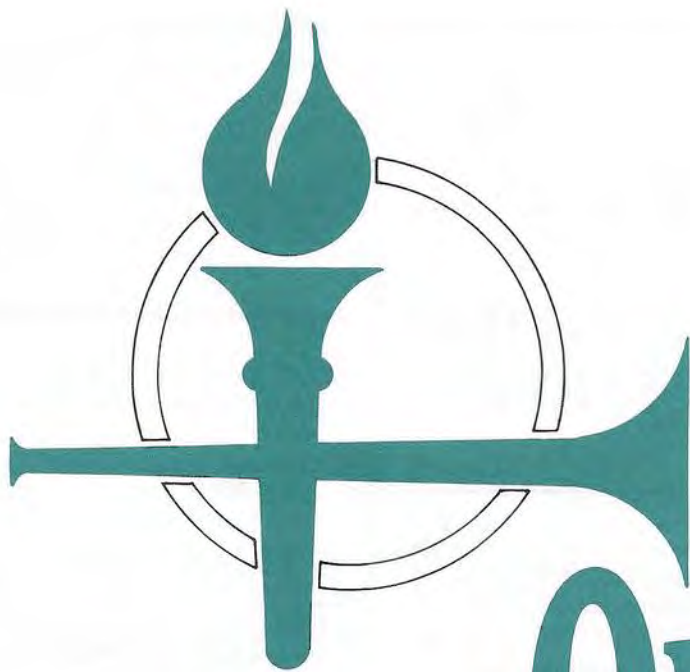




Outlook

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

Congress on the Bible

Gospel Immensities

Lords of Christ's Flock

FEBRUARY 1988

“WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE?”

Peter Grossmann

Our fathers in the faith were scholarly, knew the issues of the day, and were energetic in their defense of the Reformed faith. They were especially on fire about their opposition to the Evangelical and Reformed merger of 1934 because it was seen to be the death knell of Biblical religion in the Church.

The article, “What Do You Believe?”, was written by Walter Grossmann while pastor at the Reformed Church at Hosmer, S. Dak. (along with two rural congregations—Neudorf and Calvin). He had had a long interest in developments in churches other than the RCUS because he saw the advance of “liberalism” as destructive to all of Protestantism. He spent much time and effort during his ministry in trying to inform people of the dangers of giving up doctrines of the faith of compromising with unbelief, for the sake of “getting along.” His outspokenness was founded in the sadness and horror he felt as he saw the church of his fathers slip away from its Biblical moorings.

Does this old article speak to us today? We live in a time when more and more people are doing what is right in their own eyes. It's okay to be religious these days, and you can believe what you want; just don't get carried away and try to convince others of the rightness of your faith. Ethics are situational: if it feels good, do it. Christianity is just one of a whole flock of religions that are all one as good as the other. In our society's overwhelming rush to be non-judgmental, not bigoted, non-racist, and all-loving, even the

church has decided not to be too concerned about the truth. Even many Bible-believing Christians talk about how they “don't believe in doctrine,” their church is non-doctrinal, non-denominational; as if fuzzy-headed thinking is a profoundly Christian virtue.

The question, “What do you believe?” is as important today as it ever was. The facts of Scripture are simple: if you don't acknowledge your sinfulness before a Holy God, if you don't trust in Christ alone for the forgiveness of sin, you go to hell. The question is not *whether* you believe something; it's “What do you believe?” Jesus Christ and Christianity are very exclusivistic. Christianity is not just one of many good religions, many good ways to get wherever you are going; it is the *only* true religion; it is the *only* way to Eternal Life. Remember, Jesus did not say, “I am one of the ways to get to God.” He said, “No one cometh unto the Father but by me!”

Worldliness is destroying churches today just as it did in the thirties and forties. The National Council of Churches (the successor to the Federal Council) and many of the denominations in it are in no better condition today than they were in 1948. The sad thing is that many in the NCC do not recognize that by their membership and financial contributions they agree with and support unbiblical religion and an economic and political philosophy that is harmful to the United States.

As was the case in 1948, the refusal today to come out of unbelieving organizations is a denial of

Paul's admonition in II Corinthians 6-17: “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you.” Without their knowing it, many people are being led to the gates of hell by unbelieving preachers who are fine ladies and gentlemen, but, who long since have abandoned Biblical teaching and fill the ears of the hearers with the philosophies of men. The Prophet warns that “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you from being my priest. Since you have forgotten the Law of your God, I also will forget your children.” Hosea 4:6. We need to pray that this not happen to our church, and we must also pray that God will preserve the pure teaching of His Word in other denominations. Many are in danger.

We don't hear preachers these days calling God a “Dirty Bully” or a “Devil.” Those who reject the truth of Scripture have become much too subtle for that. But the poison of asps is nevertheless on their lips, and they just as easily lead unknowledgeable people unto unbelief and death.

The article by Walter Grossmann in 1948 was meant to awaken those who by their membership and financial support were approving of and aiding the spread of unbiblical teaching. It was a call to them to get their priorities straight, to stop being married to bricks and mortar (church buildings) and to come out, be separate, to leave the unbelieving organization and join a truly Bible-teaching church.

That call must still be sounded in the world today. May God grant that the RCUS be among those continuing faithful to His Word, calling to every man, woman and child to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life. You must **know** what you believe.

Editor's Note:

"What Do You Believe?" was the title of a 2 1/2 page article by Rev. Walter Grossmann which appeared in WITNESS of Feb., 1948 and is now reprinted in the Nov., 1987 *Reformed Herald* of the Re-formed Church in the U.S. Its writer took a leading role in the continuation of those churches (as Eureka Classis) when the German Reformed denomination was swallowed up by increasingly liber-al unions to eventually form the United Church of Christ. In that article Rev. W. Grossmann warned against the worldliness that was inundating the churches, especially as it was being advanced by the ec-umenical Federal Council (later to become the Nation Council of Churches). One of the presidents of that council (George Buttrick) had said that the God who would curse sin was the Devil, and a successor in that office (Dr. Oxnham) could pronounce Him a "Dirty Bully." When such men are elect-ed to lead the Protestant churches and are followed, what does it re-veal about their host of followers who still claim to be "Christians"? The writer saw this state of affairs forcing everyone to face the question, "What do you believe?" And then each one who believes in Christ according to His Word must face the additional question whether or how he can give support to any church or organization that so flagrantly denies the Lord and His Word. The son of the writer and current editor of the *Reformed Herald*, Rev. Peter Grossmann of Mitchell, South Dakota, (and brother of Rev. Robert Grossmann of Mid-America Reformed Seminary) accompanies the reprint of his father's article with this editorial comment, reprinted with permission.



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

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CONGRESS ON THE BIBLE

Stephen M. Arrick

News report and observations of the International Council On Biblical Inerrancy's Congress On the Bible II held in Washington, DC September 23 - 27, 1987.

