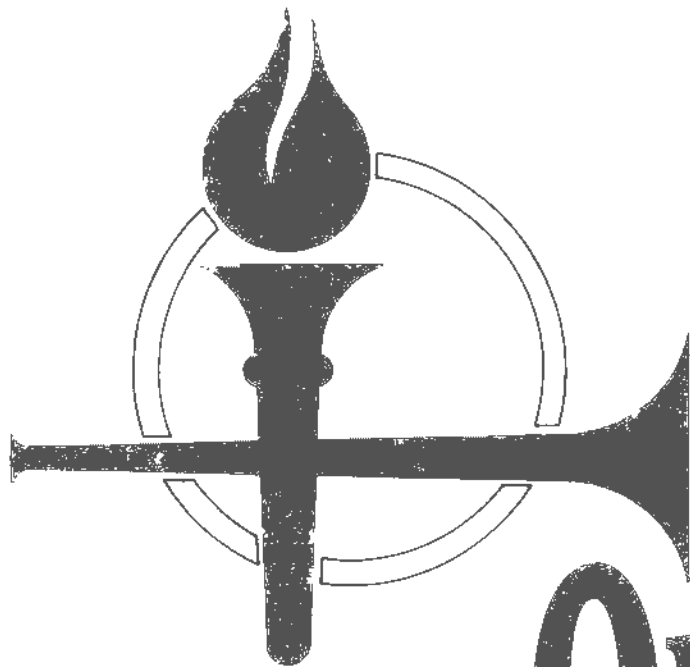




Outlook

*devoted to the exposition
and defense of the
reformed faith*

**Church History
in Preaching**

Black Monday

Jacob's Wrestling

JANUARY 1988

THE USE OF CHURCH HISTORY IN PREACHING

Peter Barnes

Traditionally, the four foundational subjects studied at any theological college have been the Old Testament, New Testament, Theology, and Church History. Furthermore, the Churches of the Reformation have traditionally centered on the importance of preaching in equipping the pastor to feed and lead the flock of God. This is as it should be—the apostle Paul declared that he came not to baptize but to preach the gospel [1 Cor. 1:17] and that it was through the message preached that sinners would be saved [1 Cor. 1:21]. Without a preacher, sinners simply will not hear the gospel [Rom. 10:14]. It is therefore not surprising that Paul could exhort young Timothy to be diligent in his study of the Scriptures that he might “rightly divide” or “correctly handle” the word of truth [2 Tim. 2:15]. Only when this was done would Timothy be able to obey the charge to “Preach the word!” and “Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” [2 Tim 4:2].

There is usually no difficulty in seeing the relevance of Old Testament, New Testament, and Theology in the training of a preacher. Any preacher who dares to step into a pulpit clearly requires a sound grasp of both Testaments together with an adequate theological basis, so that he can interpret the biblical texts in a faithful way. However, the study of Church History may not seem to pos-

sess the obvious justification that inheres in the other three subjects. One might be tempted to ask, “Why study Church History, for what use could it have in preaching God’s word?”

In order to begin to answer that question, one needs to recognize that the Bible itself frequently makes its message clearer by appealing to history. Perhaps the most oft-quoted text is Psalm 44:1, “We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what deeds You did in their days, in days of old.” But Psalm 44 is not alone in this regard. Psalm 77 raises the question as to whether God has cast off His people, but then the Psalmist recalled great episodes in Israel’s past which gave him hope for the future (note the change of direction in vv. 10-12). Psalm 78 also recounts God’s wondrous acts in Israel’s past, despite Israel’s rebellion and ingratitude.

Many other examples could be cited—Psalm 95 calls on Israel to worship the Lord, and warns against any hardness of heart, such as was evidenced in the wilderness as Israel made her way towards the Promised Land; Psalm 106 records Israel’s rebellious acts in history and contrasts these with God’s long-suffering grace; and Psalm 136 refers to God’s mercy illustrated in the way He treated Israel’s earlier history in order to rebuke and encourage their

contemporaries. In the eighth century B.C. Hosea referred to the corruption which prevailed, especially amongst religious leaders, as in the days of Gibeah [Hos. 9:9]. To us, this reference sounds somewhat obscure, but Hosea expected his hearers to pick up the allusion to Judges 19:22. Hosea went on to contrast God’s loving redemption of Israel in calling His people out of Egypt with Israel’s response in sacrificing to the Baals [Hos. 11:1-2]. A little over a century later, Jeremiah was to make potent use of the disparity between Israel’s earlier covenant faithfulness and her later idolatry [Jer. 2:2ff]. Jeremiah’s younger contemporary, Ezekiel, also delivered an historical oration which highlighted Israel’s rebellion against the God of the covenant [Ezek. 20:1-32].

It is thus quite in keeping with these Old Testament precedents that the same appeal in history is found in the New Testament. Stephen’s address to the council in Acts 7 is virtually a history lesson. Stephen spoke of the patriarchal period (vv. 2-16), the period under Moses and the reception of the law (vv. 17-43), and also to the tabernacle and the temple (vv. 44-50). The application which follows in verses 51-53 is based firmly upon the historical account of verses 2-50.

In 1 Corinthians 10:1-10 Paul points to the sacramental blessings which Israel of old had received

from Christ (vv. 1-4), but abused through their idolatry, immorality and murmuring (vv. 5-10). In verse 11 Paul tells the Gentile Christians at Corinth that these historical examples were recorded 169 for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come." The whole biblical approach to the use of history is in harmony with Paul's summary in Romans 15:4, "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." There is thus overwhelming biblical precedent for appealing to history in order to illustrate theological or moral truths.

But there is a need now to establish a continuity between the history that is recorded in the Bible and the history that is recorded elsewhere. Both histories exist on the same plane; both are speaking of real people and real events. Admittedly, there are most significant discontinuities—God has not worked through prophets and apostles since biblical times, and extra-biblical history is not recorded by holy men of God as they are moved by the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, there is much validity in Thomas Carlyle's assertion that Church History should be seen as "a sort of continued Holy Writ."¹ This is not meant in the sense that Christian historians write the history of the Church in the same way that Luke wrote the Acts of the Apostles. Rather, it is meant in the sense that Christian historians need to use principles derived from Scripture to write about events that actually happened and people that actually lived.

One of the most widespread perversions of the faith today is what Francis Schaeffer called an "upper storey" religion. According to this approach, faith is separated from its historical basis, and so becomes an optimistic leap without verification or communicable content.² The Bible is portrayed as a book about spiritual values, like Aesop's Fables, far removed from the actuality of science or history. Hence faith is seen as a kind of mysticism from the world of facts and events. Rudolf Bultmann, for example, wanted to retain what he regarded as the gospel message but reject its histori-

cal basis. In the pulpit, Bultmann would preach the fallenness of man, but not the historical fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden. He would proclaim the Easter faith, but not Christ physically risen from the dead. In fact, Bultmann considered that "the historical problem is

scarcely relevant to Christian belief in the resurrection."³

The consequences of such an approach is that there is a general feeling in the community that the Bible is not about history, and that the Christian faith has little to do with the real world. But God must be



THE OUTLOOK

(USPS 633-980)

Published Monthly

July-August Issue Combined

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

JOURNAL OF REFORMED FELLOWSHIP, INC.

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

BOARD OF TRUSTEES: Edward Knott, President; Jay Wesseling, Vice President; Arthur Bestman, Secretary; Peter Wobbema, Treasurer; John Velthouse, Ass't. Secretary Treasurer; John Engbers, Henry Hoeksema, Randal Lankheet, John Piersma, Berton Sevensma, Gerrit Sterk, Henry Vanden Heuvel, Thomas Vanden Heuvel, Syburn Voortman, Peter Yonker. Production Manager: Peter Wobbema.

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

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

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

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

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

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THE OUTLOOK

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seen as the God of history – the God who protected Judah from the Assyrians in 701 B.C. and the God who preserved Western Europe from the Nazis in 1939-45; the God who sent the Babylonians into Jerusalem in 587 B.C. and the God who has chastened His backsliding covenant people many times during the course of history.

Thus it will be that one of the major uses of Church History in preaching is that it will provide illustrations and parallels which will show that just as the Bible is concerned with history, so also the God of the Bible continues to concern Himself with history. Some examples may be given. About the year 622 B.C. the book of the law was found in the temple, and King Josiah was greatly used of God in turning the nation from idols and to the living God. True worship, according to God's revealed Word, was restored. The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century provides many parallels to Josiah's reformation—both were founded upon a rediscovery of God's inerrant Word, both sought to eradicate idolatry, and both sought to reinstitute true religion after a long period of decay and superstition.

The vision of revival in Ezekiel 37:1-14 might be illustrated by the evangelical awakening of the eighteenth century, as God's word and Spirit gave new life to a people who were spiritually dead. As a counterpoise to that, one might point to the collapsing Roman Empire as an illustration of the process of accelerating degradation, culminating in homosexuality, which Paul portrays in Romans 1:18-32. For that matter, our own tottering civilization will provide enough sad parallels. The use of such illustrations will reinforce in the minds of Christians the fact that God is the God of history, the One who acted in biblical times, who has acted since, and who acts today. Faith and fact will thus go hand-in-hand, unlike the case in neo-orthodoxy where there is a tragic separation.

