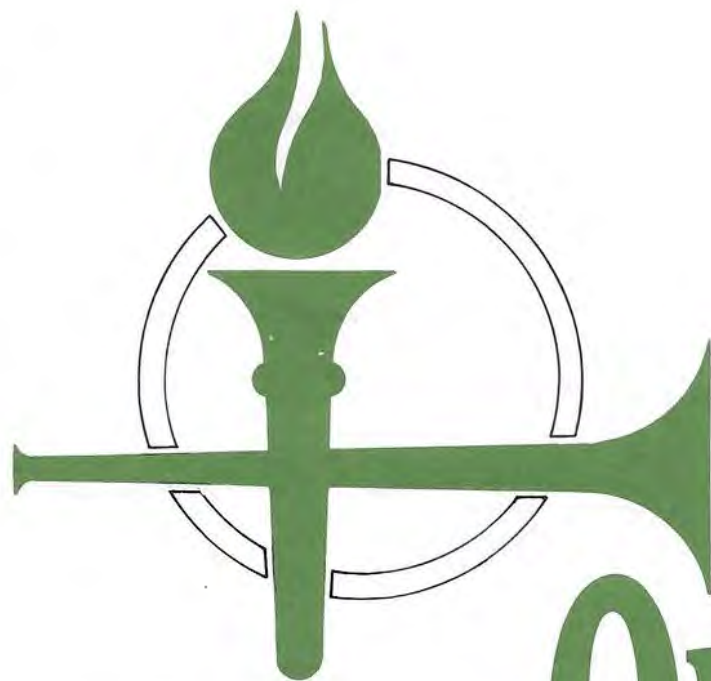




Outlook

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

Darwin's Worst Nightmare

"Commercial" Calvinism

C.R.C. Synod

I BELIEVE IN GOD THE FATHER, ALMIGHTY....

John Blankespoor

God is almighty. That we as Christians confess with the first words of the Apostle's Creed. As the Almighty, He created heaven and earth. He has "all might" — is able to do anything and everything He wants to do. There are no limits to His power. Another word for this is infinity. This means that there are no limits in Him.

God is Spirit. We who are earthly creatures cannot see Him, or find Him. If we are to know Him He must come to us, reveal Himself to us. Man can never find or discover God. But questions arise here. If He is Spirit and infinite, how can that have any meaning for us? It can have meaning only when He compares Himself with something we can see and know with our senses. Therefore, in the Bible God often compares Himself with the universe in which we live. This suggests that we who live in the 20th century can know more about the greatness of God than people could who lived before our day. God's revelation in nature to them was adequate, but we can know much more about His majesty. God told Abraham to go outside one night and count the stars, of which he saw many on a clear night. But when today we look at the stars through a telescope, we see many more than Abraham could see with his naked eye. Accordingly, what God told Abraham should mean that much more to us.

The universe is immensely great. Astronomers tell us that there are billions of stars. How much is a billion? None of us can begin to imagine what it is. If someone would

start counting, one number per second, and keep on counting day and night, it would take him 8000 years to get to 250 billion. Astronomers speak of "light years" when they try to describe distances in the universe. A light year is the distance light traveling 186,000 miles per second covers in a year. Can anyone even begin to imagine how far a light year is? And if some stars are estimated to be 70,000 light years from the earth, how far that is? The thought is staggering. The universe seems to be almost without end. We confess on Sunday in church that we believe in God the Father almighty maker of heaven and earth. Only faith can accept and believe that God could create such a universe. How great God must be!

• • • • •
This revelation of God, which is completely beyond our comprehension, makes us human beings infinitesimally small. Isaiah says that all men are before God like some dust on a scale (Isaiah 40:15). How marvelous it is that we have been created "in His image." In a creaturely way, we may be something like God. And we can know Him, which "is life eternal" (John 17:3). How terrible sin is in the light of this greatness of God! Just imagine, that little, sinful man wants to replace God (Rom. 1:23). What audacity to reject his creator (v. 25)!

Now think of the amazing miracle of the incarnation. This great God becomes one with tiny man in the person of Jesus Christ. Only faith can accept this.

• • • • •
The authors of the Bible often use the earth and the universe as examples to give us some idea of the greatness of God. Consider a few of them.