"It was a breath of fresh air." That was my personal response to those who asked me what I thought of this year's ICBI's Congress On The Bible. Not only was the conference impressive in its scope and thoroughly organized, but it was purely inspirational in its impact. Approximately 3500 evangelicals attended and participated, as it called to action the evangelical community, represented by a whole spectrum of evangelical denominations from the US and Canada. They came to hear, among others, Attorney General Edwin Meese, Chuck Colson, William F. Buckley, James Boice, Chuck Swindoll, J.I. Packer, Becky Pippert, Os Guinness and R.C. Sproul. The call to action addressed the Christian and Society, the Christian and the Sanctity of life, the Christian and God's World, the Christian and the Family, the Christian and Biblical Justice, and the Christian and the Church. Evangelicals were attempting to tackle, from a Christian and biblical perspective, issues such as pornography, ministering to homosexuals, wife and child abuse, mini-

stering to AIDS victims, developing a consistent pro-life ethic, genetic engineering and artificial reproduction, and the role of the Church in public education. There were more than 80 separate action workshops conducted during the three-day event. The CRC's Dr. Joel Nederhood led one. Chuck Colson, Chairman of the Conference, stated the goal of the Congress On the Bible: "To deal with the entire person of a Christian, not just his spiritual responsibilities, but his family, social and political responsibilities."

Attending this Conference, prompted several observations:

CHUCK COLSON

A truly gifted and godly man. He has a prophetic voice that is accepted by almost all evangelical groups. He deserves to be heard in the CRC. He's a part of that "fresh air" old fashioned evangelical and reformed believers rarely hear any more.

NOTICEABLY ABSENT

Although there were a dozen or so CRC people there, any official representation by the CRC was absent. One wonders if we can afford to miss one of the largest and most significant evangelical gatherings of the

decade. Our own Professor Fred Klooster was a member of the advisory board. Yet, neither Calvin College nor Seminary co-sponsored this event along side of many other major evangelical and academic institutions. Could it be because, except for a few faculty exceptions, our institutions could not participate in a conference sponsored by an "inerrancy" council? At least one would think that CRC Press would be there in order to expose its curriculum. Where is that even-handed push for ecumenicity? Could it be that it is only reserved for more liberal and "progressive" directions and gatherings? I, for one, felt very comfortable hanging my hat with those who hold to an historic and reformed "high view" of Scripture. These people were solid, they had convictions, they were there to develop a world and life view, and we were not hearing questions about the accuracy and authority of the Bible which we call "God's Word." That was another breath of fresh air.

CONGRESS LEADERSHIP

The evangelical movement is coming of age, and they are searching for more precise doctrinal expressions and attempting to develop a perspective for their world and life. The

leadership of this conference was basically reformed (Colson, Boice, Packer, Sproul.) The International Council On Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) sponsored this Congress which marked the conclusion of the ICBI's ten-year history. At the final ceremony the NAE (National Association of Evangelicals) was given the mandate to pick up where the ICBI left off. Here we have a truly historic event: the ICBI setting the future direction and being responsible for a substantial portion of the development of the world and life view of evangelicals who are members of the NAE. But this was not just any world and life view. It was a Kingdom - covenant world and life view. These terms were being used in major speeches and being presented as a viable Scriptural perspective in the development of our evangelical and social concern.

HOPE

Conferences should inspire hope, and this one was no exception. It inspired hope in a variety of ways. It gave me hope for the evangelical Church of the future. There are thousands, perhaps millions of evangelicals in the US and Canada who have some basic commitments to the faith (to Jesus Christ personally, to the Word of God, to the Body of Christ) and are now beginning to mature in their faith, hungering and longing for a deeper and more complete expression of doctrine. They are not ducking the hard questions facing their society and world in a mere anticipation of the Lord's return. I am confident that God will continue to bring to completion the work he has begun among them. In some ways it is hopeful for the reformed faith too, because many of the doctrines and biblical/theologi-

cal principles they are discovering are nothing more or less than the reformed faith, minus a particular ethnic tradition. What they are building will be uniquely theirs.

I am saddened that the CRC is not doctrinally healthy enough or genuinely ecumenical enough to be a part of this exciting movement. These evangelicals would remind us that we are evangelical too! In the exchange we would receive some much needed life and momentum and they would gain greatly from our historical reformed doctrinal and theological perspectives.

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

John Blankespoor

THE ROCK THAT IS HIGHER THAN I

"Hear my cry O God; listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I." (Ps. 61:1,2).

• • • • •

A man, a man of God, is overwhelmed with anxiety. He is almost overcome as by the waves of a flood. There have been more people like that, in fact, tens of thousands. We find many of them mentioned in the Bible. The Bible comforts the many who in faith struggle with such problems. Father Jacob, when Benjamin also had to go to Egypt for food, cries out in despair, "All these

things are against me." We see Elijah the great prophet under the juniper tree, praying that the Lord would take him away.

Here David is speaking, perhaps in fleeing from his own son Absalom. How many have had problems worse than this—a father fleeing from his son who wants to kill him?

David cries for help "from the ends of the earth." God in the temple seems to be far away. In the hill country of Judea were high rocks and boulders. On such rocks one could seek safety. What a retreat he could seek there. They offered safety, peace and rest.

Sometimes when fleeing from Saul, David had to seek such refuges. On occasions he could say, "The Lord is my light and salvation. Of whom shall I be afraid?" and "With my God I can jump over a wall and run through a troop." On others he felt almost overwhelmed, seeking refuge and help.

Many children of God have had such experiences. Think of the many living under persecution of which we in North America know little or nothing. Even where there is no persecution, many people of God encounter fear, anxiety, frustration and depression because of spiritual or physical circumstances.

At times all may seem dark in the struggling souls of such saints. Nights may be sleepless and in the morning they wonder what the day will bring. Despite many prayers, they may see no answers. Such people know what it means to cry, "Lord lead me to the rock that is higher than I."

• • • • •

The Rock to which we must flee is God Himself in Christ Jesus. Again and again in the Bible the Lord, the covenant Lord, is compared with a high rock. Such rocks don't change, erode, rust or rot. They remain the same for ages, and cannot be moved. This can really be said only of God. He is always the faithful One for His people in Christ Jesus. Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever (Heb. 13:8). With Him, we are always safe. The enemies of Christ may continue to attack. Those enemies include the world, our own sinful flesh and the devil himself. But with Jesus, we are safe. He is the unmoveable and unassailable Rock!

• • • • •

But the Rock is too high and too steep. The psalmist knows this, and cries for help, "Hear my cry, O God." Many Christians, confessing our own inability to ascend this rock, share this cry. They realize that they cannot solve their own problems, nor deliver themselves and they call to God for help.