Naturally, there are pitfalls of which the preacher must be aware if he is going to refer to Church History in proclaiming the Word of God. One of the most obvious is

today's ignorance of history. As one of the senses in which the word "history" may be used, C.S. Lewis referred to "that vague, composite picture of the past which floats, rather hazily, in the mind of the ordinary educated man"⁴ More amusingly, Sellar and Yeatman have portrayed history as "Memorable History," for history is "what you can remember."⁵ To a significant extent, sociology has supplanted history in universities and schools. In Oxford in the 1920s over 30% of undergraduates were reading history, but forty years later this percentage has almost halved.⁶

Names like Jonathan Edwards, John Calvin, Anselm, and Augustine can mean much to the preacher but little to many seated in the congregation. The preacher may be waxing eloquent on Martin Luther, and all the time some of his congregation think he is speaking of Martin Luther King. I recall bewildering one Bible College student in Vanuatu who, admittedly armed with a defective grasp of English, could not work out what Augustine (of Hippo) had to do with a hippopotamus! If a preacher is going to refer to historical characters and events, he needs to take the time to explain them simply and in enough detail, so that a person with no background in history will be able to follow what is being said. In all his works, whether biblical, theological or historical, J.C. Ryle was a master of forceful simplicity. Any preacher would be well advised to study his essays on historical subjects.⁷

Contrary to prevailing opinion, even in historical circles, it is appropriate to give some dates, so that people can begin to sort out an order of events in their minds. The modern distaste for dates is part of the reason for the vagueness that pertains to most people's grasp of history. Luther, Calvin, Wesley and Spurgeon all belong to some indefinite past, and few have much understanding of how they fit into the flow of history.

Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones never tired of telling us that "there is nothing next to the Bible which is more encouraging than to familiarize oneself with the great history of the church."⁸ To the Doctor's eloquent

testimony might be added that of Philip Schaff: "History is, and must ever continue to be, next to God's Word, the richest foundation of wisdom, and the surest guide to all successful practical activity."⁹ The Christian preacher has every reason to delve into church history and to share the fruit of his labours with his congregation. It will encourage him, it will help to train his people to think historically, and it will provide many apt and helpful illustrations of biblical truth. Provided he avoids the pitfalls noted above, the preacher may indeed "declare His deeds among the people" [Ps. 9:11]. Bolingbroke used to say that history is "philosophy teaching by example." The Christian can do better – history is theology teaching by example.

¹T. Carlyle "History as Biography" in F. Stern (ed) *Varieties of History from Voltaire to the Present*, Mac-Millan and Co., London, reprinted 1970, p. 98.

²e.g. F. Schaeffer *The God Who is There*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1970, pp. 52-3, 78-9.

³R. Bultmann "New Testament and Mythology" in H.W. Bartsch (ed) *Kerygma and Myth*, vol. 1, S.P.C.K., London 1957, p. 42.

⁴C.S. Lewis "Historicism" in C.T. McIntire (ed) *God, History, and Historians*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1977, p. 230.

⁵W.C. Sellar and R.J. Yeatman *1066 and All That*, Methuen, 1930, reprinted 1975, p. 5.

⁶R.W. Southern "The Contemporary Study of History" in F. Stern *op. cit.* p. 405.

⁷e.g. *Five English Reformers and Christian Leaders of the 18th Century*, both reprinted by the Banner of Truth.

⁸e.g. *Joy Unspeakable*, Kingsway Publications, Eastbourne, 1984, p. 124.

⁹Cited in Mark Noll et al *Christianity in America: A Handbook*, Lion, Herts, 1983, p. xix.

Reprinted from the Aug.-Sept. 1987 BANNER OF TRUTH with which I've had a reciprocal arrangement.

CREDIBILITY

PDJ

Editor Joel Belz in the October 26, 1987 *World* magazine calls attention to one of the most significant and likely-to-be overlooked aspects of the nomination and rejection of Judge Bork for the Supreme Court. It is the deliberate campaign of lying on the part of senators by which this rejection was achieved. Editor Belz observes that "lying, of course, has always been expected of politicians," but "the lies of the Bork bashers are of another sort. Here is a case of assassins lying in wait, cunningly calculating what kind of lies might be necessary to accomplish the evil they have in mind. What they have in mind is murder, and when they finish truth has fallen in the streets." (He is alluding to Isaiah 59:14.) He wrote, "I see the evening after evening as I continue to hear evildoers wickedly malign a good man." Yet he observes that his "main point...is not to demonstrate the vileness of the get-Bork-at-any-cost crowd. They will pay, somehow and someday." His main point is an important warning against all dishonesty as an offense against God, whether committed by Liberals or Conservatives, by others or by ourselves.

Let's consider this occurrence a little further. Why were not only Senators Kennedy and Biden, but

soon the majority of the whole Senate so determined that the Bork nomination, despite admittedly high qualifications, must be rejected, even if that necessitated a policy of deliberate slander? It was evident that the most intense opposition to Bork arose out of the fear that his presence in the Court might change the balance of that court and threaten to reverse the Court's legalization of abortions. The relatively new "right" to murder uncounted millions of unborn children must be preserved even if our nation's highest legislative body had to join in systematic criminal slander to do it! When we remember our Lord's identification of the "murderer from the beginning" and the "father of lies" (John 8:44), we do not have to ask any further about what inspiration and direction currently guides our highest legislative body (and court).

In view of such government developments as these, there is nothing mystifying either about the multiplying problems that threaten the nation. Currently some of the most obvious seem to be those of the economy—the stock market crash, followed by the steadily falling dollar. Why should that surprise anyone? What are those dollars

whose value continues to fall on world markets? They are simply government-authorized notes—promises to pay. When the government has generally for a half century, and particularly for the last seven years, been refusing to repay what it borrows, preferring to build up astronomical debts, why should anyone be surprised that the world's money exchangers more and more discount those paper promises? Thus, as we have been observing, God's judgments eventually overtake liars, murderers and thieves.

But isn't the gospel a message of God's compassion and mercy? Indeed it is. He spared even a repentant Nineveh, much to the exasperation of His prophet Jonah. But His call to repentance unto salvation, sparing even repentant Nineveh, must never be misread to mean that He will spare an *unrepentant* Washington. We must, with Paul, believe and preach "the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes." But that gospel has to be introduced and understood in view of the fact that "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:16, 18).

THIS GOD IS OUR GOD FOREVER AND EVER

PSALM 48

A new year lies ahead.

What will it bring? What will we experience, if we may live, in the year that lies ahead? Such questions almost automatically enter our minds, often accompanied with fear and anxiety. What will happen to the world, to our own families, to the church and to ourselves? These questions become more urgent when we think of the threatening world in which we live. Think, for example of the dreaded AIDS disease, of which we knew nothing several years ago. What will it do in the next 30 years if no cure is found? We are already told that it may become the worst "epidemic" that has been experienced in the world since the New Testament time. It is one of the signs of the times, a sign of judgment of God upon sin. 1988 is still under the constant threat of nuclear war. We are often reminded of the damage being done to our ecology. Think also of the growing millions of poor in the world, compared with the small minority of the rich. Consider the possible future great clash between the two. The world is becoming much smaller in this age of "communication explosion," as telephone, television, radio and computers bring the people of the world closer together. Important events almost anywhere in the world can be seen in our homes on the evening news. We become apprehensive

about the future of our children and grandchildren, unless the Lord returns soon.

Where can man find guidance and direction? Where can we find peace and security in this constantly shrinking, changing and godless world?

The answer has been the same throughout the ages—in the Word of God. The Word is infallible, inerrant and always dependable, for it is the Word of our unchangeable God. Let's consider Psalm 48 and learn from its inspired author how to face the future.

• • • • •

The Psalm can be divided into four sections. We quote the first one, found in verses 1-3.

"Great is the Lord, and most worthy of praise in the city of our God, his holy mountain. It is beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth. Like the utmost heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion, the city of the great king. God is in her citadels; he has shown himself to be her fortress."

The Psalm became well known in Israel in later years. The Israelites were called to go to Jerusalem three times per year for the celebration of feasts. It became custom, we read in history accounts, to sing songs as they walked and traveled together. This was one of the Psalms which they sang.

MEDITATION

John Blankespoor

The city of Jerusalem was built on Mt. Zion surrounded by a high, thick wall. This made the city almost invulnerable against the enemies of God's people. On this wall were towers and fortresses. These "bulwarks" were enclosed structures in which the soldiers could take defensive positions against the attackers from the outside. There must have been many of them.

Within the city of Jerusalem was, of course, the temple. Here God dwelt in the presence of the cloud in the Holy of Holies. This cloud had been with Israel in the wilderness and led them through the wilderness. For the people of Israel the great protective wall became symbolic of their real security, the presence and protection of their great God dwelling in the temple within the city. The heart of the temple was, of course, God dwelling there through the sacrifices that were brought. These constantly pointed to the Christ who was to come. This great city with its protection became the joy of God's people.

Great is the Lord we read. This great God of the fortified Jerusalem is their Lord. The name Lord, formerly also translated Jehovah, is the God of the covenant. Lord is His covenant name. As Lord in Christ He is their faithful God, assuring them of His promises, power and love. To the believing Israelite this

fortified city, with its temple, was a visible, tangible evidence of the power and protection of this great God. The sight of this city where God had revealed Himself and centered his worships gave him a sense of security.

We who live in 1988 know much more about God than did the Old Testament saints. With His complete Bible revelation, we know much more about Him and His greatness in His works in history and the church. We know about His marvelous love in the gift of His Son. We also see His power over death in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We know more about God's greatness with all the discoveries of His greatness in nature—not the least, the almost unimaginable size of the universe. Today the Christian can surely say, "Great is our Lord, and most worthy of praise." Our God is Lord, He rules over all. He causes all things to happen according to His will. Try to say this with the psalmist, in a spirit of adoration and awe, "Great is our Lord."

• • • • •

"When the kings joined forces, when they advanced together, they saw her and were astonished, they fled in terror. Trembling seized them there, pain like that of a woman in labor. You destroyed them like ships of Tarshish shattered by an east wind. As we have heard so have we seen in the city of the Lord Almighty, in the city of our God; God makes her secure forever."

