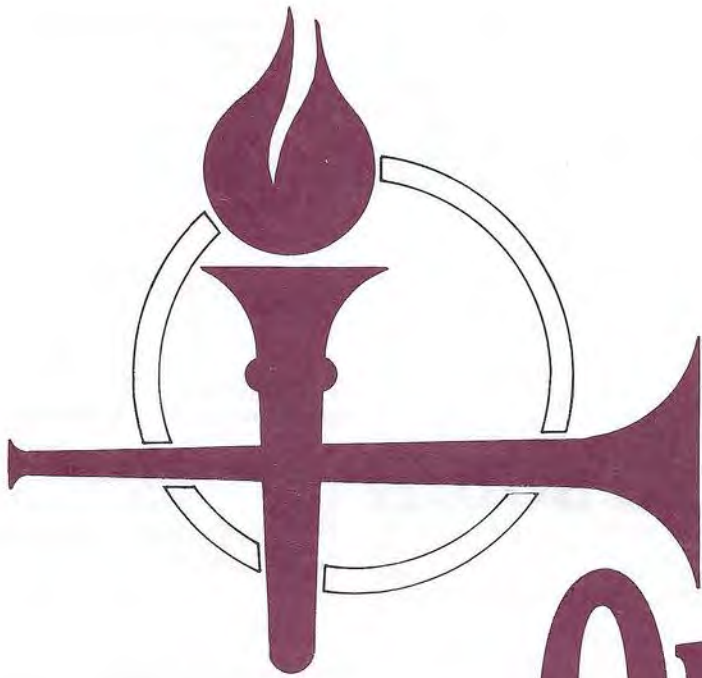




Outlook

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

Sign the Form?

Bavinck on Evolution

The Compromise Road

MAY 1988

THE HOPE ANCHORED SOUL

"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain where, Jesus who went before us, has entered on our behalf." (Heb. 6:19)

• • • • •

An anchor attached to boat or ship, keeps it from drifting. In this text we are told that believers' souls have an anchor. We have hope-anchored souls. "Hope" in the Bible is different from what the word means in common usage. Often it is the expression of a wish or desire, with its fulfilment not at all certain. We're not sure that we will receive what we desire. As I am writing this it is very cold in Michigan and we hope that the weather will soon warm up. But we're not sure. Hope in the Bible has a somewhat different meaning; it is a certainty, because it is a desire or wish based on a promise. And some time elapses before our wishes or desires are fulfilled. (A boy is promised a new bicycle on his next birthday, but he has to wait until his birthday comes to receive it.) The sacred author says that the hope we have, that for which we are waiting and hoping, is like "an anchor of the soul." Our souls are made secure, because our expectations are surely to be fulfilled.

• • • • •

The Hebrew Christians to whom this epistle was written had problems. There was persecution — not "unto blood," but persecution never-

theless. The result was that their faith weakened; they became sluggish in their outlook, activity and hope. They were despondent and impatient. And who are we, who have never experienced persecution, to criticize them?

Weak faith is common to God's people. Everyone who will live a godly life will experience opposition. When cross-bearing for Christ's sake is prolonged, we often become discouraged. There are also many "common" adversities, physical difficulties, frustrations, and problems of widows, widowers and elderly. Whatever the problems may be the Lord knows them and will give His people what they need when they, in faith, seek help from Him.

The writer speaks of how God gave His promises to Abraham and in Him, to all believers, confirming them with an oath. He wanted to make the unchanging nature of His purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised. In an oath, we call upon someone greater than we are (here the all-seeing and all-knowing God Himself) to witness that we are speaking the truth. Since God cannot call upon anyone greater than He is, He swears by Himself.

What did God promise under oath to Abraham? That he would have many descendants and that God would give them the land of Canaan. The promise ultimately refers to the heavenly Canaan, or heaven itself, and all salvation.

Meditation

John Blankespoor

This eternal salvation, in Christ was the hope of Abraham, and is still the hope of all God's people. The object of our hope is the eternal glory in the new heaven and earth.

That hope is for us an anchor of the soul. It makes our souls secure. It prevents us from being swept away by all life's storms, including persecution and opposition brought upon the church by the devil.

That anchor will hold. What makes our hope sure? Jesus Christ has "entered into the sanctuary" which is "behind the curtain." The language refers to the old Testament tabernacle and temple. In them were the Holy Place and beyond that the Holy of Holies. In the Holy of Holies God dwelt, in the symbol of the cloud. According to custom, the high priest would enter into the Holy of Holies behind the curtain with some of the sacrificial blood which would be poured on the "mercy seat" as a type of the blood of the coming Christ. Through the blood of Christ, the blood atonement, our sins would be forgiven once and for all and our peace would be secured with God.

The writer says that the "anchor of our souls" enters into the inner part behind the curtain. He is not thinking of the temple built by Herod, or the earlier one built by Solomon, but the "Holy of Holies" in heaven, into which Jesus entered with His atoning blood.

This work of Christ included His resurrection and ascension into heaven. During this time of the year

we may be reminded of His ascension. That ascension was a very important link in the chain of salvation, although it is ignored by the world and almost ignored by the Christian church.

To Christ, who has entered into "the heavenly sanctuary," our souls are anchored. The discouraged and despondent Hebrew Christians must be reminded that their souls were anchored to Christ. That is to be the comfort for all God's people in all times and all circumstances! We are as safe and our salvation is as sure as Christ is in heaven today.

Our little boats are still on the sea of life and at times the waves may be high and threatening.

Life can be difficult in rough seas. But we must not fear if we are "anchored" in Christ who has ascended into heaven as the atoning and risen Lord. We are as safe as Jesus Christ is at the Father's right hand.

Let all Christians when weak in faith, anxious, or discouraged look at this Jesus.

As the anchor normally is out of sight down deep in the water, so the heavenly anchor is out of sight. It is in heaven above, where Christ is.

Although the world's ships will drift and be wrecked the ship of God's people is firmly anchored.

Our certainty lies in Jesus. He conquered death, rising from the grave and ascending into heaven He prays for us, constantly holding us fast. That's the comfort of all who trust in Christ.

Tho' the angry surges roll
On my tempest driven soul
I am peaceful for I know,
Wildly though the winds may blow,
I've an anchor safe and sure,
That can ever more endure.

Mighty tides about me sweep
Perils lurk within the deep,
Angry clouds o'er shade the sky,
And the tempest rises high;
Still I stand the tempest's shock
For my anchor grips the Rock.

Blow your wildest, then O gale,
On my bark so small and frail:
By His grace I shall not fail
For my anchor holds, my anchor holds.



Outlook

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

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SIGNING THE FORM

Norman DeJong

My hand shook almost uncontrollably. My neck stiffened, like it did sometimes when I got nervous, so that the turning of my head seemed like a punctuated jerking. When it was my turn, I almost stumbled the short distance to the table at the front of church and managed to put my full name on the page reserved for the latest signers. The penmanship was deserving of no gold stars, even at the fourth grade level. The signature would baffle any handwriting analyst, for it bore little resemblance to my normal flowing style.