God is pleased with such prayers and answers them.

• • • • •

The author cries out, remembering that the Lord had heard such prayers in past. He prays in the confidence that the Lord will also answer him now. We must pray in the confidence that He will hear us (Heb. 11:6; James 1:5-8).

The Bible says much about who can pray and for what we as Christians may and should pray (Mt. 6:5, ff.). Here one of God's children is praying for His help, to be lifted up on the rock. God will *always* hear such prayer. We must pray in the confidence, that He will hear (Romans 10:13). The Scriptures tell us that "the Lord inclines His ears to

our cries." The words suggest a "cupped" ear to hear what is being said. He says: "Ask, and you will receive." This is true for all prayers that are uttered according to His will (John 5:14).

There are with God's people misuses and wrong uses of prayer, so that they do not receive what they ask. Remember that no earthly father will ever give to a needy child a stone instead of bread, or a scorpion instead of an egg, or a snake instead of a fish. Much more sure is this of our heavenly Father (Luke 11:11-13).

This kind of confidence we find in the prayer of Ps. 61. David pleads in confidence that the Lord will lift him up to safety. Regardless of the conditions of his life, the Lord will give him spiritual fortitude and strength. Thus the Lord often, I think usually, answers prayers. If He doesn't change *things*, He changes *us*. A new "attitude" can make much difference, as the Holy Spirit gives strength and courage to face the future "Lord, lead me too to the rock that is higher than I."

TWO CALVIN HISTORIANS AND CALVINISM

1. PSYCHOANALYZING ABRAHAM KUYPER

In commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the birth of Abraham Kuyper, Dr. James D. Bratt of the Calvin College History Department, (author of the book, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*) devotes two special articles in the October

and November, 1987 *Reformed Journals* to a treatment of his life, the first to his public career, and the second to his private life. Both indicate a great deal of historical research and a close acquaintance with the subject, but it is the evaluation and interpretation given to the mass of detail that invites our attention.

Kuyper, the thinker and scholar, some of whose ideas still get attention among us, was constantly compelled to devote much of his time and effort to dealing with the practical problems of an enormously diverse career of leading a movement. "Put simply, Kuyper's ideas emerged in the process of identify-

ing, organizing and pushing a grassroots constituency to action." The survey of his career becomes a comparison of his role in his own time and circumstances with those of Jerry Falwell and Martin Luther King—colorful preachers getting into politics and leading minority movements. Then the article becomes a briefer comparison with the ephemeral role of Jimmy Carter, and the longer and more extensive one of Grover Cleveland. Thus Kuyper's career is sketched, "indelibly a 19th century man who came to office as the Netherlands' first 20th century premier."

The second article deals with Kuyper's private life, focussing attention on his nervous breakdowns. "Why did this man who spoke, like the Master he served with authority, who was sure he knew the will of God and was quick to declare it on every issue under the sun—why did he collapse so utterly that people worried about his future—and not once but three times?" His first collapse occurred at 21 years after 8 months of strenuous and successful effort in a nation-wide essay contest. His second occurred after years of increasingly strenuous struggle in a movement for church reform which pitted him against the more compromising policies of his pastor-father, for "a Calvinistic system built from unshakable principles by hard logic into a complete edifice." "One need not be a sworn psychohistorian...to recognize that Kuyper's church battles involved, among other things, the redemption of a tarnished Mother (here evidently "Mother-church") and the exorcism of his father...." Kuyper found a substitute father in G. Groen van Prinsterer, head of the confessionally Reformed. Thus he became involved in a campaign that led him as Amsterdam preacher, newspaper editor and member of parliament to his second breakdown in 1784 at age 37. His further career was full of struggle, and overwork which brought another breakdown. The writer sketches the way "the personal mirrored a cultural problem." In the undermining of all kinds of traditional authorities across Europe many were obsessed with maintaining order. "The duty fell to...thinkers

and movers who could construct the one big system that would put things back in place," making those who tried "prone to messianism and mortification, to extreme but finally unavailing labor and subsequent collapse."

The author compares the breakdowns of Kuyper with those of Max Weber and William James, observing that they all shared the common trait that "behind their fathers stood stout Calvinistic grandfathers and a tradition the grandsons knew well." A concluding paragraph observes that "Kuyper's career surely highlights once more the paradoxes of Calvinism—a system that begins with the inscrutable sovereignty of God and ends in the enforceable clarity of law; that starts out denying and ends up magnifying human agency; that warns of human depravity, yet can feed all ambition. These tensions must end in (self) destruction or in a self-deprecating humor that echoes the laughter from heaven. As 'the tribune of his people,' Kuyper did not allow that much in public. But in retirement he could do better. When asked how he knew he had done God's work, Kuyper replied, 'When you've done it as long as I have, you can't be sure anymore.'"

How shall we appraise this anniversary portrayal of Abraham Kuyper? Does it show familiarity with Kuyper's career and shed light on some unfamiliar aspects of his life? Indeed it does. Is it a fair evaluation of Kuyper? It exemplifies the efforts of many later historians to interpret history in the light of abnormal psychology. Stated more bluntly, to the eyes of our secular age, anybody who will work or fight for anything as stupid as religion has to be some kind of nut! Although this is contemporary, it is, of course, not new. Governor Festus said to the Apostle Paul, "You are out of your mind! Great learning is driving you mad" (Acts 26:24). To that Paul had to reply that even King Agrippa knew better. Understandable as that kind of evaluation is in an ancient or contemporary pagan, could we not expect better from a Calvin historian?

Historian Bratt devotes more than a page to the multitude of parallels he discovers between the lives of

Abraham Kuyper and Martin Luther King (much closer than between Kuyper's and Falwell's). In the November 1987 *Banner of Truth* Geoffrey Thomas reviews David Garrow's 1986 800-page biography of Martin Luther King, *Bearing the Cross*. He observes that "The picture that emerges is not an attractive one and scarcely one of the life of a Christian minister." "Martin Luther King's double standards in sexual morality, and subsequent and related dark depressions that characterized the final years of his life are some of the revelations of this book. They have been the stuff of rumor for many years but Garrow has interviewed all those involved in the so-called Southern Christian Leadership Conference and built up this picture of a man who from student days was attracted to women. There were three particular relationships which were more than brief, one of these lasting for almost two years. Of that liaison Morrow writes: 'That relationship, rather than his marriage increasingly became the center piece of his life, but it did not eliminate the incidental couplings that were a commonplace of King's travels.' King's doublemindedness caused him to be guilt-ridden, depressed and obsessed with the spectre of his death. At one five-day retreat he told Joan Baez, after a couple of whiskies, that he was sick of everything and just wanted to be a preacher. But preach what? He said: 'People expect me to have answers and I don't have any answers. I don't feel like speaking to people. I don't have anything to tell them'.... With his enormous potential to be a leader and preacher of Jesus Christ, King turned his back on all of that to guide his people into the wilderness of political action where he deserted them and where so many of them forlornly wander until today. We must be thankful that black American ministers are beginning to preach again the whole counsel of God un intimidated by the humanist pressures to preach another gospel. The betrayal of the black pulpit in America is King's legacy." Bratt, determined to see only psychological parallels, ignores all this, glossing over the difference between the two men with only the incidental remark

that "Kuyper's ego tended to abuse male rivals; King's, female subordinates." The enormous religious difference between the two, Bratt flatly denies; "Nor should aspersions about the Christianity of King's vision be quickly granted." "...King's was as fundamentally an interpretation of the gospel as was Kuyper's." Thus, to Calvin's secular historian, the difference between believing and struggling for the Biblical gospel and rejecting it is of no consequence!