These words refer to something that happened to Israel in times past. No one knows exactly when. Some commentators think it was in the days of Hezekiah when he was attacked by an enemy, perhaps Assyria. When the attackers saw for the first time this wall with its many bulwarks, they were gripped with fear. What would happen to them if they would try to attack such a fortified city? God can and does destroy Israel's enemies like an east wind destroys the ships of Tarshish. Although the ships of Tarshish might be some of the largest and strongest ships on the sea, they were no match for the powerful east wind. The God of Israel, of the people living in this

city, is so strong and mighty. Centuries later Luther wrote a song about our God being "a mighty fortress." Think of how God destroyed the army of the Egyptians in the Red Sea and how one angel killed 185,000 Assyrians in one night. And above all, remember how Christ defeated the devil. Christ said that He saw the devil falling from heaven like lightning. As Paul, wrote, God, "is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20).

• • • • •

"Within your temple O God, we meditate on your unfailing love. Like your name, O God, your praise reaches to the ends of the earth. Your right hand is filled with righteousness. Mount Zion rejoices, the villages of Judah are glad because of your judgments" (Vss 9-11).

The psalmist speaks of the loving kindness of this great God of Israel. He shows love and mercy to sinners. Think of the millions of sacrifices that were brought in the temple, which all pointed to the sacrifice of Christ. One can hardly imagine how much blood flowed throughout the years. It all speaks of the infinite value of the blood of Christ. In that blood the Lord shows that He is righteous, that sin has to be paid for, that He in love sent His Son to save us. The judgment, for His people, is past. In righteous judgment, God often protected His people by bringing destruction upon their enemies. Many signs that the Lord Jesus listed regarding the end of the world are signs of coming judgment. But the judgment for His people is past because of His lovingkindness in Christ. And because He is righteous Jesus will come back someday. Because we are right in Him He will deliver us completely from sin and give us new bodies in a new heaven and earth.

Let us with the inhabitants of Jerusalem rejoice with gratitude in this Lord.

• • • • •

"Walk about Zion, go around her, count her towers, consider well her

ramparts, view her citadels, that you may tell of them to the next generation. For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide unto the end" vss 12-14.

In summary the author tells the people to walk around the city and take a "second" and "third" look at that big wall with all its towers. Doing this, they will be impressed anew with how great He is, How great is His protection of His people. And that His lovingkindness and righteousness are equally great.

How blessed are the people who enjoy such Divine protection. They must tell this to the next generation. Who wouldn't want his children to share in such blessings? They, too, must learn to know this God with all of His protective love and care.

Let us walk around Jerusalem and count those towers at the beginning of another year. "Count those towers" by listening to Isaiah when he says: Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket, they are regarded as dust on the scales. "Count those towers" as you listen to Paul, "O the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God." "Count those towers" by listening to the psalmist when he says that earth and heaven were made by the mere speech of His mouth. Consider also what the Heidelberg Catechism says about His providence: "Providence is the almighty and ever present power of God by which He upholds heaven and earth, and all creatures, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty, all things in fact come to us not by chance, but from His fatherly hand."

Why do all this? Why count all these towers? Why should we consider His greatness with the beginning of another year? Because this God will be our God forever and ever. Imagine what this means from now on and forever He will be our great and gracious Lord. That includes the rest of our lives. God says, "That's my promise to you." Do we really believe this? Let's say and sing with the psalmist, "Great is our Lord."

REFLECTIONS ON SYNOD 1987

Henry Vander Kam

It takes some time before the decisions of the most recent Synod can be judged by the church. Often there is one particular issue which has demanded the lion share of the Synod's time and has also been debated pro and con in the church papers before Synod meets. This past Synod had quite a number of important issues to deal with, but not one of overriding importance. I believe that there are certain patterns which have been disclosed by the actions of the Synod of 1987. We have had some very excellent articles of information on the actions of the past Synod in the religious press, but it is also well to get a certain amount of commentary on what has been decided.

One committee reported to this Synod concerning the often discussed matter of the calling of ministers in our denominations. There have always been certain weaknesses in our system of calling although the committee stated that "normally it presents no problems." In fact, even though there are weaknesses in the method, our system also has certain strengths which may not be lost. In our system of calling, both the congregation and the minister have freedom! The congregation may call whomever it pleases and the minister who is called may either accept or decline the call. These are freedoms which may not be lost. In many churches

these freedoms do not exist. The matter of calling has been studied time and again in the history of the church but no one was ever willing to tamper with the system we have.

The committee which reported to the Synod of 1987 was willing to "take the bull by the horns!" They came with "a bold suggestion." This is putting it mildly. The committee proposed that Synod "allow" a church to issue a "term call," i.e., a call for a specific period of time. Where our method "normally presented no problems" the abnormal is now addressed. The advisory committee at Synod expressed the wish that more attention had been paid to the work of the Holy Spirit! Is this "remedy" not like killing a fly with a sledge hammer?

You have noticed, of course, that a church is *allowed* to issue a term call. It doesn't have to! Here we have another sizeable step in the direction of congregationalism. Personally I also wonder if this will not be an excellent way of paving the road toward the acceptance of women preachers. Why not try it for a couple years!!! As I say, this is a personal view, but is it so far fetched? We have been on a steady course since the adoption of Report 44 on the Nature of Office and Ordination by the Synod of 1973 of "hollowing out" the offices in the church! This is

a serious matter. The office of the minister of the gospel is no longer considered to be a calling, it is a job! We give "tenure" to our professors and, I believe, rightly so. However, the ministry of the Word is denigrated again and again. It has been a one-way street since 1973. I will return to this a little later.

It is only three years ago that Synod decided it was proper to elect women to the office of deacon. Many thought this wasn't so bad because this was not a ruling office(?). It has become well known that there are some of our churches who already have women elders and the Synod of 1987 was faced with the question whether or not a woman ought to be allowed to become a candidate for the ministry. This is going fast!!! Her appeal was turned down. But this is not the end of the matter. She has appealed to the judiciary code committee. It will be very interesting to see what this committee reports at the proper time. Although it was turned down (the appeal), nevertheless there were 22 registered negative votes!

Another item in this same connection was the decision of Synod to appoint a committee to study the matter of "Headship" once more, as it pertains to the church. It is not long ago that a committee reported to Synod on this matter and Synod agreed that the man's headship is

found in both the home and the church. Well, let that headship in the home stand — that won't hurt anybody. But, don't you see, if that headship is also found in the church, women will not be able to serve in at least some of the offices! It is going fast!!! Is anyone listening? The advisory committee which dealt with this matter seemed to be somewhat disturbed. This committee speaks of the goodness of the Lord on the decision which was taken in 1984 (allowing women as deacons). The same committee makes mention of the Pastoral Letter sent by the officers of the Synod of 1985 to the churches being used to maintain the peace and unity in our denomination. These words were written right after the committee had stated that "there is serious unrest in our churches. Consciences are troubled." It doesn't seem as though the peace and unity in our churches is too strong. Indeed, the Lord has been good to our denomination *in spite of* the decision of 1984, which, as I had informed Synod in a Minority Report in 1981, was unscriptural. A pastoral letter, very nicely written, does not take away the effects of wrong decisions!

There was also the matter of restructuring the workings of the various agencies of the denomination, commonly called "Vision 21." I imagine this is necessary. Not many years ago we used to hear of the evil of Boardism — we are far beyond that. Today we have a bureaucracy which is growing by leaps and bounds. We will have to spend between three and four million dollars to house all these growing numbers. The bureaucracy is taking over. It can only increase in numbers. The church and its business is now pretty well controlled by the bureaucrats. Unless we institute "Particular Synods" some time soon the problem will continue to grow. It seems strange that there were so many overtures against Vision 21, but Synod, though not implementing it as yet, goes along with the general concept. A "Super" board should make for more efficiency. Face-tiously I would say, if you want the efficiency of the business community in the church, why not send proxy

ballots to all the members. Then Synod would not even have to meet!

The things mentioned above are all evidence of tremendous change in the affairs of the church. I have lost count of all the articles of the Church Order which have been changed by the last four Synods. Woe to anyone who would write a commentary on the Church Order! It would be out of date next year. Of course, the Church Order may be changed! This is no infallible document, but it has turned into a Saturday night massacre in recent years!

There are some things which do not change. Regardless of the debatable nature of the matter, certain things are "set in concrete." Dennis and Annette Bredeweg appealed to Synod of 1985 to be allowed not to pay their quota to an agency of the denomination which they felt they could not support. Their request was denied. One delegate to that Synod recorded this protest: "Please note my protest against requiring any individual to contribute to a church cause against his will." The Synod of 1987 was again asked about this matter but the answer was the same. When Synod has taken a position, regardless of its rightness in the estimation of any particular member, all must pay! If this is not dictatorial, what is? I thought in my naiveté that it was an inalienable right of every person to give to the cause he desired! I believe the position of Synod is unbiblical, unreformed, and even unamerican!

I will just touch on one other item in which there is no change. Overture 22 asked Synod to revoke the rule that students graduating from other seminaries must spend one year at Calvin Seminary. Synod did not agree to revoke this rule. In brief this is the history of this rule. It was entirely logical when this rule was adopted. It goes all the way back to 1900, but it was especially in 1924 that the rule was spelled out very definitely. There was good reason for this rule. The Synod of 1922 had stated that "students who have not studied at definitely Reformed institutions must pursue the course of study of the last year at our Theologi-

cal School." This decision corrected and amplified the decision of 1900 which said that students who had studied at *other* theological schools were to have one year at Calvin Theological Seminary with no year specified. Synod of 1922 gave as one of its grounds that the Reformed character of many theological schools was difficult to determine. The Synod of 1924 reiterated this position because many students had gone to various seminaries after the Janssen case of 1922. The rule was also reasonable because there was no other seminary in the country which taught Chr. Ref. Church History, Chr. Ref. Church Polity or the preaching and teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism.

Now there is a Seminary (MARS) which teaches the above three subjects, and it is a seminary whose Reformed character is not difficult to determine! Overture 22 asked that an equivalency exam be required of those who had studied at other seminaries. In other words, they should not be let in the back door! Let us be fully persuaded that they are competent! Synod's answer was "No." The grounds are weak. Synod really gave no clear answer to the overture. This is a sore spot and will not go away!