It was the first Sunday of January, 1973. The place was Sioux Center, Iowa. The occasion was the annual installation of elders and deacons. It was my first induction as an elder. What made it so memorable was the manner in which it was done. Our pastor had the somewhat unusual notion that the signing of the Form of Subscription should be a public activity, in front of the assembled congregation. Naturally, then, he read the entire document for all to hear: "...we heartily believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine contained in the Confession and Catechism of the Reformed church, together with the explanation of some points of the aforesaid doctrine made by the National Synod of Dordrecht, 1618-'19, do fully agree with the Word of God." What were all those points of doctrine? Did I know them well enough to sign an oath before God and before His people?

While I was still pondering, the pastor read on: "...we do not only reject all errors that militate against this doctrine... but...will neither publicly nor privately propose, teach, or defend the same.... and cheerfully submit to the judgment of the consistory, classes, or Synod...."

I signed it that day, with no regrets, but with an unusual amount of fear and trepidation. So did my fellow office-bearers who were also first-timers. I don't know about theirs, but my memory was seared as though a white-hot branding iron had creased my cerebellum.

Later that same spring Classis Chicago South forwarded an overture to Synod, advocating a revision to that Form of Subscription which I had just signed. Spurred on by a courageous individual who wanted a completely new form, classis argued that it was "the right and responsibility of the whole body of believers, to whom the Holy Spirit is given, to reflect upon and prayerfully seek the will of the Spirit concerning any proposed changes or amendments of our doctrinal standards." If an officeholder had serious difficulties with any point of doctrine, they reasoned, his right to freedom of speech was drastically throttled by the present Form. Even though he had filed an official gravamen, he might neither publicly nor privately air his views and present his case, except within the confines of the consistory, classis, or Synod. Such restrictions minimized the wisdom of the membership and bottled up the

Holy Ghost. Furthermore, such procedure smacked of hierarchicalism, which was both contrary to the best Reformed thought and certainly anathema to good old American democracy.

Synod in 1973 bought the argument and gave provisional approval to the revisions, which would give an office holder the right to discuss and defend his contrary views in public, provided that he did not project them into his preaching and had previously presented them to his consistory. It seemed the right thing to do, particularly in light of the successes of the counter-cultural revolution and the anti-establishment mentality which had succeeded in removing the United States from the mire of Vietnam. The general populace must have the right to hear and weigh the issues, even if the official decisions would still be made in ecclesiastical assemblies. A little bit of people pressure could only improve the process.

But later Synods balked. Two subsequent sessions refused to be persuaded, so the amendment was never ratified, and the Form which was first adopted in 1857 remains essentially unchanged to this day. A document "that seems to underpin all others, but seems to concern only a few" (see *Banner*, 12/28/87, p. 7) has been signed by all those who have held or are holding ecclesiastical office in the Christian Reformed Church. Yet few of them appear to take it seriously. In a recent conversation, a friend of mine ridiculed my

concern by insisting that everyone is violating it, so why get upset when some one individual does. Such logic might be fitting for a junior high student who wants to go on a date, but it also would lead us to condone all manner of heinous sins. We should never justify evil by citing its prevalence, nor should we declare our intention to violate the law in the absence of its enforcement.

If Senator Teddy Kennedy wrote an editorial for *The Boston Herald* in which he recommended that his state's electorate vote Republican, the Central Committee of the Democratic Party would ride him out of office over a narrow bridge. If Lee Iacocca went on television and did commercials for General Motors, his Board of Directors would remove him from his office post-haste. Even if he had argued, in closed executive session, that General Motors had a superior drive-train assembly and that Chrysler should modify theirs accordingly, he would have no right to use the power of his position to persuade the public.

I know of more than one set of parents who frequently send mixed messages to their children. The father will lay down a set of regulations governing the children's behavior, but the mother will quickly contradict the rules in the children's presence and condone what was just condemned. In one home the mother and father will openly disagree and quarrel in front of the children, with each of them enticing the children to side with his or her position.

Such children are to be pitied. Almost inevitably they are confused, but that confusion quickly becomes manipulation, divisiveness, and open rebellion. A family simply cannot be told to go in different directions simultaneously without doing irreparable emotional and spiritual harm. The family of God is no different.

In ecclesiastical matters, the importance of this loyalty is of even greater significance. We not only made a pledge to a Board of Directors and to the mass of potential consumers. We made a solemn vow to God in front of all His people. We said to Him that we "heartily

believe" all the points of doctrine to fully agree with His Word. We said that we would defend all of those doctrines and reject all those who sought to undermine or diminish them.

Now, if we suddenly decide that it is permissible to teach contrary to them, one of several possible conclusions must be reached:

1. Our word is unreliable and we are no longer to be considered as trustworthy; or
2. The doctrines must be changed in light of some new, previously unknown truths which take precedence over both the confessional statements and the Word of God on which they were founded; or
3. The Word of God is no longer reliable, since it was written by culturally-conditioned authors who were writing to a culturally-conditioned audience; or
4. There is a new, refined, and yet mysterious way of reading the Scriptures (a new hermeneutic, the pros call it) which gives a whole new meaning to its content.

No matter which conclusion we draw, the organization is in serious trouble. If its leaders are no longer reliable, trustworthy men, the parishioners will wander, drift, and lose their way, for they will no longer be able to recognize the Master's clarion call to "Follow Me!" The sheep will hear first one message, then another, and will no longer know whom to believe. When that happens, they will be ready to follow almost anyone, for it is inherent in the nature of man to believe in someone. If we draw conclusion number two, the unity of the church will be shattered, for the very forms under attack are the glue that has held us together for these last four centuries. The oneness for which Christ so passionately prayed in John 17, and the bodily harmony which Paul so eloquently illustrated in Romans 12, I Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4, will be jeopardized to the point that we again embrace congregationalism at best and democratic individualism at worst.

If the third conclusion is where we stop, the very foundation of our faith will have been undermined. Our only guide for faith and practice will be-

come an historical relic which should be taken off the pulpit and the bedstand and be placed in the archives. The pillar and ground of the truth will become the object of scholarly analysis, but will no longer function as *Sola Scriptura*, that open, perspicuous set of spectacles which John Calvin and all the reformers since had said was clear to the understanding, for both the clergy and laity.

We all know what will happen if the fourth conclusion is reached. We have lived there for lo at least fifteen years. To the *Grand Rapids Press* it might be amusing and worthy of editorial comment. To the hostile world around us, it may even be occasion for glee. To the insider, however, the situation is confusing at best. Threats of schism persist. Synods revise the church order with such rapidity that the average pew sitter no longer bothers to study the rules which were probably changed twice since the last publication. Unable to tolerate confusion, increasing numbers of members migrate to other denominations where the preacher makes them feel secure and where two services are not even planned. Revolving door evangelism becomes a practiced art, bringing new converts in the front while the oldtimers quietly slip out the back, thereby making room for even more. Discipline is rarely understood and seldom used, for fear that even more will find excuse to escape.