2. EVALUATING FRANCIS SCHAEFFER

Another Calvin College historian, Ronald A. Wells, contributes a 21-page essay to the 1986 Zondervan book, *Reflections on Francis Schaeffer*, edited by Ronald W. Ruegsegger. Of interest here are not so much Wells' analyses of the broad-stroke and often imprecise and not well-documented talks of Schaeffer, as his own views on the subject of Calvinism. He saw one of Schaeffer's later books, *A Christian Manifesto*, as reflecting his acceptance of the notion of "the antithesis," a necessary struggle between "those who 'stand fast' for the truth... and those who accommodate to 'the world.'" Although his call "for a return to Christian foundations" is "in a venerable tradition of Calvinist writing," Wells regards his "antithesis" as false, because it does not reckon with the "pluralism" that has from the beginning characterized America. "No doubt Schaeffer is quite correct in suggesting that cultural pluralism has become the norm of American society...a society in which no norm of one religious or ethnic group may be imposed on another." Schaeffer objects, "Pluralism has come to mean that everything is acceptable....There is no right or wrong; it is just a matter of your personal preference." "But, one asks, what is the alternative in a democratic society? Does Schaeffer mean that...Christians should enforce their views by 'law' if people will not accept Christian belief and behavior by choice?" "This tendency to promote one's own view by 'law' has always been the dangerous part of Calvinism: one sees Calvinists in power as triumphal and dictatorial. Whether in Calvin's Geneva, Knox's

Edinburgh, Cromwell's London and Dublin, Winthrop's Boston, or in our own time, Vorster's Pretoria and Paisley's Belfast, Calvinists in power have wielded that power oppressively. Without doubt the above-named Calvinists thought they were doing God's service—restoring God's law—when they did their (in my view) intolerable, even heinous acts of repression" (p. 237).

Schaeffer felt that with the legalization of abortion in our society, secularization had gone so far that a Christian must oppose the whole movement. But Wells raised the question, "Can modernization be opposed or its processes stopped?" He is convinced that they cannot. Schaeffer was only "half-right" in seeing the change as one in the system of thinking; it was every bit as much the product of the change in society. "Evangelical Protestants, who typically have had a trivial view of evil, believe they have an answer. If they were to 'preach the gospel,' people would be 'saved' and, since evil resides essentially in the human heart not in social structures, social evils can be eradicated when people 'turn to the Lord.' More thoughtful evangelicals, like Francis Schaeffer...realize that the gospel needs to be articulated into the social order." "Christians really have only two options: to work within (modernity)... and...effect some accommodations to it, or to oppose it on every level." Wells sees "liberal (mainline) Protestantism" as generally choosing the first of these, that of accommodation, while "Fundamentalists...find the modern world view unacceptable as much in socio-political as in religio-moral terms." He sees evangelicals since 1945 wavering between Fundamentalist militancy and semblances of modernist accommodation. They are compelled to adjust themselves to the situation "in order to make their message comprehensible to modern people," thereby losing the energy to sustain their movement over time. "On the other hand...they will be unable to keep their movement pure enough to survive if they choose the route of resistance," since he cannot see how they can stand against "modernity's most powerful agents: universities, the professions, upper social classes, and urban lifestyle."

TODAY'S CHRISTIAN COURSE

Although we may notice some difference in temper between these two essays, what is unmistakable in both of them is their capitulation to modern society and their rejection of Calvinism as hopelessly out of date. Both, despite their wide acquaintance with the history, seem oblivious to what necessarily distinguished Christians, not only leaders like Paul, Calvin and Kuyper, but their hosts of followers as well, from the non-Christian world, and inspired, drove and sustained them in the Christian testimony that "turned the (pagan) world upside down" (Acts 17:6). As I observed in a November *Outlook* article ("How to Lose the Gospel."), God after the Fall introduced "the antithesis" of a continuing conflict between Himself and the devil (Gen. 3:15). Although U.S. colonial beginnings were not as uniformly Christian as some like to think, to reject the Biblical antithesis because it is contrary to current U.S. "pluralistic" political theory, puts us on the side of the antichristian secularists who try to outlaw all recognition of God and His laws from public life. Today's sophisticated academic advice to "accommodate" a world that more and more explicitly rejects every semblance of Christian faith or morals is the exact opposite of the Biblical injunction, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2). This secularist advice ignores the gospel's call to all Christians to "contend for the faith" in this world and its assurance that "in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us" (Rom. 8:37).

The book of Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, has shaken our academic world by showing how current educational policy has been destroying our ability to think coherently. Near the end of his book (p. 374) Bloom observes that "One can most clearly see (the current lack of interest in truth) in the case of the Bible." "It is subjected to modern 'scientific' analysis, called Higher Criticism, where it is dismantled to show how 'sacred' books

are put together, and that they are not what they claim to be." Or it is used "as one expression of the need for the 'sacred' and as a contribution to the very modern, very scientific study of the structure of 'myths'." Thus he sees the prejudiced refusal to even consider its claim as Revelation. Bloom is not a Christian and his proposed correction (a broader, less ideologically stunted, classical education) is inadequate, but he has seen more clearly than some Christians do how misguided and destructive the current academic course is.

Our college was established and still appeals for support to equip young people for Christian service in the world. What kind of preparation and encouragement are they receiving for such careers by having all who have lived and still live such committed lives as Calvin, Kuyper and Schaeffer caricatured as misguided fanatics?

Many years ago a first-year Calvin student asked my opinion of the comments of a history professor, that the Council of Nicea, under the authority of a still half-pagan emperor and dominated by men more politicians than Christian theologians, was far less significant than we had been

taught to believe. I had to concede the validity of some of the critical remarks. But had the professor also shown how out of this political mess had emerged Athanasius? That remarkable man was for 46 years a bishop, 5 times exiled and a fugitive for a total of 20 years. In spite of all the political and religious authorities who (accommodating to changing times) surrendered to the denial of the deity of Christ and who threatened his life innumerable times, he so adamantly refused to compromise this truth that the saying, "Athanasius against the world" became proverbial. Even the skeptic, Gibbon, in his many-volume *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, was moved to write some of his most extravagant prose in admiration of that church father. And, despite all of the political chicanery, Athanasius' confession of Christ's deity, so long maintained against apparently hopeless odds, was vindicated as the orthodox teaching of the church. This story the student had not heard!