A similar problem surfaced in the Netherlands just over 100 years ago. Dr. Abraham Kuyper had started the Free University in 1880. In the year 1885 the first theological candidate appeared. This was Mr. J.H. Houtzagers. He had finished his theological studies *and now they couldn't get him ordained!* Why not? The candidate had to come from Leiden, Utrecht or Groningen. These were the theological schools of De Hervormde Kerk. Finally the congregation of Kootwijk called this candidate. Dr. Vanden Bergh, a neighboring pastor, agreed with Kootwijk. He was examined and then ordained. Kootwijk and Voorthuizen, where Dr. Vanden Bergh was the pastor, were the first congregations to break with De Hervormde Kerk. The Doleantie followed in 1886.

In light of all the above, what must be done? This is the question which

is being asked more and more. There is the possibility of doing nothing. But how long is the conservative element in the church going to be able to take it? Do you really believe that we will not have women elders and ministers? The question is not *if?* but *when?* Everyone is hesitant to split the church. I refer you to the article which I wrote in *the Outlook* of March 1986. We are *not* splitting the church—the Synod of 1984 did that! We need not join others—we are simply to go calmly forward as the Chr. Ref. Church!

In the above mentioned article I estimated that within five years we would have women in all the offices.

There are only three and a half years left on that schedule. I am not revising it. It was a conservative estimate. Some say that it cannot happen because the rules are against it. When the other two offices are attacked it will be all new material, and, therefore, acceptable.

There seems to be no conception of the meaning of the term *church*! As a result, there is little conception of either the meaning of office or of worship. A leader publicly denies the validity of the articles of the Belgic Confession on the Church. An Episcopalian priest is allowed to occupy one of our pulpits...and nothing is done!

All these are serious matters that call for action. The liberal element in the church has won the recent battles. It is becoming a juggernaut. Can anything stop it? Will we have anything left to bequeath to our children and children's children?

Winston Churchill once said: I do not plan to preside over the dissolution of her majesty's empire. Are you planning to help pay for the ruin of the church?

Rev. H. Vander Kam is a retired CR pastor living at Orange City, Iowa.

BLACK MONDAY: A SIGN OF THE TIMES

R.E. Knodel, Jr.

The recent panic on Wall Street, wherein the market lost a fifth of its value (hundreds of billions of dollars) in one day, tells us almost more than we want to know about modern man and his times. It reveals a society which glories in its own sophistication, but which in reality has had its intellectual bankruptcy laid bare. Even as brokers were reassuring their clients with soothing clichés, the free-falling market was revealing the utter error of their ways. The power of consensus broke, and panic ensued.

Since this makes up the social context of today's church, we can legitimately ask whether or not she is afflicted with the same kinds of foundational weaknesses. And we would say "Yes," that this telltale event reveals the church's loss of faith as

well as rationality. She too has her brokers saying "Peace, peace...." But as the Scriptures say, there is no real peace when the underlying supports consist of half-truths and error. Can our Black Monday be far away?

Confusion Threatens

This phenomenon threatens both the church's theology and her ability to apply it. Symptomatic of this disease, men even seem to have lost the capacity to look at words and sentences (or events and trends) and understand them correctly. And, as has happened time and time again historically, oligarchies or bureaucratic fraternities have leapt in to fill the resultant theological vacuum. If God's Word won't rule, men are all too willing!

Damnably, such groups are able to

say that black is white, or that the word "No" really means "Yes," and still draw affirmative nods from the crowd. But while this simple ignorance may be able to perpetuate itself for some time, as the Scriptures say, all error has its day of reckoning. Their "feet will slip" and they will "fall headlong."

And when people who are at ease with a herd mentality suddenly find their folly discovered, panic overcomes them. From the results of the recent crash, we can see what happened next. They ran this way and that, with bonds, futures, precious metals prices etc. gyrating wildly as the herd irrationally and momentarily changed its choices. They were utterly lost.

God predicts this of those who scoff at His Word. He says that there

is a day coming when He will send a "famine....of the *hearing* of the words of the Lord." In that day, "men will stagger back and forth...and to and fro, looking for God's Word—but they will not find it!" (Amos 8:11-12).

The Church's Shaky Indicators

In the church there are many tell-tale signs of this trouble. As we said, an early indicator can be seen in the fact that we discount what people say today. And if words, which are *foundational* to theology are discounted, what hope does the queen of the sciences (ie. theology) have?

Jesus didn't feel this way. He commanded, "Let your yea be yea and your nay be nay," and warned that even our "idle words" would be judged. But modern reformed Christians question whether it *really* matters what people say. And so they admit people to their churches, sacraments, seminaries and offices whose words are most deficient.

They claim that what really matters is the *psychology behind the words*. If the person "loves" in some undefined and ambiguous way, then that person is "orthodox." He's fit for offices, and maybe even for the "fraternity." Likewise, if the person doesn't have "love," then he has disqualified himself.

Because this mentality is mystical (ie. not anchored to objective words) it's vicious. Ultimately, it can be as arbitrary as it desires! It has no checks. It can say one thing and mean something else, or say nothing and yet claim to have said something. It may be quasi "conservative" for a time, and then it can moderate or become moderate or become outwardly liberal. But at root it was "liberal" all along because instead of being tied to God's objective Word, it was tethered to the subjective mind of man for its authority.

This syndrome has led to a general de-emphasis of the church's subscription vows (ie. allegiance to the church's authoritative "words"). Confessionalism is at its breaking point. Many sessions and presbyteries don't care what their confessions (ie. the Scriptures) say. They are their own "confession" and they will do what they want.

Some Christian Reformed churches ordain women, regardless of what the Heidelberg catechism says. And we know of a least one Mid-Western OPC church which distributes communion to its children already. The same can be said for charismatism, dispensationalism, and the principles of liberalism. "When the spirit leads (as the liberal CRC men are wont to say), who can stand before it?"

The Perception of the Seminaries?

Would it surprise us if our seminaries were similarly afflicted? Soon, *Journey* plans to publish criticisms of some theological works. The words are down in black and white. But according to an unsolicited response by one author's protege, the words of the mentor just don't mean what they say. "He," the student said, "was just making a hypothetical case." The words, he is saying, can be discounted because of their *intention*.

In the area of biblical studies, we see the loss of theology wreaking havoc. For example, many modern reformed teachers quote people like liberal James Barr (cf. an English biblical scholar) as if they were God's greatest gift to conservatism. For the uninitiated, James Barr has done much writing wherein the errors of the German liberals found the *Theological Wordbook of the New Testament* have been catalogued. So, evangelical and reformed scholars point with glee to Barr as if he's really their friend. His books are used in their seminary classrooms, often without any criticism at all.

The problem is that Barr's presuppositions are basically liberal, just like those who wrote the *Wordbook*. His criticisms are intramural and not substantive. He doesn't believe in inerrancy. The Bible, for him, is not the material cause of reformation. In reality he's an out and out naturalist (ie. the *real* authority for him is his own mind)...albeit of a slightly more "conservative" stripe than the Germans.

But just as in Wall Street's blindness, these danger signals don't matter, because our earlier mentioned "fraternity" has decided that such men are perfectly "o.k." They sense

a commonality of "spirit" which legitimizes their errant theological position.

What has happened is that somewhere along the line, our scholars accepted liberalism's charge that the orthodox line of argumentation by men such as B.B. Warfield and E.J. Young was irrelevant. (I can remember hearing such criticisms by evangelicals at my own seminary alma mater.) Deciding this, they have left those historic fields and have wandered over onto the Astroturf of liberalism.

In other words, they're debating the issues the way they would be debated at places like Harvard and Yale. Graciously we would grant that such men, "in their hearts," hold to Christ. But they haven't yet realized they're already playing on the other field.

The PCA's Twist

The Presbyterian Church in America has developed its own unique twist on this phenomenon, which has greatly affected American Presbyterianism. For them, mysticism's fraternity is found in the "big churches." When the big churchmen speak, it's just like the big brokerage houses on Wall Street. "After all, they *must* know how to search out the golden mean, for "They got *large*, didn't they?" And contrariwise, how can those little-church "TR's" really know what's right? They're so small!

The problem for the big churchmen is that the TR's are looking at the *Scriptures* and saying, "But God's Word says." And even while they may not always be right, at least their basic orientation is substantial. History bears this out. Christ's "little ones," (ie. those who cling to the "insignificant" Scriptures instead of the powers of the world) survive, regardless of temporal appearances!

At one time in history, heretical Arianism held all the big churches. It was also the "most missionary-minded," with its missionaries penetrating Northern Europe. It occupied all the fields. But God was in control, so when Athanasius began to preach truth, the big churchmen crumbled. It took a hundred years, but ultimately error had its own "Black Monday," and truth won out.

The same could be said of Augustine's battle with Pelagianism. The latter said the former just didn't understand the Scriptures. But they and their twisted exegesis perished in the refreshing rains of God's sovereign truth.

We can see the same from more contemporary history. Many churches have thought they could maintain orthodoxy by their evangelical (heart) commitment rather than by their heartfelt commitment to objective creeds and confessions. An excellent example is the old (psalm singing) United Presbyterian Church of men like Addison Leitch and John Gerstner.

Creedalists like these latter two men were perceived as *reactionary*. They just didn't *understand*. And so the U.P. church set itself on a course which focused almost exclusively on missions and evangelism.

This is precisely the course of the PCA's big churchmen. The problem is that the devil consumed the old U.P.'s. He scoffed at their naivete. Within a few short years (ie. 1958)

they were gobbled up by the old (Northern) Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. They denied what God said, and so paid the price for it by marrying the beast of liberalism. The moderating U.P.'s thought they could "welch" *just a bit* on what God has said (just enough to be successful and avoid controversies), and survive. But they didn't. And Black Monday came. And they were wiped out.

The Church's Black Monday?