Among the marks of the true church are the *pure* preaching of God's Word and the faithful exercise of church discipline. If the ministers no longer treat that Word as the clear, timeless, authoritative, infallible revelation of the sovereign, omniscient God of the universe, then the church can only expect to drift and atrophy to the point of impotence. If the officers of the church no longer insist on loyalty from its leaders, then we will be inviting chaos and increasing confusion.

If we want "free speech" as our courts are inclined to interpret it, then we also invite the moral and ethical decay which comes when everyone is at liberty to believe and practice that which is right in his own eyes.

If we want to regain some of the clarity of vision, the strength of commitment, then we ought to insist that all of our officers mean what they say and say what they mean. Those who speak with forked tongue or come with contrary teachings should not be entrusted with leadership positions. Those were the decisions

of Synod in 1974 and 1976. Until those decisions are rescinded or revised, they should be considered settled and hindering.

In the meantime, it might be an excellent idea to read the Form of Subscription in front of the whole assembly and then to ask each new officer to sign that statement in

public. The knees might knock, and the pen might palpitate, but the church will be stronger for it.

Dr. Norman DeJong is a professor at Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, Illinois.

MUST WE HAVE AND HOLD CREEDS?

"If anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules" (2 Tim. 2:5).

Confusion About Creeds

Why should we have church creeds or require anyone to agree with them? A discussion of that question might well begin (as Dr. Martin Woudstra began it in the Oct. 6, 1986 *Christian Renewal*, reprinted in the Feb. 1987 *Outlook*) with a look at the widely discussed case of Charles Curran. Curran's license to teach as a Roman Catholic theologian was revoked because of his wide ranging rejection of the church doctrine on a number of moral issues. That church action was widely deplored as a violation of the professor's rights. Dr. Woudstra pointed out that, although we do not share some of the Roman Church's doctrines, its action against an official teacher of that church's doctrines who flatly contradicted what he was hired to teach deserves praise rather than blame. While we cannot accept that church's hierarchy, we must approve of its honesty. His article went on to highlight some

of our own synod's recent less-than-forthright treatment of such issues, especially in its relations with the Reformed Church (RCA) and in our committee's courtship of the World Alliance.

The need for a church to say and maintain what it believes was especially eloquently argued in 1949 by the British novelist, Dorothy L. Sayers in a fascinating 20-page essay entitled "Creed or Chaos?" (It was printed in a book with that title and later in her larger 1969 collection, *Christian Letters to a Post-Christian World*.) Her point was that the chaotic condition of British society was traceable to the fact that in that "Christian country not one person in a hundred has the faintest notion what the Church teaches..." and that the Churches were "discredited," not because they were, as alleged, "too bigoted about theology," but because they had "run away from theology." Then she went on to argue that to teach any Christian values or morals one simply had to return to true teaching of who Christ is—in other words, "Christology." Although her analysis of some details of the early controversies is less than

accurate, her insistence on their practical importance is valid and refreshing in an atmosphere that still echoes with the foolish motto, "Take away theology and give us some nice religion." We still have to choose between the alternatives she saw plainly 40 years ago, "creed or chaos?"

The Bible's Requirement

The Bible insists that we must be prepared to tell the world what we believe and why we believe it. The Apostle Peter directed us to "sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence" (1 Peter 3:15). Our creeds (from "Credo"—"I believe") are simply a carefully formulated collective church effort to give that kind of responsible account of our faith.

That confession is not something for each to determine privately, according to individual likes and dislikes, but is to confess (literally, "say the same thing") as God has said to us in His Word. As John stated it,

"He has borne witness concerning His Son...the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the witness that God has borne concerning His Son. And the witness is this that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life" (1 John 5:9-12). In the same vein 2 Peter 1 calls attention to the way God had given the revelation of His Gospel both in the events of our Lord's coming and the confirmation of Holy Scripture, which is never a "matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." In sharp contrast with that Divine revelation, Peter then warned against the "false teachers" who would "secretly introduce destructive heresies (literally, self-chosen opinions from the Greek word "to choose") even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves" and misleading many (2 Peter 1:19-2:2).

Especially the elders who are appointed in each church to lead and teach are admonished to "be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." They must do this the more carefully because "savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:28-31). The Lord, in the letters which the Apostle John was instructed to write on His behalf to the seven churches, issues the same kind of warnings. He especially commends the church at Ephesus because it "could not endure evil men" and "put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false" (Rev. 2:2). In the following letters he reprimanded the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira for failing to exercise such discrimination.

Paul in his pastoral letter urged Timothy to "Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard

from me in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.... And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 1:13, 14; 2:2). It is highly significant that these church leaders must learn from the example of the military way of life to be "good soldiers of Christ Jesus" (v. 3, 4; compare the lesson the Lord taught from the Roman centurion about the nature of Christian faith in Matt. 8:5-13). Anyone who has had any military experience learns that one of its first and most important requirements is discipline. "No one serving as a soldier gets involved" in civilian affairs — may take off to pursue his own hobbies — he has to follow the orders of "his commanding officer." No army could begin to function if each recruit were free to do whatever he pleased. The "academic freedom" to promote one's own personal opinions being assumed or demanded in churches amounts, in military language, to "mutiny." It produces the same kind of anarchy in churches that the attempt to practice it would in an army.

Paul goes on to use another perhaps even more striking example (v. 5). "Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules." Any game requires that players play by its rules. How long would a basketball player be tolerated on a team if he insisted on his right to throw the ball in the wrong basket? If even in a ball game players have to observe the rules, how could we expect to accomplish anything in the infinitely more serious business of bringing the gospel if we insist on freedom to discard the gospel's rules? Anyone who is seriously going to bring the gospel has to confess that gospel and be faithful to it. When even that is no longer required or expected in churches, they have obviously reached the point at which our Lord said of them, "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness...it is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men" (Matt. 5:13).

Binding Creeds in Reformed Church History

A study of the early history of the Reformed churches helps us to understand and appreciate their development of confessions and of their requirement that church office holders subscribe to them. Some thirty years ago I made such a study dealing with Calvinist-Anabaptist relations in 16th Century Netherlands. (Thesis in Calvin Library; a summary in Oct. 1964 *Torch and Trumpet*.) There the Anabaptist movement preceded that of the Calvinists by about 30 years. At first it flourished, but soon waned to be replaced by the Calvinist Reformed. A careful search of the records reveals especially three reasons for that development. The political revolution was not, as has often been alleged, one of them. (1) The Reformed leaders were firmly convinced that their beliefs were the doctrines taught by God's Word and were prepared to show that to anyone in public debate. (One such debate was prolonged to 124 sessions!) Their creeds were not mere expressions of personal sentiments, but laboriously prepared common statements of what they saw the Bible teaching. Drawing together many kinds of people, they were called "Forms of unity." (2) In the Dutch Reformation the church leaders were expected to replace the priests in taking responsibility for the operation of the nation's schools. Christian education in those schools was as great a concern to them as Christian preaching in the churches. (3) Despite the fact that the Reformed churches in that half century could not get government permission to have a general synod, but had to operate as provincial churches, they succeeded in establishing a Biblical and workable system of church government, something which the often dedicated Anabaptist leaders with their strong emphasis on personal insights and experiences never really succeeded in doing. The latter split into some 40 or 50 separate and often hostile sects as each followed its individual leaders. In this situation, the Reformed "forms of unity" and the common requirement that each church leader commit himself in

writing to believe and teach this common Biblical doctrine helped to unite those churches and keep them strong.