Gibbon saw the thrilling story (as some Christian historian apparently didn't), but Gibbon still misinterpreted it, attributing it to the extraor-

dinary character of Athanasius. Athanasius knew better. It was not the genius of Athanasius that produced the doctrine, but the Word and Spirit of God that called and sustained Athanasius in his lonely, but finally triumphant confession to God's truth. The same observation applies to Paul, Calvin, Kuyper and hosts of others. If and as long as we let the secularist unbelieving modern mind control everything we study and say, we will always misread our history, betray our faith and sabotage our cause.

We must open our Bibles and learn again that every Christian is called to the most difficult, but also the most wonderful and most rewarding enterprise in the world, full of promise for "the life that now is and that which is to come." That is what, page after page, fills Paul's Christian testimony, and will be endlessly repeated in the life of every believer who shares in the same taxing but triumphant business. We must prayerfully get on with it and not let "modern secular scientific" historians (to use the phrase of a state university professor) keep us from even discovering it. PDJ

J. Tuininga

DENOMINATIONAL LORDS OF CHRIST'S FLOCK

For a number of years I have been firmly convinced that Reformed churches in general, and the CRC in particular, have greatly over-emphasized the importance of so-called broader assemblies (classes and synods). And during recent years I see this trend toward hierarchism worsening. Not only are synods be-

coming much too powerful, but in the minds of many people, synods are far more important than local congregations. Synod is at the top, with the local churches at the bottom. But that scheme should be set on its head, with the local churches at the top and synod on the bottom (as Abraham Kuyper once outlined

it). It is the consistory which has *original, permanent* authority. The authority of classes and synods is only temporary and delegated — they receive their authority from the consistories, and when the meetings are over, there is no more classis or synod.

Though this is an elementary principle of Reformed (Presbyterian) church government, it has recently been called into question by the former professor of Church Polity and Administration at Calvin Seminary, Richard De Ridder (in one of the "service booklets" recently published by the denomination). Article 27 of the *Church Order* maintains this important distinction, and Monsma said some good things about this in his *Revised Church Order Commentary* (pp. 114-117). He concluded, "From the principle here enunciated it follows that major assemblies have no more authority than that which the churches have attributed to them by mutual agreement." He also stated another distinction of long-standing validity in the Reformed churches: "*Consistories* are essential to the existence or the being (*wezen*) of the churches as institutions; *major assemblies* are essential not to the being, but to the well-being (*welwezen*) of the churches." In practice we often seem to turn this around.

In a recent *Banner* Prof. De Ridder once again says things that are

open to serious question. He says, "The Christian Reformed Church is not a *federation* of individual congregations joined together loosely; it is *one* church. When the church fathers adopted the name 'Christian Reformed Church,' they strongly resisted the opinions of some who thought that the name should be 'Christian Reformed Churches.'" Then he goes on to quote a 1980 synodical declaration that "Christ gave authority to the church as a whole..." (Cf. *Banner*, Oct. 26, p. 10).

I beg to disagree. Those desiring "churches" (plural) in the name had hold of the biblical principle that every local congregation is a complete, autonomous church by itself; it does not become that by uniting together in a federation. The latter may be desirable, but the local congregation is complete without it. We do not believe in a "collegiate" system where each local church is only an incomplete part of the larger body, which really is *the* church. May it never be! In the Bible all the emphasis is upon the local congregation — recall Paul's letters to individual, concrete congregations, and the letters of Jesus to the seven churches in Asia Minor. Says Monsma: "Consistories have an independent existence and do not exist for the sake of the major assemblies." He also quotes Bouwman: "All ecclesiastical authority, given unto His Church by Christ,

resides in the particular church." The Canadian Reformed brethren give evidence that they have their principles in order in this respect when they call themselves the Canadian Reformed Churches. We could learn from them here.

Years ago one of our Canadian immigrant ministers wrote about this matter in *Torch and Trumpet* (March, '56). The late Rev. Guillaume too had some problems with our name. Said he: "This means that the denomination and the local church possess the same name. The name of our denomination does not inform us that it is a collection of autonomous local churches." He went on to say that this is not merely a *nominal* difference, and concluded with the question: "Could we be going in the direction of 'synodocracy'?" What he was afraid of already then has become a much greater threat today, and people like De Ridder are abetting that bad trend. It is time we arrest this evil before it gets completely out of hand. Many times in the history of the church we have seen the dire consequences of hierarchy in the church (think of the 1944 controversy and split in the Netherlands). It is time that consistories and members of the congregation wake up. And it is more than time that good Reformed ecclesiology be taught at Calvin Seminary.

WHO AM I?

Glenn P. Palmer

"And he (John the Baptist) will go on before the Lord, in the Spirit and power of _____, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous - to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Although I lived in the Old Testament

era, I am mentioned 28 times in 6 N.T. books. Of all the prophets, only Moses is mentioned more often and in more books than I, yet I did not write a book. I am renowned for my faithfulness and willingness to speak the truth - no matter how much it was against the prevailing attitude of

the day. Because of this, John the Baptist is compared or confused with me nine times, and Jesus Christ four times. When Jesus, who was dying on the cross, called out, some thought that he was calling for me. How absurd because his brother describes me as being a "man just like us." My name means Jehovah is God. Who am I?

My name means "timid" in Hebrew, but my actions contradict

my name. I am King Saul's head shepherd. One day as I was traveling through Judah, I was "detained before the Lord at Nob." David was also traveling through the area and stopped there. Then Ahimelech the priest gave David showbread to eat, Goliath's sword, and inquired of the Lord for him. Later when Saul ordered the priest Ahimelech to be killed, the officials would not raise their hand against the Lord's anointed. But since I am an Edomite, I raised my sword and killed Ahimelech and 84 priests of the

Lord, and then destroyed all of Nob - "the men and women, its children and infants, and its cattle, donkeys, and sheep." What wicked man am I?

Luke 1:17; James 5:17

I Sam. 21, 22

LCDR Glenn P. Palmer's address is 453 Warley St., Portsmouth, RI 02871.