Isaiah 40:25, 26: "To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal? says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who has created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls them each by name." Here the prophet speaks of God as the Creator, Who also saves His people. Israel in bondage in Babylon may feel God has forgotten them, does not know their needs, or may even think that He is not able to deliver them. How foolish this is when we remember that God is the Creator of the world. God says (Isaiah 55:9) "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." We must remember this, especially when in need and overwhelmed with problems. When we are mystified by His ways, we must remember that there is "no searching of His understanding." The love of God, but also His purpose, intent and design in our afflictions are far beyond the grasp of our small human minds. He wants us to trust in His promises: (Ps. 103:11, 12) "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him: as far as east is from west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." The psalmist speaks here of the forgiving love of God; it is "as high

as the heavens are above the earth." In the light of the fact that this is millions of miles, we get some idea how great the love of God (in Christ) is for His people. Notice also the next verse. "As far as east is from west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." (May we conclude that the Holy Spirit here intentionally does not say, "as far as north is from south"? The distance from the north pole to the south pole can be measured, but not the distance from east to west. If one goes east and keeps on going he reaches the point where he began.) No one can measure the greatness of the forgiving love of God. Ps. 36:5; "Your love, O God, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies." The question may arise, how far is it "to the heavens" and "to the skies?" Again, we are speaking about distances of millions of miles. In the context of these words, David is speaking of the wicked. "There is no fear of God before their eyes, the words of their mouths are wicked and deceitful. They love evil." But, by contrast, the love of God and His faithfulness reach to the heavens, or the skies. The love with which God reaches out to His people is indescribable. God does not fail. His promises stand. His love is not dependent upon ours. He is everlastingly faithful to His Word and His church. We live in a world, like that which David describes, where people easily and commonly hate and reject each other and man is changeable. But God's love and faithfulness never fails His people.

• • • • •

If God is so great, we can understand the Scripture teaching that with Him "all things are possible" and that He never has any problems. Our problems are no problems to Him. If He wishes, He can remove our biggest without any difficulty. But if He doesn't remove them, He has a purpose with them, for our good. We may never question whether God can do what He will. The only thing that God cannot do, and never will, is love sin. That is contrary to His holiness. We may not question His doings, His right to do what He will. People often ask why they encounter adversity and trouble. What did I do to deserve

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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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this? Or why do good people suffer? And, why do some suffer more than others? These questions show rebellion. Because God is as great as the Bible says He is, in His love and wisdom, we must acknowledge His sovereignty and pray, trust and wait.

Faith in God is the final answer to every question we may have. If we, considering the many prayers that ascend to God at one time, ask how He can listen to all of them simultaneously we must remember that that's no problem to Him. He can give each one "individual attention." Gods knows all the conditions of all

the millions of people in the world, and in a special way He knows His own, with all their aches and pains and all their fears and hopes. By the time the world comes to an end and God will have reached His purpose with creation, millions, or billions of people will have lived and died. And their bodies will have returned to dust. The Bible says, that "all who are in the graves will...come forth" (John 5:28, 29). How will that be possible? The answer is, we have an almighty God.

When in church we confess: I believe in God the Father, Almighty

maker of heaven and earth, we must put our trust in His love, wisdom, and faithfulness. Abraham had the promise of a son, but he had to wait twenty-five years for that promise to be fulfilled. He had to put his confidence in Almighty God.

God wants that simple, child-like trust.

What a blessing it is for us, small and insignificant in ourselves, sinners by nature, to belong to this great God, omnipotent in His love and infallible in His wisdom.

He deserves *all* our praise and *all* our love!

WHO AM I?

Glen Palmer

I am a man of God, a preacher, a missionary. It is said of me that I risked my life for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, as I was a leader among the brothers. I helped Peter write his letter to the churches of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, the very area where I preached with Paul on his second missionary journey. When Paul wrote to the churches of Thessalonica and of Corinth he mentioned me as having preached there. Peter wrote that I was a "faithful brother." When the Thessalonians chased Paul from Berea, Timothy and I stayed behind to encourage them. I am a member of Chuck Colson's Prison Fellowship. In prison I prayed, sang hymns, and converted the jailer and his family. Who am I?

• • • • •

I am the king of Judah who reigned from 910-869 B.C. My father's name was Abijah, my grandfather's name was Rehoboam, and my great-grandfather's name was Solomon.

I was a mighty military commander. When my grandfather,

Rehoboam went out to fight, all he could muster was 180,000 soldiers. But I mustered 300,000 from Judah and equipped them with large shields and spears (the infantry), and 280,000 men from Benjamin with small shields and bows (the artillery). But when I was faced with Zerah the Cushite who had an army of thousand thousands with 300 panzers—excuse me, chariots, I placed my trust not in the strength of my army, but in the Lord, who crushed my opponent.