That study gained added interest because of the contrast between Calvinist success in the Netherlands and Calvinist failure in the U.S. Consider that while Menno Simons and Arminius kept little following in their home country (the Netherlands), the movements they fathered (Baptist and Methodist) captured the U.S. The study suggested the loss of these reasons for early Calvinist strength, (1) loss of Biblical confession and convictions, (2) surrender of education to the secularists, and (3) discard of Biblically grounded church order and discipline, contributed to continuing defeats of traditionally Calvinist churches here. "Salt" that has lost its "saltiness" has tended to be discarded—as the Lord said it would be. If we and our churches would see a better future, we will have to pray for and work at (1) regaining the commitment to God's Word, to (2) educating our children in it and to (3) reactivating its order and discipline. If such a program is to be genuine our leaders will have to hold and be held to that guide which we confess we follow.

Creeds Under Attack

The immediate occasion for this article was a discussion of the overture of Dr. H.R. Boer at the 1973 Synod (*Acts 729-731*) calling for a new form of subscription. It embodied his charges that the churches' form was hierarchical in restricting free discussion of proposals to change the creeds, inhibited theological and spiritual development, and was far too absolute in its required endorsement of the creeds. The 1973 synod largely gave in to these proposals with changes in the church order. The following synod refused to approve the changes, and in 1976 another committee after a more extensive study, pointed out how the criticisms of the form had been unfair to the facts (*Acts*, p. 562ff.) and had misinterpreted the purpose of the form (p. 571), treating it as a method of

changing creeds instead of as the regulation of the ministry and government of the church that it was designed to be. (Boer's criticism somewhat resembled criticising a court which is supposed to enforce the law for not operating as legislature to rewrite the law!) The amendments to the form "by stressing what is a secondary function of the form (at best)" tended "to neglect and obscure the primary purpose of the form" (p. 577). In line with the report, the 1976 synod retained the form of subscription, although it adopted some explanatory guidelines and regulations to eliminate confusion about it.

The difference between Boer's proposals and the stance of the form concerned the proper approach to the creeds. Boer's assumption was that the subscription should encourage and provide opportunity to change the creeds. His proposals rather strikingly exemplified what Harry Blamires in *The Christian Mind* described as prevailing (secular) "ideas that the Christian Faith is something which men have manufactured and which they have the right to alter...a set of beliefs fabricated by human brains and therefore able to be altered or improved upon by human brains. Often the assumption appears to be that Christianity represents mankind's best shot so far at making a religion; that if man had another try, he might do better next time" (p. 115). Blamires stressed the need to begin to correct this error "by taking for granted the authoritative, God-given nature of the Christian Faith." That is the stance of our creeds and, as we have seen, the direction given the church in the Bible. Boer demanded the right to freely promote criticisms of the creeds throughout the church before the churches made any decision. How can the elders called to "guard the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers" and warned to guard the church against especially the "savage wolves" who will attack from without, and the perverse teachers who will arise within to mislead it (*Acts 20:28-31*), responsibly open

those churches to attacks on what those churches officially say they believe is God's truth?

Dr. Boer charged that the form, by its authoritarian strictness, in practice stifled criticisms and stopped theological progress. The fact that he, despite his prolonged public attacks on the Canons of Dordt, the Bible (cf. his book, *Above the Bible*) and the Form of Subscription which he violated, was never deposed, shows the falsity of that charge. The Lynwood, Illinois consistory, as his supervising church, for a dozen years tried to carry out its duty under that form to make him conform to the creeds he had promised to support. It was frustrated by the refusal of the larger assemblies to support it. It is no accident that that consistory then initiated the consistorial conferences to consider what churches who want to be faithful to their confessed Christian beliefs must do about their relations with a denomination that refuses to maintain those beliefs. If we are to see any real improvement in our churches, we will have to pray and work at getting back to saying what we really believe and believing what we say. PDJ

This material was presented to a class in church polity at Calvin Theological Seminary on Feb. 5, 1987.

"Who Said? God Said!"

Address by
Rev. Jay Wesseling

May 10, 7:30 p.m.

Wyoming Park Christian
Reformed Church at
Annual Meeting of
Grandville Chapter of
Concerned Members
of the CRC.

Everyone Welcome!

BAVINCK ON EVOLUTION

Did He Consider It Acceptable?

Herman Bavinck a century ago was a leading Reformed theologian, who may deserve a place among the most learned and clearest Christian thinkers of all time. In recent controversy about Evolution, his observations about that subject are worth noticing. Generally, he tended to take more account of problems and unanswered questions about such matters than did some of his successors. Professor J.G. Vos in his 1966 address to the Reformed Fellowship ("The Bearing of Scriptural Revelation on the Evolutionary World view," reprinted in the April and May, 1987, *Outlooks*) noted Bavinck's comments in *Our Reasonable Faith* (p. 172) on the Biblical creation days. (In the same May issue I noted a related observation in Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*.) Bavinck's treatment of these matters has been understood as leaving room for Evolution (by Dr. Harry Boer, for example, in a brief quotation in the Dec. 1987 *Reformed Journal*). Let's face the question: "Did Herman Bavinck teach that there is no conflict between creation and evolution, as it is being widely taught and defended in Calvin College today?"

An Overlooked Essay

The Preface to Bavinck's *Our Reasonable Faith* (p. 9) lists among the few translations of his work into English, "a little treatise *Evolution*." When Calvin College Library's catalog revealed no such listing, my appeal to the theological librarian, Mr. Peter De Klerk, through a thesis bibliography, located in the November, 1901 *Methodist Review* (!) a 25-page article of Bavinck entitled, "Creation or Development" (translated by J. Hendrik de Vries). Whether or not this is the writing mentioned in the Preface, it sheds much more light on Bavinck's views of Evolution, and shows an interest-

ing anticipation of present arguments.

The Inevitable Conflict

Bavinck at the beginning of this century foresaw an intensifying conflict between two contradictory world views. "This conflict extends the whole length of the line.... more serious and fiercer than ever before... between the old and the new world-view. For man has undertaken the gigantic effort of interpreting the whole world, and all things that are therein, in their origin, essence, and end, what is called purely and strictly scientifically, that is, without God...." Although this had often been tried, with indifferent success, "Darwin's theory of development has provided the necessary means to make this process of the eternal becoming intelligible in the material world." Thus Bavinck saw the rise of a "new world-view" which undertakes to interpret all "without exception independently of God, and only and alone from an immanent self-development." While he saw many following this trend only part-way and trying to find compromise positions, leaving "faith and knowledge divided and irreconciled" and keeping "two sets of books of truths," he found such compromise impossible. "He who fully accepts the theory of development in the sensual, observable world cannot dismiss it at once and without explanation when spiritual phenomena appear. Even though provisionally a small domain is then set aside for faith, this domain is bound to become ever smaller.... One fortification after another must then be sacrificed, one line of defense after another abandoned, and one concession after another be granted. There is no immovable conviction in these conservative dualists, no strength of faith, no enthusiastic courage. And hence they are ever bound to lower the flag before the radicals, who have the courage of

their convictions, who shrink from no inferences, and who, beginning and continuing without God, are determined also to end without God. Hence these are the men of the future. Conservatives and liberals die out, but the radicals and socialists are to be the leaders in the twentieth century. They have agreed to hold a total and final clearing out of whatever of the old Christian world-view consciously or unconsciously still remains in our laws and morals, in our education and civilization." Thus he sees them working to "put an end to the imperfect knowledge as well as to the foolish faith of former days and cause all things to appear before the soul's eye in the magical light of a world-embracing system."