PROFESSOR MAC MILLAN ON OUR EXPECTATIONS: Gospel Immensities

The letter to the Ephesians is like a hymn to the grace of God. The first two chapters instruct in the doctrine of the gospel, laying out the ground for that revelation of grace. With the third chapter Paul, recalling his three years of gospel labor in Ephesus, goes from exposition to prayer, interceding for the believers there. He recalled his tribulation for them (v. 13; compare Acts 19; 20:19; "I have fought with beasts at Ephesus," 1 Cor. 15:22). His emphasis from the outset has been on the gospel of God's grace, a movement from God toward men, His loving, choosing to save people like us in Christ. Now he goes from exposition into fervent prayer for these people to whom he has been bringing the gospel—these doctrines must move our souls, as they did his. For these people, he pleads for "inner strength." We are often accused of being "one-sided," preoccupied with doctrine. We need to teach the

doctrine, but that must move us to pray for the grace that we preach. Paul's prayer to God is that "the people may be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man. That Christ may dwell in (their) hearts by faith that (they) may be rooted and grounded in love."

"Though I...understand all mysteries, and all knowledge...and have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2). Only so may they "be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and...know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that (they may) be filled with all the fulness of God." We believe what we cannot ultimately understand. Although we may not know what this means, it is a reality, possible in the believer's experience.

Paul prayed "with many tears" for the Christians of Ephesus, the Ephesus of idolators, magicians, fortune-tellers and wicked books—so

like the contents of many of today's magazines—there he saw "a great door of opportunity" among "many adversaries." The gospel ministry continues to be full of such opportunities in the short time which we have. To understand something of the power of the Reformation in Scotland, we must take account of the urgent prayer of its great Reformer, John Knox, for its people. Our whole western society is crumbling because it needs the power of the grace of God, and it needs men who will similarly "spend and be spent" in the service of God.

Paul urged the Ephesians to "put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (6:11). The speaker had seen only too many ministers whose ministries in our time were (sometimes through "counseling") "cut to the ground by the power of hell" in the form of temptations to which they succumbed.

Therefore this "putting on the whole armor of God" is the more urgent. With a view to all of the sins and temptations of Ephesus, Paul was driven to his knees to pray that the Lord would "fill them with His fullness" so that they could stand.

Then he looks away from the Ephesians and their problems upward to the God of all grace, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, "unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that worketh in us." Paul "is persuaded that he is able to keep" (2 Tim. 1:12). He is dealing

with gospel immensities! He "is able to do *above all that we ask*"—more—"abundantly above all that we ask"—even more than that—"exceeding abundantly above all that we ask"—in fact—"above all that we ask or think"! This is the gospel of God's "extravagant" grace. Stop worrying about what people think of your sermon; think of what they think of God! The prayer goes into a benediction, "Unto Him be the glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." Let our expectations and prayers be grand, beyond the people's needs, as

big and broad as God's omnipotent grace. PDJ

Tapes of these Banner of Truth Conference addresses are available from Reformed Baptist Tapes, 3181 Bradford N.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49506 at \$2.00 each. Rev. Douglas Mac Millan is Professor of Church History at the Free Church of Scotland College at Edinburgh, Scotland. This is a summary of his second address at the May 1987 conference at Calvin Theological Seminary.

BASIC BIBLE TEACHINGS

II. Knowing God

1. Where Must We Begin?

To help us determine how to begin presenting basic Christian teachings, the Bible itself gives examples. Paul in Acts 17:19ff. answered a question about that by referring to a Greek inscription "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD," explaining, "the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you." Then he showed that "since we are the offspring of God," we ought not to think of Him as like the man-made images that filled Athens. His introduction to the gospel in Acts 14:13ff. to less learned pagans, begins in a similar way by directing them away from their idols to the living God who made all things and provided for His creation. Paul in Romans 1:16ff. introduced the whole body of gospel teaching by showing that although God's "eternal power and Godhead" are obvious in all that He has made,

man in his unrighteousness suppresses that revelation. Therefore he everywhere experiences the frightening consequences of that ungodliness and unrighteousness in the vices to which God, in judgment, "gives him up" (vv. 24, 26, 28). Psalm 94:8-13 exposes the foolishness of rejecting the Creator. "He who planted the ear, shall He not hear? He who formed the eye, shall He not see?" Can the Maker be less than what He made?

Since man's predicament is in every way traceable to his deliberate revolt against and resulting ignorance of God, his salvation is really coming to know and be reconciled with God. See how John at the end of his first letter summarizes the matter: "...the whole world lies in wickedness. And we know that the Son of God is come, and has given us an understanding, that we may know him

that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols." Our Lord in His prayer to His Father in John 17 speaks of His being granted "authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life" to those whom the Father has given to Him. "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

2. The Reality and Limits of Our Knowledge of God.

God reveals Himself to us so that we may know Him. This is possible because we were, up to a point, made like Him—"in His image." In other respects, however, He is infinitely beyond us. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your

thoughts" (Isaiah 55: 8, 9). Man instinctively revolts against these limits. Think of the Jehovah's Witness' usual objection to the Christian revelation of God: "God wouldn't insult our intelligence by expecting us to believe what is unreasonable." Who says He wouldn't? The same attitude has become characteristic of our increasingly Liberal "expert" synod reports, which routinely "reinterpret" the Bible to conform to current scientific (physical, psychological or social) opinions. The Apostle Paul called us to unceasing warfare for the exactly opposite cause, "pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:4, 5).

3. The Trinity.

From the beginning of Genesis on, the Bible speaks of God as more than one ("Let us make man...."), and yet as only One. Through the centuries Christian thinkers have vainly sought images to illustrate this seeming contradiction. How can we know, if we cannot understand Him? Because He reveals Himself to us as the only God, and yet as God the Father, our Creator, God the Son, our Savior, and God the Holy Spirit, our Sanctifier. "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18) "For through Him we...have access by one Spirit to the Father" (Eph. 2:18). "God sent forth His Son...that we might receive the adoption as sons. And...God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' Therefore you are...a son, and...an heir of God through Christ" (Gal. 4:4-7). Thus the Christian faith is essentially faith in and a growing personal relationship with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit! Christians are admonished to, "building yourselves upon your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 20:21).

4. The Creator.

How must we introduce the Christian faith? Some have suggested that

we begin with the New Testament gospels. Reformed missionary leaders have pointed out that we cannot satisfactorily do that. We must rather begin where the Bible itself (Genesis 1) and Paul in his missionary witness (Acts 14 and 17) began, (and therefore also our creed begins). We must introduce God, "the living God who made" "the world and everything in it," "God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth."

This approach brings us immediately into collision with the sophisticated paganism of today, just as it brought such a collision with the paganism of the Apostle's time. "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible" (Heb. 11:3). "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth." "For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast" (Psalm 33:6,9). God's claims on the universe and everything in it are the claims of their Creator. And "Christians" who try to compromise those claims by deferring to unbelieving scholars who reject them are simply surrendering to God's enemies.

5. God, the Provider.

Paul, in his examples of gospel testimony to an unbelieving world proceeded from introducing God as the Creator, to highlight His continuing providence for His creation. "Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17). "He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, so that they should seek the Lord...for in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17: 26-28).