Because of this physical victory over the Cushites, I won a spiritual victory against the devil. I removed the idols, rebuilt the altar of the LORD, offered innumerable sacrifices, and renewed the Covenant. Unlike, as in the modern era of Liberation and toleration, "All who would not seek the LORD, the God of Israel, were to be put to death, whether small or great, man or woman." The Israelites sought God. I "did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, as (my great, great, grand)father, David had done." I even deposed my grandmother Maacah as queen

mother because she had made a repulsive Asherah pole. My "heart was fully committed to the LORD all my life."

However, all good things come to an end. After 36 years of peace, only once interrupted by Zerah the Cushite in the fifteenth year of my reign, Baasha, King of Israel, came against me. I built a cistern to supply Jerusalem with fresh water. (In the time of Jeremiah it became a grave and was completely filled with corpses.) I did not trust in the LORD, and Hanani the Seer chastised me. Like a true Oriental, I placed the bearer of bad news in prison. Then, three years later I suffered from a severe foot disease and still I did not seek help from the LORD. Two years later I died and was buried in the city of my father, David. Who am I?

1 Peter 5:12; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:19.

2 Chron. 14, 15.

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John W. Oller

DARWIN'S WORST NIGHTMARE

Design of all kinds worried Darwin. A year after *The Origin of Species*¹ first appeared in 1859, he wrote:

"The eye to this day gives me a cold shudder."² What disturbed him about the eye was its perfection of design. But the eye should not have been his worst source of anxiety. For it is merely part of a larger picture. It is just one of the avenues of intelligence. Yet Darwin scarcely appreciated the greater difficulty his theory would have to face.

A hundred and twenty-nine years have passed since the *Origin* was published, and yet today, evolution's workshop still remains almost empty. It has just two clumsy tools: accidental change and selection. The question is, how could such blind methods create something as perfect as the binocular eye? Our visual system codes color, shape, size, distance, movement, speed, texture, density, and perspective dynamics (motion toward, away from, and along-side) in a richness of detail that fairly laughs out loud at chance.

But, as we noted already, Darwin's worst problem lay ahead.

In the middle of the twentieth century, as science peered dimly into the tiny world of molecules, ever more perfect designs yielded up their secrets. The purposive brilliance of complex organs, became more and more difficult to deny as the broader scope of the whole genetic program began to come into view. Consummate intelligence was everywhere evident.

It had been popular from the late 1800s into the middle of the twentieth century to poke fun at the biblical claim that "in the beginning was

the Word . . ." (John 1:1). However, since the 1950s the truth of that statement has echoed again and again from every determinate outcome of molecular biology. The story has unfolded in atoms, nitrogenous bases, DNA, RNA, amino acid sequences in proteins, the ribosome, the two thousand or so enzymes it uses in building itself, them, and all the other proteins. One after another, perfect solutions to unthinkable complex puzzles have appeared.

In a poor defense of dumb luck, blundering its way through the biosphere, making a human eye here, and a Panda's thumb there³, the Harvard naturalist, Stephen Jay Gould, has whined that every living thing is just a "quirky mass of imperfections."⁴ The sideways slur that God must be deaf, dumb, and illiterate, or altogether non-existent, is a brassy boast considering it comes from a little man who stands on two shakey legs for such a short time, and can achieve nothing worthy of comparison.

But Gould's faith in blind luck is boundless. To explain the absence of any gradual transitions in the fossil record, he proposes saltations (or "jumps"). If evolution has not made small steps forward, then, he concludes, it must have made giant leaps, the sort that would produce a "hopeful monster" every now and then.⁵

His enthusiasm for dumb luck leads him to postulate huge constellations of simultaneous or cumulative mutations that express themselves all at once so as to sail across the chasms everywhere apparent in the biological hierarchy. As evidence for

his faith he has only the absence of transitional forms in the fossil record. For a mechanism? Nothing but more dumb luck than even Darwin was ever able to believe in because Darwin explicitly rejected saltations.⁶

Molecular biologist, Michael Denton, himself a secularist, sums up evidence that should give Gould a doubtful moment or two, if not a cold Darwinian shudder. In a chapter called "The Puzzle of Perfection" Denton writes of DNA:

So efficient is the mechanism of information storage and so elegant the mechanism of duplication of this remarkable molecule that it is hard to escape the feeling that the DNA molecule may be the one and only perfect solution to the twin problems of information storage and duplication for self-replicating automata.⁷

He points out that the ribosome, the protein factory of all living cells not only can build any protein called for by the DNA, but also builds itself. Yet it weighs less than 10⁻¹⁶ grams. This makes it, he says, "about a thousand million million times smaller than the smallest piece of machinery ever constructed by man."⁸ Yet this little factory can build all the proteins of the biosphere ranging from the clear cornea of the eye to the fibrous material of a redwood.