The Antichristian World System

Although in science many busy themselves with insignificant details and curiosities, everyone has to face the question about the origin and purpose of his life. "The development theory of our times meets this question with the answer that in reality there is no origin and no beginning of things." "Development, evolution is the eternal law, which governs and directs everything that exists; with its blind fate and incalculable accident it displaces Divine Providence. The origin of our planetary system is explained according to this law. Our world in its present form was preceded by a thousand others, which in turn came into being after this same law and have passed away." "Along long, immeasurably long lines of regularity the higher develops itself from the lower. By all sorts of evolutions the earth forms itself into a fit dwelling place for living beings... at length under favorable circumstances from inorganic matter the cell originates.... There is no deep, broad chasm between the animate and the inanimate, but a gradual transition....

Along the same way at length man arrives upon the scene... not brought forth by the hand of the Creator, bearing his image; but... the higher development of that species of animals, whose next of kin still continue to live on in the orang-outang, gorilla, and chimpanzee.... No one is able to indicate where the animal ceases and man begins... and man himself is the result of a process covering many millions of years."

A Bankrupt Theory

Bavinck calls attention to the attraction of this interpretation of origins which, understandably, "charms many." Although "this theory may still be incomplete and leave many phenomena... unexplained," Bavinck sees "an age which... shakes off all religion" compelled to "expect all salvation from... its own thinking, and to see the solution of all the riddles of the world in development." This theory, he observes, "is not a product of science, but of the imagination... an air castle in the true sense of the word." "Theology is accused, and justly so, of having usurped, in early times, all the sciences. But no science has ever done this more entirely than physical science of the present day... it forces its method upon all the sciences, and considers the mechanical interpretation the only one that is warranted to the claim of being scientific." Bavinck highlights the contradictions of the theory especially as applied to man, and the total lack of fossil or any other evidence for it, setting in opposition to it at every point, the Biblical revelation of God's creation as "He spoke, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast" (Psalm 33:9).

In the further treatment of his subject, Bavinck points out the total inability of the theory to do justice to anything human, let alone spiritual. He notes its inevitable relativizing and destruction of all morals, for, clearly, "from this viewpoint there is no difference of good and evil, of right and wrong, of truth and falsehood." Its adherents "skeptical according to their principle," are "hardened dogmatists in practice and oftentimes worse fanatics than the adherents of a religious belief. While they do not acknowledge ob-

jective truth, they are more certain of the truth of their own teaching than many an orthodox believer." He exposes this evolutionary system as having "no need of God," and even less of Christ, no knowledge of sin or Savior or of the Holy Spirit's regeneration and renewal, or of a faith that justifies the ungodly and that overcomes the world. It only tries to develop a civilization that would temporarily check the "wild animal" in man. "It is the world view of the heathen who, knowing God, does not glorify Him as God," but, changing the truth of God "into falsehood, honors and serves the creature above the Creator" (Cf. Rom. 1:21-25). Thus he contrasts in every way the Christian faith with this antichristian counterpart.

God's Revealed Hope

The radical opposition of the two world-views becomes even more evident as one looks ahead and asks "Where am I going?" "At this point," Bavinck sees the bankruptcy of evolutionary theory as "especially evident... it knows nothing of an end." "Irrational, planless, purposeless humanity goes forward to meet its ruin." While the evolutionists reduce the future to a social paradise, impatient people demand it now, if necessary, by "violence... revolution and slaughter." "Complete bankruptcy, moral and spiritual, is the end of the modern world-view," confirming Paul's word, "that he who is without God and without Christ is also without hope in the world." We are shown the radical contrast of all this in every way with the Christian hope. "There is indeed no other choice save between the ruin of all existing things as taught by present-day science, and the hope of the glory of the children of God, as preached by the Holy Scripture." Though the Lord's promised future can only come with conflict, and "the near future may be the portion of the world and Satan, the later future belongs certainly to Christ." "The kingdom of heaven has not once come along the lines of gradual ascent, neither will it come along these lines in the future. Not from beneath but from above do we expect the righteousness and life, the blessedness and

glory of God," when Christ returns and all must "confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Present Surrender to Antichrist

To what conclusions does this review of the apparently long forgotten essay of Bavinck lead us? It is obvious that Bavinck, the scholar, tried to do justice—possibly more than justice—to the degree of development the Creator designed into His marvelous creation. Bavinck describes the appeal of this comprehensive evolutionary theory with which Van Till in his book in extravagant language expresses his enthusiasm ("Cosmic history is like a magnificent tapestry woven from different strands of temporal development to form the intricately designed pattern of cosmic evolution. Spatial evolution, galactic evolution, elemental evolution, stellar evolution, planetary evolution, and biological evolution are coherently integrated and intertwining processes that serve as the individual threads in the tapestry..." p. 254). Yet Bavinck was so much the Christian thinker consciously governed by the Word of God that he saw and pointed out with unmistakable clarity the world-conflict (or antithesis) which must be and was intensifying throughout history between God and the devil and the followers of each. He highlighted the evolutionary system as the substitute for God in the devil's program. The sweep and intensity of that conflict is in some ways even more evident now than it was a century ago. Yet now our professed "Christian educators," trying to wipe out the Biblical antitheses between God and the devil, are teaching the discredited system with more enthusiasm than some of the unbelievers who invented it.

The avowedly anti-Christian character of today's secular, evolutionistic system of thought, both in principle and in its devastating practical consequences in all of society, becomes so evident that it hardly needs argument. The way virtually all higher educational institutions, by surrendering to that system, have betrayed their Christian origins and purpose to become militantly anti-Christian is also undeniable.

What is especially significant for us is that that secular evolutionary system of thought is now being publicly adopted and defended by the majority of Calvin College's faculty. And the school's administration after a year's "investigation," has now approved and encouraged this course as perfectly acceptable to the churches who are supposed to own the school. For four generations our family had had more or less of its education at Calvin College. For me it is especially saddening to see the churches' school today publicly

adopt and promote the same kind of anti-Christian faith and life that I faced daily for a decade in a very anti-Christian public school system. When Christ and His Word are being thus avowedly betrayed by our churches' school, conscience compels Christians to stop supporting and to separate themselves from that betrayal. (This is not to distance ourselves from the many earnest Christians in faculty and student body, but from a chosen course that is plainly wrong.)