Does God's Providence govern and control everything? His Word says that He "works all things according to the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11), And our Lord assured His followers that although they would be "hated by all" for the sake

of His name, "not a hair of your head shall perish" (Luke 21:18). How is this possible, if people are accountable for their own actions? God's Word teaches both man's responsibility and God's total control. "If there is calamity in a city, will not the Lord have done it" (Amos 3:6)? In Isaiah 10: 5ff. God calls the Assyrian "the rod of My anger" commissioned to punish the wicked, yet holds that Assyrian completely to blame for the atrocities he has committed for his own wicked reasons. This double explanation comes out especially in the death of our Lord, with which Peter must charge his people. "Him, being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23).

The all-inclusive Providence of God is to be the sure encouragement of all real believers in Christ. They are to consider the birds and the flowers. If their "heavenly Father" provides even for these, will He not "much more" provide for His children (Matt. 6:25ff.)? This confidence in God also becomes our assurance that "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28ff.). For no "created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

"When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word, what a glory He sheds on our way!"

Suggested Questions:

1. Why should our review of the Christian faith begin with knowing God (John 17:3)?
2. Why isn't His revelation in nature enough for us (Rom. 1:20- 25; 1 Cor. 1:21)?
3. Can we fully understand how God can be 1 God in 3 Persons? Why and how can we believe this (1 John 5: 19-21)?
4. Why can't we explain that God created by way of evolution (Heb. 11:3)?
5. Does God's providence control everything (Eph. 1:11)?
6. What encouragement is His providence to us (Rom. 8:28ff.)?

PDJ

A UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

April, 1978

AN ONGOING CHALLENGE

As these lines were being written, a well-informed and deeply concerned former elder in a large local RCA congregation said to me: "do you know what our greatest enemy is? Apathy!" And that's exactly it! The present CRC apathy to the increasing erosion of our former staunch and vigorous commitment to the Reformed faith, together with open and ever bolder attacks upon it are nothing less than appalling. He who is "a liar and the father thereof" (John 8:44) is having a field day, while even our "watchmen on the walls of Zion" refuse to be disturbed.

But isn't the whole thing hopeless?

Some answer "yes." But they are listening to the voice of frustration and fear instead of faith. Or they argue "Why keep on beating a dead horse or trying to breathe life into a corpse?" These are the quitters who never win, not the winners who never quit. Ezekiel's vision of dry bones may have something to say to them.

Repeatedly it must have seemed to Paul that his Lord's cause was altogether hopeless. But the great apostle marched to a different drum-

mer and he listened to a higher voice. He wanted to know nothing of the quitter either in himself or in others.

To the Galatians Paul wrote: "And let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (6:9).

And to the Thessalonians: "But ye, brethren, be not weary in well-doing" (II Thess. 3:13).

Hope thrives only when, like Peter, James and John, we see no man save Jesus only as the One Who builds His church. And if it be His will, already on this side of glory, to effect and bring forth a union of those united in the Reformed faith, He surely can and will bring it to pass.

Pity those who are always vocal among the critics of the church but are never found among the builders.

To be united and zealous only as critics of one's church will surely prove to be frustrating and counter-productive. Only those are entitled to criticize who at the same time are joined with our Lord as He goes on *building* His church to make it what He would have it to be.

To pray for, to pursue, and to propagate the realization of the "United Reformed Church" should be the aim which we still cherish as a

John Vander Ploeg

(*OUTLOOK* editorials reprinted
from ten years ago)

part of our Lord's building program
and regard as our ongoing challenge.

• • • • •

Finally, a few observations about our ongoing challenge:

1. As a first priority toward any real rapprochement there must be a mutual recognition and realization that the pursuit of union of all those who are honestly and unambiguously committed to the Reformed faith is a continuing duty. *What belongs together should be together.* To cherish, to pursue, and also to implement the ideal of union whenever and wherever such appears to be warranted and timely, according to Scripture is not merely an option but a divine mandate. Let no man put asunder what God hath joined together in a common commitment to the Reformed faith.

Do I now see the way to achieve such togetherness *today, tomorrow, or the next day?* Unfortunately, I do not. However, can and dare we be comfortable if we will not even move a muscle or lift a finger to bridge the unwarranted gaps that divide Reformed Christians? Our Lord's prayer "that they may all be one" (John 17:21) and Paul's inspired exhortation about "giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the

bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3) are a mandate for God's people of our day as well as for those of long ago. The Ecumenism prescribed in Scripture is not to be repudiated merely because so many of today's ecumenical churchmen disregard the sound doctrine and the godly walk demanded by the Scripture. Their pursuing a kind of union which God's Word forbids should not deter us from pursuing the kind of union His Word commands.

2. Let it also be clearly understood then that there are precious convictions that are non-negotiable, and that the surrender of them is too great a price to pay for union. Before we proceed to organize or unite we must prepare, agree upon and proclaim a "Reformed Manifesto," a clear and unambiguous statement of basic Reformed convictions founded on the Word—convictions that are never to be compromised, curtailed or submerged.

3. Allow me to suggest also that those who may come together to consider the possibility of a United Reformed Church should begin by exploring the convictions they do have in common without demanding that the *first* order of business must be a reconsideration and a resolving of controversies of a bygone day. Even though considering old controversies may later be unavoidable or necessary as we move down the road together, to make settling them a prerequisite for any common action could result in our being hopelessly stalled before we begin. To avoid insisting or making initial meetings a clearing house for conflicting views, or for airing our hurts and injuries of the past, will probably demand a self-denial which can be made possible only by grace that will be given to all who earnestly seek it. Meanwhile any who, after sincere soul-searching, may find themselves to be conscience-bound to have no part in this should be regarded with Christian esteem by others who do feel free to act together, in the hope that those who remain aloof will reciprocate by showing Christian esteem toward any and all who feel free to proceed without them.

4. The ongoing challenge for those who are truly Reformed to close ranks and to present a united

front should be sharpened by the realization that there is no hope for today's largely apostate Christendom apart from what the Reformed faith has to offer. If we are unwilling to bestir ourselves for this cause, our Lord may well say to us what Mordecai once said to Queen Esther: "For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then will relief and deliverances arise...from another place" (Esther 4:14).

Together with William Carey who, before he became a renowned missionary, had a map of the world tacked over his cobbler's bench, we too, when confronted by apparently overwhelming obstacles, should say: "Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God."

June 1978

Recently at church, a good friend drew me aside and said, "The URC (United Reformed Church) is an old man's movement." Then he added that he himself was going on eighty-five and that he had no more fight left in him. A bit doggedly I countered by stating my conviction that the URC is *God's* movement. Besides this we may well be reminded that it was precisely when he "forsook the counsel of the old men" that Rehoboam met disaster and his kingdom went to pieces. Wisdom as the fruit of experience is found more often with the old than with the young. The flattering quip about the senior citizens being the "keen-agers" may even have a bit of truth to it.