He asks:

Is it really credible that random processes could have constructed a reality, the smallest element of which—a functional protein or a gene—is complex beyond our own creative capacities, a reality which

is the very antithesis of chance, which excels in every sense anything produced by the intelligence of man?⁹

The question is how chance might arrive at such perfect design. Darwin's mechanisms yield such mathematical disasters that mathematicians have all but given up on the subject.¹⁰ The difficulty is how to achieve unbelievably improbable arrangements of words. The problem is not merely to string words together—whether we are speaking of nitrogenous bases, amino acids, or human words—the problem is to arrange them in structurally complex and coherent patterns. The trouble is that the patterns required are so delicate and articulate that they defy chance. They challenge the limits of human intelligence.

Words and arrangements of them are the central issue. Therefore, the ultimate difficulty for evolution is the intelligence that makes the theory itself possible. The ultimate design to be explained is man's language capacity. It is our ability to represent, through words, that makes possible all of the quandaries of science and all of the proposed solutions. This ability is critical even to those proposals that are fantastic beyond imagination, such as the notion, contrary to all logic, that blind chance could produce such an ability.

Language is Darwin's worst nightmare. Words and sequences of words appear as limits at the beginning and the end of the biological story.

In a lecture on cosmology, William James ran into an opponent who capitalized the character of the problem. This opponent, the proverbial little old lady, said, "Your theory is wrong, Mr. James. The world is not hanging in empty space."

"Then what holds it up?" James asked.

"A turtle," she said.

He had her now for sure. "And what holds up the turtle?"

"Give up, Mr. James," she said.

"It's turtles all the way down."

Darwin's difficulty is similar. At the beginning of the biological sequence, we find the words of DNA. Without them no living thing could exist. And, in biology at its maturity, we find man, the rational, talking organism. It's a problem of words from

the beginning, all through the middle, and at the pinnacle of creative design, we find more words.

For Darwin, the language problem is the worst imaginable nightmare.

With reference to human language, even the non-specialist knows that words are made up of sounds, that they combine to form phrases, that phrases combine to form sentences, and sentences to form larger units of discourse. This awareness forms a crude basis for an appreciation of grammar in the technical sense of the term.

But combinatory potential per se is not the main design feature of language. The main feature, though obvious, is difficult to appreciate, even for the specialist. It is that language can be linked via intelligence to the world of experience. This is its most important design feature, and without which it would be utterly useless.

Concerning man's quest to understand the universe, Albert Einstein said, everything depends on the degree to which words and word-combinations correspond to the world of impression.¹¹

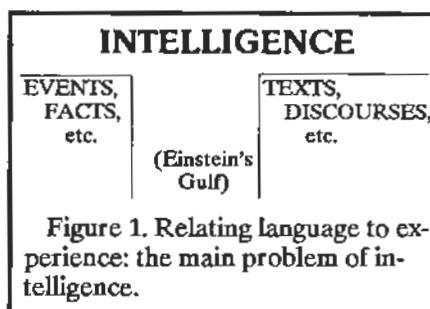
In another place he wrote:

The eternal mystery of the world is its comprehensibility.¹² He contended:

The concepts which arise in our thought and in our linguistic expressions are all—when viewed logically—the free creations of thought which cannot inductively be gained from sense-experiences. This is not so easily noticed only because we have the habit of combining certain concepts and conceptual relations (propositions) so definitely with certain sense-experiences that we do not become conscious of the gulf—logically unbridgeable—which separates the world of sensory experiences from the world of concepts and propositions.¹³

Without departing at all from Einstein's idea, we can sum up the problem of human intelligence as shown in Figure 1. The left side represents the facts, events, relationships, etc., of ordinary experience. On the right side, word sequences, discourses, texts, are represented. The fundamental problem of intelligence is how a sequence of words (the right side) can be set in cor-

respondence with an arrangement of events or facts (the left side).



When a text (or representation) is well-fitted to a certain constellation of facts or events, we say the text is true, or correct, or appropriate. This is the same as saying that the representation is intelligent or intelligible. These two are opposite sides of the same coin.

The question, as Einstein and other perceptive thinkers saw it, is how such correspondences could ever be established. How is it possible to represent anything aptly, well, or intelligently? Or, putting the same question in a slightly different form: what makes a representation intelligible?