The demise of the old U.P. Church occurred only thirty years ago. Yet we are so historically illiterate that even that lesson is too distant for us. With our biblical and historical shortsightedness, we think we can mock God again. We think we can mediate from our Calvinistic confessionalism and prosper. We pretend that we can trade truth and buy her back again when we might have the "need." But the bear always lurks around the corner of such a strategy.

If we do not humble ourselves before God's Word, our churches

will soon bear His wrath in even more dramatic ways than heretofore. And we, both leaders and people, will look back and ask, "When did we go wrong? Why did we waste our money building another ungodly liberal church?"

In truth we have no choice. God has shown his power over the affairs of men. It is time to admit our failures and return to His Word and a straight-forward understanding of it. It is time to call for His Word as a reforming agent over our lives. It is time to speak honestly, recognizing the significance of our words. It is time to take our theology seriously, and cease our scoffing at its application. In other words, brothers and sisters, it's time to change. Before the worst occurs.

This editorial is reprinted from the Nov.-Dec. '87 JOURNEY MAGAZINE, with which we have a reciprocal arrangement. Rev. R.E. Knodel is an Orthodox Presbyterian pastor at Lynchburg, Virginia.

WHO AM I?

I am an important person in the Bible because more was written to me than any other man in the Bible. My doctor friend wrote an orderly account so that I "may know with certainty of the things" that have been taught. I must have been important because even such a distinguished man as a doctor, a fast friend of the great apostle Paul, called me "most excellent." Therefore, some have speculated that I

was a Roman official or at least wealthy. The translation of my name means "one who loves God." Who am I?

After Judas Iscariot fell headlong and died a gruesome death, the apostles decided to fill out their ranks with "one of the men who have been with us the whole time the

Glenn P. Palmer

Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection." After prayer, they cast lots and chose me. Who am I?

Lk. 1:1-4
Acts 1:1
Acts 1:18-26

Catechism Preaching

N.D. Kloosterman

ASSUMPTIONS AND METHODS IN CATECHISM PREACHING

Few among us would deny the urgent relevance of appeals to preach the Catechism faithfully and regularly. For those committed to God's Truth and God's people, this requirement is more than a duty—it is a joy. We can therefore be deeply grateful to those who have recently sounded that appeal in *The Outlook* of October, 1987: Revs. Peter De Jong, Randal Lankheet, Jay Wesseling and Mr. Sjirk Bajema. Each of the articles is of a different character, the one more general, the other more pastoral, yet another more theoretical.

The article written by Rev. Lankheet, entitled "Two Ways to Write a Catechism Sermon," is a bit more theoretical in nature. Because we are currently teaching a course entitled "Catechism Sermon," dealing with the *theory and method* of Catechism preaching, we thought it might be helpful to analyze and learn from Rev. Lankheet's remarks. Because we'd like to give our supporters a "taste" of what goes on in our classroom, we thought it might be appropriate to invite you into a "class discussion." That's what these remarks that follow sought to provide: an opportunity to reflect on and discuss how our students will one day preach the Catechism. All the area pastors were invited to audit the course (Wednesday morn-

ings, one hour) and, to our delight, several accepted the invitation.

What follows, then, is intended to elicit your discussion, your awareness of method and assumptions, as those who with us long for a revived love of the Lord's truth confessed in the Heidelberg Catechism. Our comments will exhibit disagreement at some points; but this does not displace our appreciation for the author—after all, he has "laid himself on the line" for our instruction and growth, for which we owe him our gratitude.

THE ARGUMENT

(words within quotation marks are taken from the article.)

The problem reflected in the title, "Two Ways to Write a Catechism Sermon," seems to be a common dilemma facing Catechism preachers: Do I preach Scripture, or do I preach the Catechism? Presumably it surfaces when the preacher has to "decide on a Bible text." According to Rev. Lankheet, this difficulty becomes a "tension between a set of questions and answers in the catechism and what is found in a particular Scripture text." This tension presents the preacher with a choice: "either he will have to stay with the catechism answers and develop his main points from them (and bring in various Scriptures

along the way) or he will have to go with a particular Bible text (and bring in the catechism where it fits the exposition of this text)."

The author explains and illustrates the "catechism-text" and the "Scripture-text" methods of writing Catechism sermons. These consist basically of explaining either the Catechism statements or a Scripture portion. The writer concludes by expressing his personal preference for the "Scripture-text method," citing the following advantages:

1. Few preachers have been able to master the catechism-text method.
2. The Scripture-text method helps the preacher avoid inserting his personal opinions into preaching, to the neglect, even compromise of the authority of the Word of God. It pays "strict adherence to the Bible text, following the words and phrases of a specific verse."
3. Listeners desire preaching that leads them through the Bible passage, verse by verse, phrase by phrase.

OUR ANALYSIS

1. That the dilemma—difficulty—tension discussed by the author *does* exist for many Catechism preachers cannot be denied. *Whether* such a tension between preaching the text

of either the Catechism or the Scripture *should* exist, can be argued.

Derived perhaps from the author's personal experience, perhaps from the sources underlying his analysis, this "tension" overlooks the significant wording of the Church Order itself in Article 54.b., which requires that

at one of the services each Lord's day, the minister shall ordinarily preach the Word as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism, following its sequence (emphasis added). We might put the emphasized words this way: the content of the Catechism sermon is to be *the-Word-as-summarized-in-the-Heidelberg-Catechism*.

That is to say: What is to be explained is the "sum of Christian doctrine" confessed by the church in her Catechism. This point and its implications for Catechism preaching have been explained and defended extensively by Dr. Peter Y. De Jong in three significant articles entitled "Comments on Catechetical Preaching," published recently in *Mid-America Journal of Theology*.

It seems to us that the "dilemma" of preaching the "Bible text" or the "Catechism text" results from an improper *disjunction* (separation, breaking apart) between God's Word and the church's confession.

Let's try to isolate this unfortunate separation (in method) by asking: When we preach Catechism sermons, are we preaching *the Bible's doctrine* or *the church's doctrine*? The careful reader will see immediately that this is a false dilemma: the church's doctrine *is* the Bible's doctrine! The contents of the church's confessions *are* the content of Scripture!

But already we can see our readers becoming nervous: What? Are you equating the creeds with the Bible?

Let me hurry to qualify this claim as follows:

1. The *authority* of the church's doctrine derives from, rests upon and is subservient to the authority of the Bible's doctrine. But this is not to say that its authority is less real or genuine. The Scripture is the *norma normans* (norming norm; the "original straight-edge ruler"), while the confessions are the *norma normata* (normed norm; the "ruler

made according to the original straight-edge ruler"). The confessions are a "ruler" made straight (derived from) the Straightest Ruler: Scripture. *But they are both NORMA: both RULERS!*

2. The *content* of the Scripture is of necessity broader, deeper and richer than that of the church's confessions. But: to preach the *content* of the Catechism is to preach the *content* of Scripture — not its exhaustive content, but the content of Scripture nonetheless. The content of the Catechism, indicated by phrases like "the Word as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism" and "the sum of Christian doctrine," is a *subset* of a set, the latter being the truths of Scripture, the former being the truths of the confession.

This claim and its necessary qualifications do not yet answer the question: How must the Catechism be preached? But it does help to avoid the false dilemma of preaching *either* Scripture *or* the Catechism, of either "pulling in" the Catechism to illustrate Scripture exposition or "pulling in" Scripture to illustrate Catechism statements. (Moreover, we can now also avoid that disjunction widely abused by many who seem not to like Catechism preaching: that "choice" between "preaching the Word of God" or "preaching the word of man.")

3. All of this is not to deny the need for the Catechism preacher to demonstrate the "scripturality" of the Catechism's explanation of biblical truth. But he need no longer be unsure of his method when he allows the Catechism questions and answers (Yes: questions too!) to *govern* his sermon outline, content and progress, since the Catechism's content is (part of) the Bible's content.

He can begin now to understand and communicate to the congregation that Catechism preaching isn't a matter of sewing a garment from two kinds of material — say, cotton and wool. The theme of the Catechism *is* the theme of Scripture: my only comfort in terms of my sin, my salvation and my service! The Catechism's explanation of good works *is* the Scripture's teaching about good works — their origin, their purposes and their necessity (Lord's Day 32).

So many of the questions and answers are nothing less than exposition of the Scripture itself! One need think only of the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer, in addition to the frequent quotations of Scripture itself in the body of the Catechism.

Our difficulty, then, in blending together the Catechism and Scripture as sources for Catechism preaching is that, like a delicious soufflé, preaching the Word of God summarized in the Heidelberg is too rich for our tastebuds! It is too deep, too broad for us to comprehend even in one sermon on a single Lord's Day! The diligent Catechism preacher is beset by at least two temptations: 1) to become too detailed in Catechism preaching; and 2) to become too general.

4. Because a discussion of how to escape these temptations would require too much space (you're welcome to enroll in "PP 311 - Catechism Sermon!"), we shall not expand on this any further. Instead, we should like to respond to what Rev. Lankheet perceives as the advantages of the "Scripture-text" method of Catechism preaching.

ADVANTAGE # 1: Few preachers have been able to master the catechism-text method.

The difficulty of a method should not be advanced as a reason for adopting an easier method. One could then argue that since few preachers have been able to master the thematic (or: textual-reconstructive) method of "free text" preaching, we should recommend topical preaching. The basis for recommending a homiletical method should be the validity of its principles, not the ease of its practice.

But is it true that few preachers have been able to master the method of preaching sermons governed in their outline, content and progress by the Catechism?

Perhaps this is true in North America, though it's difficult to prove. But in my study I have more than twenty volumes of Catechism sermons, in addition to a file-drawer full of photocopied Catechism sermons, that I would consider worthy

examples of that kind of Catechism preaching. Some are in English, most are in Dutch. Some of these come from the pens of those Rev. Lankheet mentioned, and others: B. Holwerda, K.J. Popma, H. Veldkamp, K. Schilder, K. Dijk, J.W. Tunderman, S.G. De Graaf, K. Deddens, D.K. Wielenga, and more. Even a rudimentary knowledge of Dutch will open up goldmines of insight and interpretation! And the effort invested in either teaching yourself Dutch or dusting it off will yield rich dividends!