Bavinck in this apparently long for-

gotten essay at the beginning of this century anticipated with uncanny accuracy anti-Christian developments we see as that century nears its end. He reminded us that Christ the King calls us to follow Him in an intensifying but eventually triumphant Holy War against the devil and his works. Although in the ranks of our Lord there has to be charity, there is no room for compromise or neutrality in that war. "From victory unto victory, His army shall He lead," but soldiers who will not fight can never expect to win. PDJ

Henry M. Morris*

THE COMPROMISE ROAD

The basic conflict of the ages is between the two world views of evolutionism versus creationism. In its most explicit form, this conflict comes down to Biblical revelatory creationism versus evolutionary humanism. The only Book even *claiming* to deal authoritatively with this supernatural creation of the space/time cosmos is the Bible, and there the Creator personally inscribed His explicit summary of creation, as follows: "For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day" (Exodus 20:11; see also Exodus 31:15-18).

Evolutionary humanism, on the other hand, purports to explain the origin and development of the cosmos entirely by natural processes innate to the universe itself. In its current form, evolutionism says that the cosmos came into existence as an evolutionary accident, a "quantum fluctuation of some pre-existent state of nothingness." From this remarkable beginning, it evolved through a stage of cosmic inflation, then explosive expansion and even-

tual formation of elements, stars, planets, animals, and people—all by natural evolutionary processes.

The road of compromise looks attractive at first, but long experience has proved it to be a one-way street. The evolutionists at the end of the road are never satisfied until their opponents travel all the way to the atheistic void at its end.

Charles Darwin set the pattern. Starting out as a Bible-believing creationist, he first became enamored of Charles Lyell's uniformitarianism and his "progressive creationism." Soon he abandoned the Bible and creationism altogether, moving on into the domain of theistic evolutionism. Eventually he became an agnostic and finally an atheist.

Many others in his day followed this compromise road. Darwin's chief opponents, in fact, were scientists, not the theologians of his day.

"Despite abundant evidence to the contrary, it is widely believed that the church was a bitter opponent of evolution."¹

Whole denominations and their religious colleges and seminaries

were teaching evolution during Darwin's lifetime, and multitudes of more fundamental Christians were accommodating the evolutionary ages of geology by their "gap theory," "local flood theory," and other devices of artificial Biblical exegesis.

But did such compromises ever persuade the evolutionists to meet them half way? The present state of the schools and colleges and the intellectual community in general is the obvious answer.

"Science and religion are dramatically opposed at their deepest philosophical levels. And because the two world views make claims to the same intellectual territory—that of the origin of the universe and humankind's relation to it—conflict is inevitable."²

"Despite the attempts by liberal theology to disguise the point, the fact is that no biblically derived religion can really be compromised with the fundamental assertion of Darwinian theory. Chance and design are antithetical concepts."³

Despite these lessons of the past, most modern Christians seem oblivious to the fact that all their different accommodational schemes were discredited a hundred years ago and that none of them ever budged the evolutionary establishment from its base of total naturalism.

A good modern example is found in the writings of Davis Young, now teaching geology at Calvin College, an institution belonging to the ostensibly conservative Christian Reformed Church. As a beginning graduate student, Dr. Young originally believed in literal six-day creation and flood geology. Under the guidance of his Princeton professors, however, he converted to "progressive creationism" and the venerable "day-age theory" of Genesis. This position he strongly advocated in two influential books.^{4,5} He did acknowledge, however, that the "natural" interpretation of Genesis, as well as the teaching of the early Christians and the Protestant reformers, was the *literal* interpretation. He had simply decided this had to be abandoned because of its supposed geological difficulties. He did, at that time, still hold out for the special creation of a literal Adam and Eve.

His progressive creationism did not even satisfy his theistic-evolutionary colleagues at Calvin, however, let alone his geological peers at the secular universities. So he is now ready to travel further down the road.

"I further suggest that both literalism and concordism have outlived their usefulness, and that these approaches should be abandoned for a newer approach that does not try to answer technical scientific questions with Biblical data."⁶

By "literalism," Young means taking the six days of creation as literal days and the flood as worldwide in geological effects, the position advocated by most scientific creationists. By "concordism," he means any theory (gap theory, day-age theory, etc.) that attempts to develop a concordance between the creation record in Genesis 1 and the geological ages. Young now wants to quit trying to relate science and the Bible at all!

"I suggest that we will be on the right track if we stop treating Genesis 1 and the flood story as scientific and historic reports."⁷

This approach, is essentially that advocated by Christian "liberals" a century ago and now taught in most main-line seminaries.

Another articulate "progressive creationist" is the Professor of Biology at Wheaton College. Dr. Pattle Pun has recently written a book promoting this system, which is essentially the same as that held by most of the Wheaton faculty and by numerous others in the evangelical college orbit. Like Young, however, Pun acknowledges that this is *not* the obvious teaching of God's Word.

"It is apparent that the most straightforward understanding of the Genesis record, without regard to all the hermeneutical considerations suggested by science, is that God created heaven and earth in six solar days, that man was created on the sixth day, that death and chaos entered the world after the fall of Adam and Eve, and that all of the fossils were the result of the catastrophic universal deluge which spared only Noah's family and the animals therewith."⁸

The problem with this obvious teaching, according to Pun, is that: "It has denied and belittled the vast amount of scientific evidence amassed to support the theory of natural selection and the antiquity of the earth."⁹

The problem with Pun's compromise, however, is that it depends on "all the hermeneutical considerations suggested by science." Did God really need to rely on 20th century scientists to come along one day to tell us what He meant to say? Pun's article, summarizing his book, was published by the American Scientific Affiliation (ASA), the organization of evangelical scientists and theologians which has for forty years been leading Christians down this path of compromise with evolution.

To illustrate the lack of appreciation by the secular evolutionists for this service, however, consider the reception accorded ASA's 48-page booklet, *Teaching Science in a Climate of Controversy*, first published in 1986 and distributed

free (because of a special grant) to over 60,000 science teachers. The booklet accepts the geological ages and much of evolution, but argues that the process was designed by God, advocating progressive creationism and/or theistic evolutionism as a compromise approach that should satisfy both creationists and evolutionists. The booklet is also promoted by the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship.

The response of the academic community has been almost totally negative. Biologist William Benetta¹⁰ has edited a collection of essays "from leading evolutionists" reviewing the ASA publication, and they all attack it as viciously as they do the strict creationism of ICR.

Lynn Margulis says:

"The result is treacherous. Authentic scientific and didactic principles have been put to nefarious use, for the writers' ultimate purpose is to coax us to believe in the ASA's particular creation myth."¹¹

Stephen Gould, Niles Eldredge, Douglas Futuyma, Michael Ghiselin, and others all contribute bitterly negative critiques to this collection of reviews. The anti-creationist Committees of Correspondence also have come down hard on the booklet,¹² followed by a rather plaintive response¹³ by Walter Hearn, one of the booklet's co-authors, complaining that the ASA was merely trying to defend evolutionism against the scientific creationists. Subsequent issues of the C/E Newsletter continue to be filled with attacks on the ASA and its "creationist pseudo-science."