Herein lies the mystery of intelligence with which science must come to grips. This is the language miracle. Noam Chomsky, professor at MIT and leading authority on linguistics, notes that the rules of language systems are normally beyond conscious awareness.¹⁴ In fact, the average user has only a vague idea about the layers of structure that comprise his language. As Solomon put it,

To man belong the plans of the heart,

But from the Lord comes the reply of the tongue (Proverbs 16:1).

Moreover, Chomsky sees the language ability as innate and unique to human beings. He says,

... some intellectual achievements, such as language learning, fall strictly within biologically determined cognitive capacity. For these tasks, we have "special design," so that cognitive structures of great complexity and interest develop fairly rapidly and with little if any conscious effort.¹⁵

Elsewhere he said:

Human language appears to be a unique phenomenon, without sig-

nificant analogue in the animal world.¹⁶

Concerning the possibility of a transition to human language from animal communication systems, Chomsky wrote:

There is no reason to suppose that the "gaps" are bridgeable. There is no more of a basis for assuming an evolutionary development of "higher" from "lower" stages, in this case, than there is for assuming an evolutionary development from breathing to walking.¹⁷

More recently, in 1988, he contends that as the study of primates has advanced, it has become even more certain that their symbolic systems are unlike human language.¹⁸ In 1980, concerning man's mathematical ability, he wrote:

... the number faculty could not have been known or the capacity exercised until human evolution had essentially reached its current stage.¹⁹

The same, of course, could be said, for exactly the same reasons, of the capacities involved in music, and art, and human language.

Ultimately, design implies a Designer, and chance doesn't fill the job description. At the front end of the problem, the difficulty is to explain the accidental emergence of the genetic code in its pristine perfection, followed by the first organism, and the rest of the biosphere.

Consider the protein factory—the ribosome. It consists, according to molecular biologist Michael Denton, of over a million atoms some 50 macro-molecules, mainly proteins, tightly integrated into a coherent and delicately organized whole.²⁰ What is the chance of getting such a structure by accident?

Slim, no matter how the calculations are done.

But take a simple problem at the other end of the biological spectrum. Take a human language text such as this one. This article consists of about 20,000 characters.

Suppose we try to get this text by generating characters at random. Counting just the main keys on a modern IBM keyboard there are 47 keys times 2 (upper and lower case). This comes to a total of 94 possibilities in each of the 20,000 positions occupied by the characters and spaces of this text. Logically there

are 94 possibilities in the first position, times 94 in the second, and so forth, or in all, $94^{20,000}$ texts of this length are mathematically possible. The odds of hitting just this text on any given try would be one in $94^{20,000}$.

The extremity of this improbability is difficult to comprehend. It is so much less than the likelihood of randomly selecting a particular electron out of all the particles in the universe, estimated at about 10^{80} , that the two numbers can hardly be compared.²¹ Imagine a ruler a million miles long. Let this represent the number of randomly generated texts the length of this one. On the same ruler, the number of particles in the entire universe would appear as so much less than a trillionth of an inch as to be altogether unnoticeable even when magnified trillions and trillions of times.

Another way of looking at the problem is to ask how long it would take to get a text like this one by accident? Suppose we cranked up a super-Cray or some future model and zapped off a text this length every thousandth of a second. By this method we could turn out nearly 90,000,000 per day. In 20 billion years there are 6.3×10^{20} thousandths of seconds, so this sets the maximum number of texts we could generate in the estimated age of the universe. However, to arrive at this text by accident would take many trillions and trillions of orders of magnitude more micro-seconds than are available in 20 billion years. All the stars would burn out and grow cold before we made any progress toward achieving this text. If we compared the age of the universe to the time required, 20 billion years would appear as a negligible instant.

Nor is the problem solved if we generate texts by the word. There are thousands of words in any language. The Oxford English Dictionary has almost half a million entries for English. The problem only gets worse by using phrases or sentences since their number in any language is demonstrably a non-denumerable infinity.

"But," the diehard says, "there are many meaningful texts, so the chance of hitting one by accident becomes highly probable."

Not so.

The number of meaningful texts that could be generated by chance is so small in comparison to the number of nonsense strings that the universe would grow cold before the first meaningful text were hit upon by any imaginable approach. Nor is there any method by which a single meaningful text might be found among all the garbage that would be created by chance. This is why scientists like Francis Crick and Fred Hoyle are turning to fantasies about extraterrestrials.²² They put off consideration of the problem by saying simply that life originated elsewhere. Like Scarlet O'Hara, they'd prefer to think about it tomorrow.