ADVANTAGE # 2: The Scripture-text method helps the preacher avoid inserting his personal opinions into preaching, to the neglect, even compromise of the authority of the Word of God. It pays "strict adherence to the Bible text, following the words and phrases of a specific verse."

We have attempted to demonstrate that this imposes upon Catechism preaching an improper disjunction (separation) between the Bible's doctrine and the Catechism's doctrine.

Moreover, if strict adherence to the Bible text restrains a preacher from inserting his personal opinions into preaching, it may be argued with equal validity that strict adherence to the Catechism's text does the same.

The point being made in either case is that strict adherence to a text restrains the preacher from "sharing" his own personal opinions and experiences — something absolutely contraband on the pulpit, about which we heartily agree with Rev. Lankheet! But to assume that adherence to a Bible text is better than adherence to the Catechism's text impales us once again on the horns of a false dilemma.

ADVANTAGE # 3: Listeners desire preaching that leads them through the Bible passage, verse by verse, phrase by phrase.

Listeners with notepads in hand will hear the preacher "expound God's Word" when the Catechism governs the sermon's outline, content and progress. Again: we must be careful not to suggest that, if the Catechism is opened on the laps of pewsitters and if it is faithfully ex-

plained in the pulpit, then we won't be "hearing the Word."

If members of the congregation sit with the Catechism open before them — as many listeners in fact do, but nowadays to their increasing frustration — and if preachers diligently proclaim the "sum of Christian doctrine" which is the Heidelberg Catechism, then we will all hear "the Word as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism" proclaimed with fresh enthusiasm, coherent exposition and challenging application.

CONCLUSION

Let us repeat: we are grateful to Rev. Lankheet for publishing some thoughts on his preferred method of Catechism preaching. It is our intention, our hope and prayer that the above comments, by no means exhaustive or complete, will further our awareness and discussion of Catechism preaching as, indeed, it is: *the administration of the Word of God*.

R. Lankheet

RESPONSE TO REV. KLOOSTERMAN

The October issue of *The Outlook* brought together several articles around one theme. The Board of Reformed Fellowship intends to publish more thematic issues from time to time.

With Rev. Kloosterman I am grateful that we had the opportunity to write, to publish, and to read several

articles dealing with catechism preaching. May our interaction with one another contribute to better catechism preaching today. As Rev. Kloosterman indicates, his response to my article should not be seen as a disagreement about the necessity of catechism preaching. On this we are fully agreed. Where we seem to have some disagreement is on the con-

struction of the catechism sermon—how the catechism sermon is to be structured.

In my article, I tried to persuade the readers that in preparing a catechism sermon, the preacher first ought to locate a pertinent Bible text related to the particular catechism question and answer for that week. He ought to study that Biblical text with all the tools at his disposal—lexicons, commentaries, sermonic helps, etc. From that study of the Biblical text, a sermon outline gradually will emerge. He then will incorporate the catechism materials into his sermon outline to explain the Bible text further or to assist in the application of that text to the faith and life of the church members. But the starting point and the outline of the sermon ought to rise from the Scripture text, not the catechism text.

Rev. Kloosterman fears that by using this method of constructing the catechism sermon, I am setting the Scripture against the Catechism. I am not intending to do so, but I realize that I leave myself open to this charge. So let me respond.

We all know Christians who claim, "No creed but Christ; no book but the Bible!" No pastor within the Christian Reformed Church could agree with such a claim. As one who has signed the Form of Subscription without any mental reservations, I heartily believe that our church's confessions "do fully agree with the Word of God." To the best of my knowledge, no teaching found within the Heidelberg Catechism disagrees with the Bible's teaching. If I thought otherwise, I would surely bring the matter up by way of a confessional-difficulty gravamen. The Heidelberg Catechism accurately represents the Bible's teaching on the specific matters addressed in the various questions and answers.

Having said this, however, we must also agree that the Scriptures are not to be equated with our confessions. The former is a product of God's ac-

tivity; the latter is a product of man's activity; the former is inspired; the latter is not. The former is infallible; the latter is not. To the question, then "what shall we preach?" the answer is, "The Word of God. *Sola Scriptura*." Even though the Heidelberg Catechism fully agrees with the Word of God, yet it is *not* the Word of God. That is why I stress using the Bible text as the basis for constructing the outline of the catechism sermon and then to bring in the text of the Catechism where it further explains and applies that Word to the hearers. Start with God's Word and bring in man's word along the way. It seems to me that this method of writing a catechism sermon keeps our focus on the Bible text which should be the focus for all good preaching.

Now there are two sections of the Heidelberg Catechism that lend themselves to developing sermon outlines directly from the catechism answers themselves. I'm thinking of the sections on the Ten Commandments and on the Lord's Prayer. These sections are based directly on specific Bible texts. For example, "You shall have no other gods before me" is found in Exodus 20:3 in the Bible and is explained by Question 94 in the Catechism; "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name" is found in Matthew 6:9 in the Bible and is explained in Questions 120-122 in the Catechism. The catechism answers given in these two sections directly explain and apply specific Bible texts. So I would have no problem taking the main points of my sermons on the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer directly from the catechism answers.

I would have a problem, though (and I suspect many listeners to catechism sermons have this same problem) developing a sermon outline based, say, on Question 80: "How does the Lord's Supper differ from the Roman Catholic mass?" First of all, where is the preacher going to find a text to hook this sermon on? He might go to the Scrip-

tures dealing with the institution of the Lord's Supper or the meaning of the Lord's Supper, say Matthew 26 or I Corinthians 11. But if he slavishly follows the outline of Question 80, his sermon outline will look like this: I. The correct meaning of the Lord's Supper, II. The incorrect meaning of the Lord's Supper. This outline does not do justice to the text or to the context of either Matthew 26 or I Corinthians 11. Is Question 80 then *contrary* to what the Scriptures teach? No, not at all. The Scriptures teach that Jesus' sacrifice is once for all, not a ritual to be repeated on an altar, as the Romanists teach. But my point is that Question 80 in particular does *not* give us a sermon outline from Matthew 26 or I Corinthians 11, or, to the best of my knowledge, from any other specific Bible text. To use Question 80 as the outline of a sermon on Matthew 26 or I Corinthians 11 is, in my opinion, a violation of those particular Bible texts and a violation of what preaching ought to be.

Perhaps these comments will help to clarify the main point of my earlier article. I appreciate Rev. Kloosterman's comments; they have forced me to think through the issues further. And I admit that I am new at preaching and at preaching catechism sermons. Perhaps I am misconstruing the whole matter. Let me encourage other readers and preachers to submit their reactions. We can all learn from each other. The worst thing that could happen is if we simply gave up on catechism preaching altogether. My goal, and that of Rev. Kloosterman, is to encourage better catechism preaching. With that as our common goal, I trust that we can endure some differences of opinion on how to best achieve that goal.

J. Tuininga

THE CATECHISM AS TEXT

I would like to add my contribution to the subject of preaching on the Heidelberg Catechism.

With Bajema and Wesseling (and contra Lankheet), I would plead for using the Lord's Day itself as the "text" for the sermon. I believe that is the only legitimate way to "preach the Catechism." And such a sermon can be just as thoroughly biblical (perhaps more so) as one which uses a particular text of Scripture. The Catechism was never intended to be used in the latter way (using a verse or two of Scripture). One simply cannot do justice to the richness of the Catechism by using one particular passage of Scripture. The Catechism's teaching is based on the *whole* Bible. It brings the entire teaching of God's Word to bear upon a certain doctrine. If one then uses one particular text of the Bible, he is either short-changing the

Catechism or he will have to use the text as a "coathanger" on which to hang all kinds of things which are not in the text in order to try to cover the teaching of the Lord's Day. It can't be done. None of the Dutch authors on the Catechism (and they are the best: De Graaf, Holwerda, Tunderman, Veldkamp) use the textual approach. They all deal with the Lord's Day itself.

Lankheet is right: You can't find one particular text of the Bible which covers the whole teaching of the Lord's Day. Exactly! That is why I will almost always read at least two Scripture passages (sometimes three) in connection with a certain Lord's Day. That way the congregation also becomes aware that the teaching of the Catechism is based on the whole of Scripture, Old and New Testaments.

I'm not afraid of the charge: You preach the Catechism, not the Bible. Proper preaching of the Catechism is *biblical* preaching through and through. The sermon can make this abundantly clear. It is just as easy to preach an "unbiblical" sermon by using a text as it is using the Catechism (and I've heard such). That's because the Bible itself has a "system" of truth — it is one book with one message, not a conglomeration of isolated texts. That's why it's just as easy to preach a good biblical sermon using the Lord's Day itself as it is when not using the Catechism (the so-called "free sermon"). For further reading on the subject may I suggest "De Catechismus in den Dienst Des Woords" by the late Rev. F. Guillaume, a chapter in the book *Van Den Dienst Des Woords*, ed. R. Schippers.

THE BIBLE AND THE CREED

PDJ

This organization and publication began 36 years ago announcing their devotion "to the exposition, defense and application of the Truth as set forth in God's Word and summarized in the... Calvinistic" (Reformed and Presbyterian) creeds. Now, in a religious climate in which church commitments not only to what is Reformed, but even to what is definably Christian become increasingly uncertain, encouraging "catechism preaching" seemed to be one way to try to remedy that confusion. For that purpose we placed 4 different articles in our October issue. All concerned about the same thing, they raise the question about what is the best way to carry it out. I believe that it is desirable that we consider that question, not to provoke useless or divisive argument, but to try to make our practice more effective. Is it better to structure the sermon on a Bible text or to take the Catechism as a "text"?

