confessing Reformed Christian ALONE possesses it, by the grace of God.

Therefore we need never compromise. We need only to trust and obey, to be faithful, beginning to end, like Uncle Case, whom we'll sorely miss.

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DANGER OF INCONCLUSIVE "CONCERN"

Reformed Fellowship, Inc.
Publishers of the *Outlook*

Dear Sirs,

For over a year I have considered cancelling the subscription. I have enjoyed reading the *Outlook* for many years and it has given us much good food for thought. But it has, to me at least, become more and more evident that the leadership given in the *Outlook* is falling in the same errors as were seen in the Gereformeerde Kerken in the Netherlands. There "bezwaarden," the concerned, battled for years inside of the denomination, while those in influential leadership positions set the course away from traditional Reformed truths and values, as well as practices. The concerned definitely did not want to leave the denomination, but hoped to reverse the trend. Lately one does not hear much about the concerned any more. They were mostly the older generation that has since passed on. Their influence is minimal at present. Because they had stated not to wish to leave, they were simply ignored. What they forgot was their responsibility to positively lead the next generation. Their actions were confined to protests of leadership acts, synod decisions, etc. In the meantime, the younger generation, growing up in the "new style Gereformeerde Kerken," does not see any need to change back to the

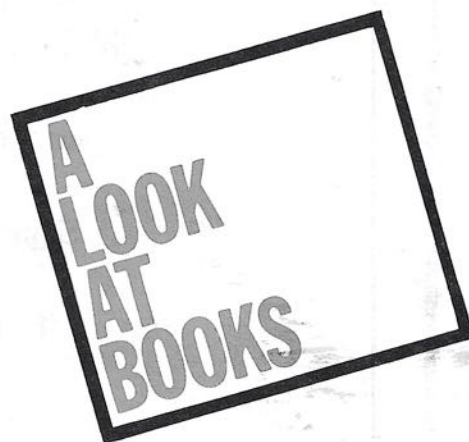
"old ways" and ignores the complaints of the "concerned" as irrelevant.

I can write all of this from much personal observation. I was 16 when my Father, as elder in the Gereformeerde Kerk, was one of a group of over 50 elders who were suspended and deposed from their office. That was in 1944. I still see it as a work of God's grace that gradually all those who had only wished to continue to be truly Reformed were gathered into joining the Gereformeerde Kerken (Liberated," upholding Article 31 of the Dordt Church Order). Some of our relatives decided to stay in the old church and not join the "Article 31" church. They did not realize then, what consequences that decision would have for their offspring, their children and grandchildren.

On meeting them later, one is shocked to see what bad church leadership has done to once good families. It is saddening to see that only a few of the "concerned" eventually came to the right conclusion, that what happened in 1944 and 1945 was not a church schism, but a reformation in the classical sense. It was a return to values, doctrines, teachings, practices that had only very gradually been changed, but became more and more a matter of great concern to a few. These few gave the positive leadership that could only lead to a confrontation. They did not seek this, but they could not shun it either when it came. They remained faithful to their calling to lead the sheep as good shepherds.

Why do I write all this? This history can teach us a lesson. "To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:22). It is becoming very late for a Reformation of the CRC to be effective. The longer we wait, the more younger families we see becoming complacent and no longer caring. It is time to say, "Let us return before we all drift so far away that none of us can find the way to return to our origins." May our Lord give us that kind of courageous and obedient leadership also in the *Outlook*.

In Christ, yours truly
Ebel H. Pol
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WHAT CHRISTIAN PARENTS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT INFANT BAPTISM
John P. Sartelle, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Phillipsburg, N.J., paperback, \$1.95, 28 pages.

Reviewed by Elco H. Oostendorp

On the back cover of this little book Dr. J.I. Packer is quoted as follows: "far and away the best study of its kind - simple, vivid, practical, pastoral - that I have read. . . . I commend it as intrinsically excellent (and) pastorally timely." This high praise is deserved. Although it contains nothing original in terms of arguments for or explanation of the Reformed position on the baptism of infants, it states that position with clarity and in a practical way that should make it valuable for pastors and parents. Occasionally one reads on bulletins that "the sacrament of infant baptism will be administered." Sartelle frequently speaks of the baptism of infants, a preferable way of bringing out that there is only one sacrament of Baptism, which means the same for both adults and infants. This booklet teaches with reference to relevant Scriptures that Baptism is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace and assures us of God's promises and reminds of our obligations. Highly recommended.

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