Darwin failed, and his cold shudder at the perfection of the eye was a mere hint of what lay ahead. It may be, as some biologists and physicists have speculated (Michael Denton and Fred Hoyle, among them), that genetic structure implicates the whole of the universe. Or, seen from the other end, the universe itself may come into focus in the words of the genetic language. In either case, the entire space-time continuum would turn out to be a perfect story—a coherent text created by a Supreme Eternal Intelligence, complete with a full cast of characters at risk, with plenty of conflict, and chronological development.

Whether we look toward the beginning or the end of the story, we see the same Alpha and Omega. Unless we choose to deny what is plainly before us, we see Intelligence through and through.

Dr. John W. Oller, Jr., Ph.D. is the author or co-author of seven published books and over a hundred articles in linguistics and closely allied areas. In 1984, he won the Mildener Medal, an international prize offered annually by the Modern Language Association. Invited lecture tours have taken him to Europe, the Middle East, Japan, Taiwan, Mexico, Canada, and throughout the United States. He is best known for his studies on the relation between language and intelligence. Formerly an Associate Professor at UCLA, he is now Professor of Linguistics at the University of New Mexico. We are grateful to him for kindly making this manuscript available to the OUTLOOK (Editor).

Notes

1. In this article we refer exclusively to the 1872 edition (the sixth) reissued in New York by Collier, 1962. All subsequent references to the *Origin* are to this version.

2. F. Darwin, ed., 1888, *Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, Volumes 1-3, London: John Murray. The quoted material was written in a letter to Asa Gray, in 1860 and is cited in volume 2, p. 373. Michael Denton, 1986, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, Bethesda, Maryland: Adler and Adler, refers to this same quote on p. 326.

3. See Gould's book, *The Panda's Thumb*, New York: Norton.

4. "This view of life: only his wings remained," *Natural History* vol. 93, no. 9, 1984, p. 10.

5. "This view of life: the return of hopeful monsters," *Natural History*, vol. 86, no. 6, pp. 22, 24, 28, 30.

6. In his *Origin*, 6th edition, originally published in 1872, Darwin wrote, "natural selection . . . can produce no great or sudden modifications . . ." (p. 468).

7. Op cit, p. 337f.

8. Ibid., p. 338.

9. Ibid., p. 342.

10. See P.S. Moorehead and M.M. Kaplan, eds., 1967. *Mathematical Challenges to the Darwinian Interpretation of Evolution*. Wistar Institute Symposium Monograph. As cited by Denton, op. cit., p. 314.

11. Albert Einstein, 1956, *Out of My Later Years*, p. 21. The remark quoted was part of a radio broadcast in 1941 titled, "The Common Language of Science." It is reproduced in the 1956 publication under the same title on pp. 111-113.

12. This was from another radio talk in 1936 which is reproduced as "Physics and reality," in *Out of My Later Years*, op. cit., pp. 59-97. The quotation appears on p. 61 of that book.

13. "Remarks on Bertrand Russell's theory of knowledge," in Paul A. Schlipp, ed., 1944, *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University, pp. 279-291. The quoted material appears on p. 287.

14. See *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT, 1965, p. 18ff.

15. Noam Chomsky, 1975, *Reflections on Language*, New York: Pantheon, p. 27.

16. Noam Chomsky, 1972, *Language and Mind*, New York: Harcourt, p. 68.

17. Ibid., p. 67.

18. *Language and Problems of Knowledge*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT.

19. *Rules and Representations*, New York: Columbia University, p. 39.

20. Op cit., p. 338.

21. The estimate in question comes from Francis Crick, 1981, *Life Itself: Its Origin and Nature*, New York: Simon and Schuster, p. 51.

22. See Crick op cit., and see Fred Hoyle, 1983, *The Intelligent Universe*, London: Michael Joseph. Also, Fred Hoyle and Chandra Wickramasinghe, 1981, *Evolution from Space*, London: Dent.

BASIC BIBLE TEACHINGS

VI. Why Have a Church and What Kind?

General References: Matt. 16:13-19; 1 Peter 1:23, 2:2-5, 9, 10; Eph. 2:11-13, 19-22.

1. Today's Confusion

In our review of basic Bible teachings we next face one about which there is extraordinary confusion, that about "THE CHURCH." Today's questions do not concern details, but are often more basic: "What's a church?" "Who needs one?" "Why have any?" We have been thinking about gospel teachings that we need to be saved by faith in Christ and what a wonderful salvation that is. What has "church" to do with all

this? Many would answer, "Nothing at all!" One meets people who say they believe in Christ, but, if asked about their church, say they never joined any, or got disgusted with one they knew and quit—one can hear better services on the radio or TV anyway. I recall a foreign missionary who said that he felt he was more useful if not connected with any denomination.