Let's first observe that, although our traditional organization of a sermon around a text has many obvious merits, the sermons found in the Bible are not always so organized around a single "text." Considering

the Biblical examples suggests that we hesitate to say that there is only one "right" way to structure a sermon.

Regardless of how one may structure a sermon, we ought to be alert to the danger that by using the Catechism as though it were a text of the Bible, we inadvertently lead people back into the Roman Catholic error of placing church creeds and decisions beside (and, in effect, over) the Bible. The Catechism may be a very valuable help to Bible study, but it may not become a substitute for it! There are some indications that suggest that a faulty method of preaching doctrine as only our church tradition has helped to provoke the anti-traditional reaction that is destroying the faith of those churches. If we don't show and teach people to show from God's Word what we believe and why we must believe it, if we say as one old minister did when this was pointed out, "We don't have to go to that trouble; we had professors who did it for us in seminary!" we are cutting the real ground out from under our faith and inviting the collapse that we are seeing throughout our

churches. Our faith needs to be grounded on, "Thus saith the Lord!" Our Lord Himself constantly appealed to the Scriptures to ground His preaching, and the apostles did the same. Luther and the other Reformers found their faith in God's Word and laboriously based their confessions upon it. We, like them, must hold, live and preach the same faith — and that for the same reasons. The only way one can be an effective missionary is to open the Bible and say to all regardless of their cultural history or diverse background, "This is what God says to you and me!" More than ever today, we must teach every member of our churches to be ready to do that. We must help them do that in growing "ecumenical" contacts with people of all kinds of other churches.

The Catechism has been for centuries and still is a valuable summary and "tool" to help people see the structure in the Bible's doctrine. But it is by no means perfect. Compare, for example, the two pages devoted to the at that time highly controversial questions about the Lord's Supper with the mere three lines with which it answers the question "What

do you believe concerning the Holy Spirit?" The Bible obviously places more emphasis on the Holy Spirit and His work than that. Let's try to make good use of the Catechism as an aid to systematically teach the Word of God but not blunder into making the catechism a substitute for it.

In our earlier seminary training, Samuel Volbeda gave valuable training on how to prepare Biblical sermons — "Marry your text," he said,

"and don't depart from it." Louis Berkhof taught us to see the system of Biblical teaching, everything supported by exhaustive listing of proof-texts, and his incomparable *Systematic Theology* continues to spread around the world in translations (though it is sometimes belittled among our unsystematic "theologians"). But for learning to begin with the Bible, and exhaustively show from it "the whole counsel of God," we needed to turn to John

Calvin's *Institutes and Commentaries* and to the works of John Murray. More than ever in these times of confused opinions and crumbling beliefs, we need to learn, like those Reformed predecessors, to believe and build upon what God said. We must learn and teach our churches to learn to, like the "noble" people in Berea, "search the Scriptures daily" to see what is true (Acts 17:11,12). That is the way the Lord has built and builds His church.

J. Tuininga

QUOTAS: OFFERINGS OR EXTORTIONS?

From a biblical standpoint, one may well question whether we ever should have introduced "the quota system" into our churches. According to the Bible our giving is to be voluntary, cheerful and without compulsion (II Cor. 9:7). Determining set amounts for certain causes for every family in the church, and obligating the paying of such, would seem to undermine an important biblical principle. I would not be ready to label such a practice as sin, but one may surely call into question its biblical legitimacy. For a church to adopt a budget and then say: This is how much money we believe we need, and, divided by the number of families we have, this is what it would amount to per family, is one thing. That is perfectly legitimate

and gives members an idea of what is needed and a guideline to follow. But to insist that every congregation must pay x-number of dollars for a number of specified causes, and calling the church to account if it fails to do this (as is presently the case) is certainly beyond biblical warrant and undermines the Bible's principles for giving. One can understand the reservations by an immigrant pastor (who came from the Netherlands to the CRC in the '50s) about what he calls "the envelope system." There is something about that "system" that jars biblical sensitivities.

So what I'm saying is that even *at best* the quota system leaves something to be desired, and it certainly is not the only or best way to finance

the church's programs. However, the matter becomes much more serious when we lose our confessional unity as church, when we are no longer agreed as to what is really Reformed, and when we are being asked to fund causes and agencies which even undermine our confessional integrity. Then the quota system faces us with a real "crisis of conscience." Why should one be forced to pay quotas for causes concerning which he has serious reservations? And the reverse side of that question is: In consequence of this, why am I unable to contribute (some or more) to worthy causes which have my full endorsement? And these are not spurious questions. They are questions asked in all seriousness and with genuine integrity. And there is really only one

(biblically informed) answer to that question: You are not required to give to causes which you genuinely believe undermine our Reformed character as church, and you are free to give to causes which uphold and promote the same. Every one who is really honest will have to agree with that. God alone is Lord of the conscience, says the Westminster Confession, and we are responsible

to Him first of all. Here *The Banner* editor is right:

We should use all means of persuasion to solicit support for causes that the church deems worthy. In the final analysis, though, we cannot force people to pay, and we may not deny them the right to follow their conscience.

I believe it's time to have a hard look at the system, and if need be, to overhaul it. That way we will get rid of the dilemma in which many people now find themselves. If the system is not changed, more and more members will be compelled by conscience to ignore the system or break the rules. And who can blame them?

BASIC BIBLE TEACHINGS

PDJ

1. Introduction: How and What We Know.

Dorothy Sayers in her 1949 book, *Creed or Chaos*, described the troubles of the Church when it discards Christian doctrine. We are experiencing that chaos, and especially young people suffer from the results of what Amos called "famine of the Word" (Amos 8:11-13). We must "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15). This survey will attempt, after facing the question of how and what we know, to cover the six main areas of Bible teachings concerning (1) God, (2) Man, (3) Christ, (4) Salvation, (5) the Church and (6) the Future.

1. *The Preliminary Question: How and What Do We Know? The Saving Power of God against the Perversity of Men.*

Paul introduced the gospel as "the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16). He gives the Bible's most systematic presentation of its teachings (in an order copied by our Heidelberg Catechism's "sin, salvation and service"). All need its "good news" because "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." They are "without excuse" because they know better than what they do. God's "eternal power and Godhead is obvious in all His creation" (19-23; cf. 2:14-16). As they reject His revelation, He gives them up" (1:24, 26, 28) to judgments.

2. Our Dependence on God's Self-Revelation.

The need for this gospel "power of God to salvation" and the way we must receive it from God is further shown especially in 1 Corinthians

1:18-2:16. (1) These are things which "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man" (2:9). If we have to depend on what people say, to know even what they think, how could we know what God thinks unless we listen to what He tells us (11)?

A further obstacle to our seeing these things of God is the fact that through sin we have become blind to them and instinctively reject them as "foolishness" (14). (How can you describe color to the color-blind?)

God reveals Himself and His salvation to us "through his Spirit," who not only provides the revelation, but also enables us to see and receive it (10, 12).

3. The Holy Spirit Inspired Words — a Covenant ("Contract" or "Testament") Bible.

The Holy Spirit's revelation is conveyed to us not only in feelings and ideas but in words, "not in words

which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (13). Through these inspired words we must receive it and also give it to others.

Amid opposition and deceptions, these inspired "Scriptures are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" and totally equipped for His service (2 Tim. 3:13-17). They can do that because they, "never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." Their teaching must be maintained against all self-chosen opinions ("heresies") — from the word "to choose") of men (2 Peter 1:16-2:3). Since this is God's Message, we must respect it as authoritative even in its words, even more than we do important human docu-

ments or contracts (Gal. 3:15-17; Rev. 22:18-19; cf. Deut. 4:2; 12:32).

4. *Our Needed Confession and Creeds.*

God's Word instructs us to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15). Thus we are to "confess Christ before men" (Matt. 10:32). When the Christian Church, facing destructive heresies, did that by carefully prepared statements, these were its "creeds" (from the word "I believe"). We must not regard them as additions to or improvements on God's Word, but as faithful efforts to confess (or "say the same thing") as God said (1 John 5:9-13). They are not infallible or perfect as the Bible is, but in the degree that they "say the same thing," they faithfully testify to God's Word.

Our Lord promised to His followers, that His Holy Spirit would teach them all things, remind them of what He had said, and be with them forever (John 14:16, 17, 26). Guided by this Spirit and Word, they must hold the Gospel truth against all errors (1 John 4:1ff.), and teach and show it to all as "the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes."

Questions:

1. How does God reveal Himself to everyone?
2. Why do we need more than that? Why can't people discover what they need to know from nature and experience?
3. Can we hold to a Bible inspired in message but not in words?
4. Why must we have and hold creeds?

PDJ

PROFESSOR MACMILLAN ON OUR PRAYERS: THE WRESTLING OF JACOB

Featured speaker at last May's local Banner of Truth Conference was Rev. Douglas MacMillan, who teaches Church History at the Free Church of Scotland College in Edinburgh, Scotland. Although this was his first visit to the U.S., he had become "one of Britain's best-known preachers," having rather recently also visited churches in Australia. His early life as a shepherd on the rugged west coast of Scotland and highlander accent, ready wit, rich

pastoral experience and warm spirituality were evident in an extraordinary series of lectures on (1) our Prayers, (2) Expectations and (3) Defenses.

Our Prayers

The first of them focused attention on Jacob wrestling with God (Gen. 32). The Christian life does not involve only one "conversion experience," but a life of fellowship with God — Father, Son and Holy

Spirit. Although this incident at Peniel is hard to identify as Jacob's conversion in view of Genesis 28:16, it marked a change and deepening of his spiritual life. (There is a "second blessing" as well as a third, fourth and fifth!) Jacob knew God's blessing especially through prayer. The name he gave the place, "Peniel," meant "the face of God." It recalls Psalm 27:8, "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek." What

kind of place was this? Although details of our experience change, God does not change. He says, "I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. 3:6). This solitary place of blessing was a place of prayer where Jacob faced a pre-incarnation appearance of Christ (the Son of God "trying out human nature!" Calvin suggested). Such audiences with God have been the secret of God's saints. "They looked unto Him, and were lightened" (Ps. 34:5). Such places seem hard to find today.