This is ironic. The compromising creationists are attacked as viciously as the strict creationists, by those with whom they are trying to compromise. And in the process, they are rejecting the plain teaching of the Word of God. Even the secular evolutionists can see this.

"Cheer Number One goes to the creationists for serving rational religion by demonstrating beautifully that we must take the creation stories of Genesis at face value....

Many Christians have taken the dishonest way of lengthening the days into millions of years, but the creationists make it clear that such an approach is nothing but a

makeshift that is unacceptable Biblically and scientifically.... Creationists deserve Cheer Number Two for serving rational religion by effectively eliminating 'theistic evolution.' ...Creationists rightly insist that evolution is inconsistent with a God of love.... Three cheers, then, for the creationists, for they have cleared the air of all dodges, escapes, and evasions made by Christians who adopt non-literal interpretations of Genesis and who hold that evolution is God's method of creation."¹⁴

The road of compromise, however attractive it seems, is a one-way street, ending in a precipice and then the awful void of "rational religion," or atheism. Our advice is to stay on the straight and narrow road of the pure Word of God.

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Robert D. Knudsen

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CORNELIUS VAN TIL

Dr. Cornelius Van Til was one of Westminster Theological Seminary's most famous and influential faculty members. This itself says something about his significance. Dr. Van Til was influential, largely through his vigorous teaching and his extensive writings. But like many other Christian leaders Van Til aroused not only profound respect and devotion but also deep and determined opposition. This was abetted by his style of approach. He took as a motto the saying: *suaviter in modo; fortiter in re*. That is, he aimed to be smooth in his approach, yet forceful in making his point. He was passionately committed to the teachings of the Bible and to the theology that has interpreted them the most ade-

quately, the Reformed Faith, and he drove his points home singlemindedly and in a way that offered no hint of compromise. All this says something about Van Til; but it does not paint the portrait of the man as to his significance.

In his vigorous way, Van Til was carrying on a tradition that drew from the revival in Switzerland which had stirred the hearts of Van Til's spiritual forebears in the Netherlands: Bilderdijk, Da Costa, Groen van Prinsterer, and Abraham Kuyper. This tradition placed Jesus Christ and His kingship at the center of life and thought. According to it, everything must center in Jesus Christ, not only in the church but also in the home, the school, the

marketplace, the realm of politics—indeed, in all of society. Dr. Van Til was fond of quoting Abraham Kuyper's saying, "There is not one inch of life concerning which Christ does not say 'It is mine'." With Kuyper he could say, "Life is religion." Van Til is significant for having carried on this radically Christian tradition. In his teaching and in his writing, he came with the bold claim that one cannot truly do anything or say anything without depending in some way on Jesus Christ. As the Bible says, everything hangs together in Him. One does not understand the significance of Van Til apart from this radically Christian commitment, and one is not a true follower of Van Til unless he

shares the conviction that Christ is Lord over all of life and thought.

Dr. Van Til's significance is also measured in the fact that he took this tradition and applied it to the defense of the Christian faith, which we call Christian apologetics. His spiritual forebears did not do this, nor did his contemporaries. They built on this foundation edifices of Christian life style, Christian social and political vision, Christian education, Christian philosophy, Christian journalism; but it was only Van Til who took the insights of Kuyper, Gerhardus Vos, and others concerning the kingdom and applied them to the defense of the faith. To defend the citadel of Christianity, Van Til said, one does not have to leave its walls and make a truce with the enemy. One must defend Christianity while remaining solidly entrenched within it. Indeed, Van Til shared the concern of Kuyper and others for a society built on Christian principles. He was concerned, for instance, with Christian philosophy. For many years he was a member of the editorial staff of *Philosophia Reformata*, the quarterly journal of the Association for Calvinistic Philosophy. Early in his teaching career at the Seminary, he himself founded a short-lived association for the study of Christian philosophy. Near the end of his life, I am told, he expressed great satisfaction that he had been instrumental in helping to found the Philadelphia-Montgomery Christian Academy. Nevertheless, one does not understand Van Til unless he sees him as one who accepted the radical claim of Christ on all of life and who applied it to Christian apologetics. This commitment made him reject all compromise with the wisdom of the world, as that wisdom sets itself up against the wisdom of Christ; this commitment led him to reject the way of accommodation and inspired him to make a frontal assault on the phalanx of unbelief. It was this attitude that made Van Til the uncompromising warrior that he was. One does not understand Van Til in his significance unless he sees him as

one who applied the biblical teaching concerning the antithesis between belief and unbelief to apologetics. And one is not a true follower of Van Til unless he himself seeks to develop a defense of the faith that is fully aware of its biblical foundations and that challenges unbelief at its roots.

Even as all of us, Van Til was not without sin. He had difficulty relating to those who disagreed with him. He shied back from bringing his ideas into the forum for quiet discussion. These were faults, they were blemishes; but they do not make up the portrait of the man. This portrait is seen in clearer light if we remember a man who trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of his sins, who in the name of Christ gave attention to the little as well as the great, who visited the sick, who counseled with those who were in need, who sought every occasion to witness to the grace that is in Christ Jesus. But we miss the significance of all this if we think of piety on the order of a Buddha looking at its own navel. True piety. He reveled in the message of the psalms, also as these have been set to music in the Genevan psalter; he gloried in the vision of the Book of Revelation of the new heavens and the new earth. Near the end of his life, he asked again and again for these psalms, and to hear these prophecies of the coming of the kingdom. He was completely taken with the opening question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism:

Q. What is your only comfort in life and death?

A. That I, in body and soul, in life and death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.

But, again, one does not understand the significance of all this unless he sees that it is true piety that must underlie and undergird our entire attitude of mind. Our life and our thought must be rooted completely in the God who has revealed and who is revealing himself to us at every point, who has revealed himself to us in these last days in Jesus Christ. One does not understand

Van Til in his significance who does not realize that true religion is the service of God with all one's heart, in the place and within the circumstances where God has placed us. In Van Til we have had a man of great accomplishments; but the greatness of the man must be observed, first of all, in the fact that he did everything in devotion to Christ. Van Til once said to me that he tried to do the things that were most important. We must not understand this to mean that he tried to do those things that would add to his own importance but that he first tried to do those things that were most important for the kingdom of God. We are not true followers of Dr. Van Til unless we too realize that whatever our accomplishments may be these are finally of no worth unless they have been done in humble dependence on Christ and on His grace.

We shall not truly honor Dr. Cornelius Van Til if we simply enshrine his memory. We shall not truly follow him if we simply repeat what he has said. A life that is truly religious will seek constantly to tap the virgin springs of biblical truth and faith.

Thought that is truly obedient will constantly test itself in the light of that Word faithfully received. We must go on. Now as always the church must be reformed and reforming. We take the same stance as Van Til did, who pictured himself as standing on the shoulders of those who went before him. Accepting the legacy of faithful men, we too labor in the present, looking to the future and the great coming of our Lord and Savior. Even so come, Lord Jesus!