In addition to such confusion around us, we face the surprising

fact that our denominational seminary has not taught the doctrine of the church in its theology in nearly 2 decades, and our synods have declared that we can change the number and characters of church offices as we wish to fit changing times. Harry Blamires in his *The Christian Mind* (p. 119) faced this confusion, observing: "We must not talk—and we must not allow critics... to talk—as though the Apostles sat round a table...and one of them said, 'I

propose we have a Church,' and another said, 'I second that,' and it was carried.... God made it, not man.... To talk of not seeing the need for the Church is like talking of not seeing the need for the moon. The Church, like the moon, is not a human project, but a divine creation." To escape the present confusion, we must go back, as in other times of Reformation, to what the Lord said in His Word about the subject.

2. The Lord's Building, House, Family.

Nowhere is Our Lord's teaching about this matter plainer than in His words to Peter (Matt. 16:16) after his confession of faith in "Christ, the Son of the living God." "You are Peter (meaning "stone"), and on this rock I will build MY church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven...." He does not only say to the confessor of faith in Him, "You will be saved," but, "On this... I will build my church!" How then can any Christian say, "I want to be saved, but I don't want any church?" When members or church leaders say, "We like" or "We want," this or that, they are forgetting whose the church is and who really builds and has a right to run it. When Peter and other church leaders and members (Matt. 18:18-20) are faithfully confessing their Lord, He will, "build His church" with them. If, however, they, like Peter, begin to contradict Him, He says, as He did to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan..." for they are not minding the things of God but of men. Thus churches that contradict their Lord become "salt that has lost its flavor" and is therefore "good for nothing" (Matt. 5:13), or as the Westminster Confession, recalling Rev. 2:9 and 3:9, says, "synagogues of Satan."

Thus Christ saves people by faith in Him and puts them into relationship with one another. They are no longer lonely "strangers and foreigners," but as Paul in Eph. 2:19ff. says, "fellow citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God... being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit." "Having been born again" through the gospel of Christ (1 Peter 1:23; James 1:18), they must "as newborn" babies, grow

with the nourishment of the same Word of God as spiritual food, becoming "living stones" in relationship to Christ, the "cornerstone," to become God's glorious temple in the world (1 Pet. 2:2-10).

3. United with Christ by His Word.

All believers in Christ have eternal life and, in that living relationship to Him, are also united with one another. The Lord prayed for them that they might "be one" in this way (John 17:11). This unity does not include all mankind, but only believers in Him as they are distinguished from the world ("sanctified"), separated from it and related to God through the gospel (vv. 14-26).

4. Its General and Special Offices.

The Lord calls all believers in Him to serve Him as His prophets, priests and kings, as we have noted previously (1 Peter 2:9). To call and equip these believers for such united service of the Lord, He provided special "offices" (Eph. 4:11-16). Thus the Lord's Word gives His directions for choosing men for these offices of the church and for their duties (1 Timothy 2, 3; Titus 1) to help that church and its members to grow. Elders, called to "rule" as they "watch out for your souls" (Heb. 13:17), must be examples of what they teach (1 Peter 5:1-4).

5. Service of the Lord's Word and Sacraments.

The Lord calls people to salvation through faith in Him by His Word and Spirit. Along with that Word He has given Baptism and the Lord's Supper as "signs" and "seals," or "pictures" and "proofs," to help us understand and be assured that His saving grace is given to us (Romans 4:11; Mark 16:15, 16; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; 10:16). Baptism pictures and assures the washing away of our sins and being brought into fellowship with God. The Lord's Supper pictures and assures our being nourished in the fellowship of Christ's Body as we remember Him in faith and proclaim His death for us. These are given to strengthen our faith (not to be a superstitious substitute for it).