In this prayer Jacob "wrestled" with "the angel of the covenant." The speaker used to wrestle. That means a close encounter — you can't do it from six feet away — and it takes energy. It is not easy to keep our minds from wandering. This is a place of penitence. God's finger touched Jacob's thigh. Twice we read in Psalms, "Thy gentleness hath made me great" (Ps. 18:35; 2 Sam. 22:36). MacMillan recalled a contest of throwing a 16-lb. hammer. When a little girl escaped on to the green, a burly bystander snatched her out of the path of the hurtling hammer and

gave her back to her mother in a demonstration of tender power. Why should the tender finger of God touch Jacob's thigh? Especially the thigh is involved in wrestling. Jacob, who had relied on his own subtlety and craft, is now disabled and can only cling to the Opponent.

God asks, "What is your name?" "Who are you?" Twenty years earlier when his blind father had asked that question, he had answered "Esau," and tried to get the blessing by a lie. Now he is Jacob, "the twister," needing God's grace to straighten him out. But he is no more to be called "Jacob," but "Israel," having "power with God and with men" (v. 28). We must learn to quit our pretensions and say with the prodigal, "I have sinned...and am no more worthy to be called thy son." Christ came to seek and to save the lost. We can't deal with people as though we were sinless.

As Jacob "passed over Peniel the sun rose upon him." The speaker was reminded of the sunrise on the mountains of Scotland's wild west coast, first striking the peaks and then even the valleys. Jacob faced

the promise of a new day, a new man in a new day, for God said, "I will heal their backsliding."

And Jacob "halted upon his thigh," crippled by the rough medicine of God's loving discipline. Jacob had been proud — like all of us — and he would limp until the end of his days, having learned more humility in one night than in twenty years. When children would ask, "Why does old Grandfather limp?" they would learn of the work of God in his life. In a somewhat similar way, Paul was given a "thorn in the flesh" to teach how God's "strength is made perfect in weakness.... that the power of Christ may rest" upon him (2 Cor. 12:9). Grandpa's limp would remind new generations of the source of Israel's strength.

*To be continued in the next issue.
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A UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

John Vander Ploeg

*(OUTLOOK editorials reprinted
from ten years ago)*

July, 1977.

An exciting prospect — Suppose that in God's gracious providence the day would dawn when Reformed Church bodies — of course, I am thinking particularly of the CRC — would experience a drastic housecleaning....and that out of the tensions, all in God's gracious providence, a new denomination

would emerge — a denomination that would not shilly-shally in its witness to the Reformed faith; but a church that would rather be unambiguous, consistent, and enthusiastic in the profession of it.... Just suppose that some day God would be pleased to grant this....allow me then to suggest as a name, that it be called *the United Reformed Church*. The idea intrigues and excites me — the idea of belonging to a denomination that would be honestly, unambiguously,

and enthusiastically committed to the Reformed faith in doctrine and life—and then also to have a name that says just that.

The unifying principle—To be a Reformed church, not only in name but in fact, a church must be committed to the teaching of Scripture as this was rediscovered and proclaimed in the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. Looking there for the unifying principle to make a church truly Reformed we come upon the basic teaching of *sola Scriptura*—the Bible alone. The Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible is to be the church's supreme rule for faith and life. There we find the bedrock of what it means to be Reformed.

Many...have tried to unite the church—always in vain—on something other than the Word. The familiar slogan, "Doctrine divides; service unites," is false and ultimately always futile. One might just as well expect to pick fruit from a tree rooted only in thin air. René Paché says it so well in his excellent work, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* (Moody Press) when he writes:

"Apart from revelation, as a standard by which to evaluate and correct our fallible human notions, sinners such as we are will be forever cast upon the shore of an ocean of doubts and speculations. And when modern theology tells us that we cannot trust the Bible or ourselves, it turns us over to an uncertain fate with no hope or respite" (p. 262).

Human reason, science, commonly-accepted mores, ethnic identity—however valuable these may prove to be—may never take the place of unconditional commitment to Scripture as the basic principle for ecclesiastical or denominational unity.

God said it long ago—a directive still as valid now as it once was for Israel of old: "To the law and to the testimony! if they speak not according to this word, surely there is no morning for them" (Isa. 8:20).

"Let this be a firm principle:" says John Calvin, "No other word is to be held as the Word of God, and given place as such in the church, than what is contained first in the Law and the Prophets, then in the writings of the apostles; and the only

authorized way of teaching in the church is by the prescription and standard of his Word" (*Institutes*, IV, VIII, 13).

Note also from our Lord's high-priestly prayer in John 17 how He relates the unity of His people to the truth or the Word of God. This close relation lies right on the surface as He prays: "I have given them *thy word*....*Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth*....And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth...that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us..." (John 17:14ff).

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The truth of the Bible is under attack. However, actually it is not the Bible that is on trial but rather the CRC that is on trial. There are issues that agitate us that are simply not negotiable if we are sincere about really wanting to remain Reformed, and this is such an issue.

Without any attempt at being needlessly alarmist or sensational, it is not too much to say that, if the ongoing attack upon Scripture among us, continues to be tolerated, the possibility of secession from the CRC can only be expected to become a growing prospect. Any attempt to play for time and tolerance when a clearcut and crucial issue is before the church must be vigorously resisted, because in such cases time and tolerance are almost invariably on the wrong side.

You ask me: how are we to go about it to arrive at a United Reformed Church. My answer: *how I wish I knew!* There is so much at stake and we know that secession is a terribly serious business. We should be much in prayer at the throne of grace for a clear sense of direction.

Someone writes me that no church has ever been reformed from within. Apart from checking the historical accuracy of this assertion, we do believe that our God is able, in answer to the fervent petitions of His people, even to do that which may have never been done before. Impetuous steps for drastic reformation may so easily lead to abortive results that impede rather than

prosper the cause. Meanwhile, we are not to forget for a moment that we have a corporate responsibility as long as we remain as members of a church when she is no longer true to the sacred trust with which she has been endowed.

Although, admittedly I am unable to clearly chart the course to achieve a United Reformed Church. **I do wish to propose the following specific steps** toward meeting the ongoing challenge and ask you to consider them for whatever they are worth.

1. Let me first plead with you to *become informed* as to the issues that are agitating the church at large, and the CRC in particular. Read, investigate, and examine for yourself the issues that are agitating the church and disturbing the peace of Zion. Don't allow yourself to be confused or prejudiced by those who may make personal attacks on those who are speaking and writing to alert the church to the heretical thinking that is gaining ground among us. Even Calvin, Luther, and others who were leaders in the Protestant Reformation had their failings: but far be it from us to reject their great achievements because of personal frailties from which they also may have suffered. The plea is so urgent; read, study, think, judge for yourself what time it has gotten to be in the CRC. Woe be to anyone who simply refuses to be concerned as long as he knows that he is comfortably on the side of the majority without ever considering seriously whether or not he is on the side of the Lord!

2. And, when once you get to know the score, speak up or write and communicate your informed concerns and convictions to others. There is a silent majority also in the CRC that could become a potent force and determining factor in rejecting the evil innovations that threaten the future of the church if only such are willing to let themselves be heard. There is no room in the church for those who choose to be mere spectators and are unwilling to become involved when the Reformed faith is being assailed. Contributions from our readers as to how to bring into being a truly United Reformed Church are welcome, and these will be seriously

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considered for publication. Of course, no blanket promise can be made to publish anything and everything that is received. Discretion and good judgment will have to be observed. However, to know what our readers are thinking about the state of the church and the remedy to be pursued may, under God, prove to be of real help in coming to our sorely needed sense of direction. The cause is of the utmost importance because it concerns the precious church of our Lord Jesus Christ which He purchased with His own precious blood. The generous financial support that continues to come from our loyal supporters means so much to us. If you are now willing also to share your thoughts, ideas, and suggestions about the course to be followed, that too may energize and activate developments that are so sorely needed.

3. Moreover, please also give serious thought to the wisdom of formulating and circulating what might be called a *Reformed Faith Manifesto*. A document of this kind should accentuate the positive in setting forth in unambiguous terms what we believe, for example, about the Bible as God's Word, the church

and requirements for membership, ecclesiastical offices and the Scriptural teaching as to who are and who are not to serve, and other matters of special concern in our time. Of course, such a manifesto should also spell out in no uncertain terms a rejection of current evils that continue to be advocated among us; for example, the so-called "new hermeneutic," the toleration of lodge members in the church, women in Church offices, a growing demigration of preaching, the adherence to and teaching of evolution, and other innovations that threaten the downfall of the church. It may be objected that we already do have our creeds and doctrinal standards and that these should be sufficient. However, it should be obvious, as we realize what is being tolerated today notwithstanding a profession of these creeds and doctrinal standards, that it has now become imperative to clearly and unequivocally cross all the t's and dot all the i's so that there may be no misunderstanding as to what is Reformed and what is not. With the Lord's blessing, such a Reformed Faith Manifesto might help us along on the way to what eventually might prove to be the

United Reformed Church for which we long so eagerly. Will such a URC be realized before Jesus comes? Only God knows.

4. Finally, allow me once again to urge concerned members of the CRC and of other Reformed bodies to *organize Reformed Fellowship local chapters* in the pursuit of the goals we cherish. In union there is strength. If you are interested in promoting the organization of such a chapter in your area, feel free to write to Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 4855 Starr St. S.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506. Assistance and suggestions as how to go about this will gladly be sent upon request. Several areas throughout the church now have such chapters for regular meetings and mutual encouragement and inspiration. Although such beginnings may be small and the efforts may seem feeble, there is no limit to what our God is able and may be willing to do. Of course, you and I are not a John Calvin or a Martin Luther, but remember they were also mere men like us and they had no monopoly on God's grace and willingness to help.

(to be continued in the next issue.)