Dr. Robert D. Knudsen, professor of Apologetics and for nearly 30 years a colleague of Dr. Van Til at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia presented this address at the memorial service last May 27. A memorial service tape is available from Westminster Media. P.O. Box 27009, Philadelphia, PA 19118.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CATECHISM PREACHING

Dear Rev. De Jong,

Though I am, in a sense, an outsider as respects the recent exchange in *The Outlook* on the subject of Catechism preaching, perhaps you will allow me a few words. I say "in a sense an outsider" because I served for a number of years with the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. When I began my ministry there [in 1963] we used as our church order there, precisely that which was then used by the Christian Reformed Church in this country. But, in due time, it was revised to read as follows: "*Ordinarily at one of the services on each Lord's Day the Word shall be expounded as summarised in the Confessional Standards.*" This revision was made for a number of reasons, one of which was a growing conviction that all four* of the Confessional Statements of the Church deserved equal attention in the official preaching of the Church. Another was precisely the danger that you stated so succinctly in the January issue (p. 18). You said "*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.*" You then go on to say that this may also help to explain the present anti-traditional reaction which is now undermining the Christian Reformed Church. I believe you are right, and would like to mention an incident that underlines this for me. During the early years of my ministry, as an Orthodox

Presbyterian pastor in New England, I sometimes preached in Iowa in the Summer in Christian Reformed Churches. I met some wonderful people. But I also noticed an element that troubled me in the thinking of some I met — and they were invariably among the most conservative in many ways. I remember one middle-aged couple, in particular, who said the Heidelberg Catechism was *inspired* by God. I could hardly believe it, and questioned them closely. But that is what they said, meant, and believed. And I think it was because they so often heard it treated as if it was.

I am reluctant to say it, but I'm afraid that this very idea is expressed in Rev. Kloosterman's interesting article. In fact, this false and dangerous idea is — no doubt inadvertently — expressed a number of times. He says, for instance, that "*this is a false dilemma: [because] the church's doctrine is the Bible's doctrine!*" (p. 14). Again he says "*to preach the content of the Catechism is to preach the content of Scripture*" and again "*The Catechism's explanation of good works is the Scripture's teaching about good works*" and so on. Now the trouble with these statements is that they go too far. The content of the Catechism is *not* identical with the content of Scripture. No, it is only a summary of the content of Scripture. And again, the Catechism's explanation of good works is *not* the Scripture's teaching about good works. No, it is only — at best — a summary of the Scripture's teaching. I am well aware that Rev. Kloosterman does not intend to put

the Catechism on the same level with the Bible, yet I think these statements show that this is exactly what is inadvertently done — when one sets out to prove the legitimacy of using the Catechism text as the text to be preached to God's people. And frankly, I do not see how it could ever be proper for any uninspired words of man to merit *that* status in the Church of God.

Mr. R. Lankheet says "*Rev. Kloosterman fears that by using this method [that is, the method that expounds only Scripture text] of constructing the catechism sermon, I am setting the Scripture against the Catechism.*" It seems to me that Mr. Lankheet is correct. But I would like to say that all of the praise that Mr. Kloosterman heaps upon the Heidelberg Catechism [and in this I join him] seems to me to prove that he has no valid reason for these fears. If — as he strongly insists — the Heidelberg Catechism really is faithful to the Bible, then there can only be one result from the kind of catechism preaching that Mr. Lankheet advocates, namely, that the people of God will be convinced — again and again — that the Heidelberg Catechism is faithful. I followed this great Catechism for many years in my preaching in New Zealand, and always used the method advocated by Mr. Lankheet. The result was that the people were more and more convinced that this Catechism really does have the support of the Bible. But — and this is of paramount importance — *they never had the slightest temptation to think that it was divinely inspired.*

In conclusion let me put forward my conviction that it may seem ironic, but it is nevertheless true: those who place the Heidelberg Catechism so high up that it even has sermon text status (just as the Bible does for the other Sermon each Lord's Day), will only succeed in undermining what they seek to uphold.

[*The Reformed Churches of New Zealand adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith as a fourth confessional standard.]

Yours in the Lord,
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TIME TO WAKE UP

"Calvin profs criticized, but not penalized," said the headline in the *Grand Rapids Press*. In a later edition Rev. Charles De Ridder, president of the Board of Trustees was quoted as saying that the report (on evolutionary views of professors prepared by the Committee and adopted by the Board) was "very critical in a careful, pastoral and studied way." But one had to go through the report with a fine-toothed comb to find that "criticism." What is not hard to find, and what receives the major emphasis in the report is the profuse praise that is given the professors. One recommendation reads "that the Board of Trustees commend these three Professors for their deep personal devotion to Christ and their diligence in subjecting their scholarship to His service." The last part of that statement effectually nullifies any criticism there might be. If their

scholarship is subjected to the service of Christ, then it has to be biblical. That stands to reason. Where is this "criticism" the headlines talk about?

Yes, indeed, "the Board reminds the professors of the limitations that these guidelines place upon the interpretation of Scripture." What that means is clear from the reaction of the professors: Young is quoted as saying, "I can't see that its report will change my teaching one iota. I don't feel threatened or constricted in any way." Menninga uses almost identical words, and Van Till said "the Board of Trustees have become the real heroes in this story." College Provost Gordon Van Harn, asked if the board's actions meant the professors could teach whatever they wanted, responded by saying, "The answer, very simply, is yes."

There you have the whole sad story. Any criticism there is of the professors' views is so mild and minimal as to be negligible. The professors got a clean bill of health. Or, to put it in a blunter but more accurate way, the report was a white-wash exercise, a real "snow-job." There's no other conclusion one can come to. And it's a very, very sad affair to say it mildly.

Anyone who has or wants to take the time to read what these professors have written, and then compares that to what our confessions say on the same matter, and to the vows they made in the Form of Subscription, and to the synodical guidelines for the interpretation of Scripture, particularly Genesis, will be struck by the complete incompatibility between the two. It is so clear that a child can understand it.

The report in the *Grand Rapids Press* itself, when referring to Van Till's book, *The Fourth Day*, says, "The book calls into question the

biblical account of creation and indicates Van Till views Adam and Eve as mythical figures." And that, please note, was declared by the Board to "fall within the limits set by the synodically adopted guidelines for the interpretation of Scripture and by the doctrinal statements of the Chr. Ref. Church." That's how far we have come.

It is absolutely incredible to me how this can happen. To my way of thinking there is a very serious lack of integrity here on the part of the Board. There is in the whole report a sustained effort to protect the professors and the institution at which they teach. In fact, they are given high praise and encouraged to continue in their service to the Lord. It's as if all the criticism that the Board has received concerning the views of these men is completely beside the point, and that these professors are champions of orthodoxy. That is the net result of this investigation. And that is, sad to say, the "cuckoo-song" (to use a Dutch expression) of our agencies in Grand Rapids. It appears that the sun rises and sets on Grand Rapids, and especially Calvin College. I call it a form of idolatry.

The necessity of Mid-America Reformed Seminary was never more clearly demonstrated than is now the case. It is to be hoped that many prospective seminary students will see "the handwriting on the wall," and will choose to study at Mid-America. And it is also to be ardently hoped that many apathetic churches and church members will realize what time it is — high time to awake from their slumber.

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