But, be all that as it may, how sorely the vision and the vigor of youth are also needed if, under God, the church is to fare well. It is gratifying therefore to be able to share with the reader a communication from a young CRC minister.

He writes:

"I have followed with interest Rev. Vander Ploeg's 'desideratum' regarding a United Reformed Church. I hope he will continue to write about this, and to keep this before our people. It seems to me that, barring some unforeseen, almost miraculous intervention, a split in the CRC is inevitable—it's only a matter of time and timing.

"I don't know exactly which event or decision of Synod might precipitate this split, but we ought to be ready for this split, while yet working to change the CRC while we are yet in it. As a student of church history, I am sure you are aware of the problem small splinter groups face after they leave an apostate denomination. There are many adjustments to be made, and as a result of having to deal with these adjustments, the fledgling denomination is often hampered in its work for several years.

"It is my conviction that when the split comes, we ought to affiliate with another solid, conservative Reformed group, such as the Orthodox Presbyterians or the Presbyterian Church in America. This would provide stability for the group that leaves, while giving added strength to the group(s) we affiliate with....

"Along the lines suggested by Rev. Vander Ploeg, I am pursuing the following concrete steps, and suggesting them to those I know are committed to the historic Reformed faith.

"1) Get to know other conservative Reformed denominations that we might consider affiliating with. This may be done by subscribing to their periodicals, visiting the church, procuring a copy of their hymnal and creedal statements, church polity, etc.

"2) Once some of the above steps have been taken, study the materials prayerfully in the light of the Bible. Evaluate different positions, practices, etc., and compare them with our own. Thus you will be in a position to offer constructive criticism and advice when talk gets around to union with such a denomination.

"3) When you find a part of church polity, etc., that is better than our own, don't hesitate to suggest to the appropriate bodies that the CRC adopt this.

"Along this line, it seems to me our synod has entirely too much power. The RCA with all its other faults, has a good idea in requiring that major changes be approved by 2/3 of the classes before they are adopted. If the CRC had been following that policy, perhaps we wouldn't be where we are today."

Rev. Wybren Dord
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SECOND CLASS
POSTAGE PAID AT
GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.

REFORMED BAPTIST RESPONSE

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

One of our members recently passed on to me the December, 1987 issue of the Outlook containing the letter by Glenn P. Palmer entitled, "Why are you dropping your middle name?" This was an open letter to the Christian Reformed Church. The man who gave me your magazine was raised in that church and continues to pray for it, but he was grieved by the caricature of Reformed Baptist churches in the letter.

I do not attribute any deliberate malice or falsehood to the son of the late and esteemed E.H. Palmer. Although what he says of the "Reformed Baptist Church" with which he has had contact may be true, the impressions left by this letter regarding the Reformed Baptist churches as a whole are false and misleading.

I am writing as one of the pastors of the Reformed Baptist Church of Grand Rapids and at the request of its overseers, as a former member of a Reformed Baptist Church which has for one of its pastors Pastor A.N. Martin, whose name was mentioned in the letter, and as an instructor in the Trinity Ministerial Academy, a seminary under that church's oversight. I can, therefore, say with confidence that Mr. Palmer (unintentionally, as we believe) gives a distorted impression of Reformed Baptist churches like the two just mentioned.

The following statements made and impressions given in the letter require correction and clarification.

First, we are said to "deny the covenant." I suppose it is the "Covenant of Grace" which is meant. If by it is meant that God's salvation, His people, and His law are basically one in all ages, then we do not deny the "Covenant." We affirm it.

Second, we "deny infant baptism." We do. That does not mean, however, that we deny the "Covenant of Grace." We deny the application made of it to justify infant baptism. We deny that the Abrahamic Covenant is the definitive revelation of it. We maintain that in

reality a true view of the "Covenant" as definitively revealed in the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34, Heb. 8, 10) requires the rejection of infant baptism.

Third, we are "hostile to the idea of Christian schools." Is this why the vast majority of our congregation refuse to send their children to public schools? Does this also explain why Pastor Martin is a vocal advocate of Christian schools? And why that congregation and a number of other such groups of believers have recently inaugurated Christian schools?

Fourth, we have "no concept of family worship." This would really surprise our people, who are regularly questioned by the pastor as to their faithfulness in this Biblical responsibility.

Fifth, "the children's church is a little church trying to win souls to Christ." We do not even have a children's church, nor does any other Reformed Baptist Church that I know of. (We do have nurseries for ages 0-3.) We certainly want nothing to do with the "decisionism" and "easy-believism" frequently associated with such children's programs.

Sixth, we do not "claim all of life for Christ." This is not true theologically or practically. We have preached frequently on Biblical government, the Biblical family, and even Biblical economic responsibilities. I would not be ashamed to compare the prayers, concerns, and activity of our people for political and social righteousness with any church in the Grand Rapids area. Our people have been in the fore front of the public demonstrations against abortion in our city.

Seventh, it is implied that we do not have an evening service. As firm believers in the Christian Sabbath, we view evening services as an important aid in observing the Lord's Day.

Eighth, it is clearly implied that we are anti-confessional and anti-catechism in our perspectives. Our children are regularly catechized as a part of our Sunday School instruction from age 2.

As to confessions, we certainly respect the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, The Westminster Confession, and other such Reformed documents, though for obvious reasons we do not hold them. We do hold a revision of the Westminster Confession of Faith known as the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689, as well as to the Canons of Dort. We are just now completing the second exposition of our Confession in the 16-year history of our local congregation.

Ninth, Mr. Palmer implies that there is a low view of theological education among us. Our seminary requires for graduation 10 hours of Hebrew and 12 hours of Greek. Each of the pastors of our Church has studied both languages and labors in the Word out of the original languages. Although we do not require that every elder-pastor know Greek and Hebrew, we believe that such knowledge is ordinarily crucial to the church and its preaching.

Tenth, the hymnal used in the church with which Mr. Palmer was affiliated was "a man-centered hymnal with many repetitions." Many, if not most, Reformed Baptist churches use the Trinity Hymnal, of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. No one doubts its God-centeredness and through its very fine collection of Psalms our people are no strangers to the Psalms. We detest as heartily as yourselves the man-centered slush that passes for hymnody in many evangelical churches.

Eleventh, we "do not say the 10 commandments or the Apostles' Creed." We do not. Though our worship is, we believe, God-Honoring, it is not "liturgical." Though we do not say the Ten Commandments, we certainly do believe them. One of our pastors is about to preach through them for the third time in our 16-year history.

With Christian Love and Respect,
Pastor Sam Waldron
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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