6. The Church Needs the Lord's Discipline.

In our united faith in and service of our Lord we are given the neces-

sary order and discipline. The Apostle points out (2 Tim. 2:4, 5) that an army requires it and that even a game could not be played without rules. (The growing confusion in the churches is the certain result when they foolishly think that they can discard the Lord's rule-book, His Word.) The believers and churches in their confession of faith in Christ are given the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:19; 18:15-20). This trust gives direction both to individual members and to church officers. They are to join in a common testimony to Christ in the church and toward the world and try to remove offenses in faith and life that contradict it (1 Cor. 5; Acts 20:28-32). Despite the ravages of error, "God and the word of His grace" (Acts 20:32) will build His Church and assure its inheritance. PDJ

Questions:

1. If we are saved by faith in Christ, why need we join a church?
 2. Who should decide what the church should be and do?
 3. How does the Lord intend His church to be one? (John 17:6-11; 14-26.)
 4. What is the relationship between the office of each believer and the special offices in the church? (Eph. 4:11-16.)
 5. What is the relationship between God's Word and the sacraments as means of grace? (Mark 16:15, 16; 1 Cor. 1:17.)
- What does the Bible's reference to sacraments as "signs" and "seals" mean? (Romans 4:11.)
6. Why must a church have discipline? (Matt. 16:19; 18:15-20.)

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CRC SYNOD 1988

Thomas C. Vanden Heuvel

Synod, 1988 met as usual in the Fine arts Building at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. When I was elected to attend it in January of 1988, I thought that this synod would not be dealing with any major and controversial issues. The issue of man's headship was on hold; the issue of creation/evolution was not scheduled to come up. I thought this synod would be rather relaxed and routine. It turned out quite differently. The difference was made by the Ad Hoc Committee report of the Board of Trustees of Calvin College and the subsequent exoneration of the three professors of Calvin College. This issue turned the rather routine synod into a very major synod.

Calvin Seminary Appointees

This synod did some very good things. We interviewed *Dr. Roger Greenway* and appointed him to the chair of missiology at Calvin Seminary. His interview was excellent. He gave a rock solid account of himself regarding liberation theology, which he characterized as a movement which plays loose and fast with Scripture and has a political and social agenda without Jesus Christ as Savior. Therefore its impact is negative. Although some of the insights of Liberation theologians can be used, as a movement, it has moved away from the organized church and shifted from biblical principles. Greenway said that Reformed Theology has much to say regarding evangelism and missions. Reformed missiology is both *proclamation* and *demonstration*. He said, "I am very afraid of universalism. It ruins churches and seminaries. I have a deepened appreciation for the

Canons of Dordt during my experience in missions. More needs to be written on the relationship of the doctrines of sovereign grace and missions. We see the sovereignty of God in missions, for example, in China, where there are 50 million Christians in a growing, committed church which has been without the Scriptures; things there need correction, but God has preserved His church. The world is becoming urbanized. In 1900, 13% lived in cities; in 1988, 51% live in cities. We have to correct an imbalance in our approach."

Dr. Greenway holds to the historicity of Gen. 1-11. He has a problem with Rev. Neal Punt's view of universalism. "We don't go out telling everybody they are saved, I want to stay a distance from that," he said. "There is a Biblical universalism. God's eye is on the world with a world-wide purpose. In Gen. 12 God says to Abraham, 'In you shall all men be blessed.' Jerusalem is the spiritual capital of the world. Matthew 28 calls us to go into all the world, and in Revelation we see all tribes, nations and tongues coming to the throne. But the unbiblical universalism which flows from the teaching of Schliermacher, which teaches that God is love, that heaven is not happy if hell exists, and that God will save everyone, is a view which makes missions go down the drain. Why proclaim a cross?"

Synod also interviewed *Dr. Henry De Moor*, for the position of Professor of Church Polity at Calvin Seminary. When asked about women as elders, he said: "Some congregations are losing patience. For a church to go ahead and ordain women as elders is technically and theologically wrong; it is individualistic. We are

still wrestling with it. No one is right who goes ahead alone. Take it to classis and synod. I favor, in principle, women in all offices. I'm a proponent for women in office, but not a crusader. I'd go to a Reformed Fellowship meeting to speak, if they would invite me." As for exegetical basis for women in all offices, he cited the event of Pentecost which, he says, brings in a whole new vision about who will be proclaimers. "The widows in I Timothy 5 were official functionaries. We all wrestle with these texts. What did it mean in that culture?"

In the issue of the relationship between the various assemblies of the church, he maintains that authority flows from Jesus Christ to congregations; only then does it flow to assemblies. "However, if one would maintain that there is no line of authority from Jesus Christ to classis and synod, I would disagree."

Regarding academic freedom, he says, "It is limited by the confessions and synodical decisions. I will never tell a student to take my views. Students know my stand; I try to sharpen and draw out their views." Dr. De Moor was appointed by the synod to be professor of Church Polity.

Dr. John Bolt was also interviewed for the position of Professor of Systematic Theology. Dr. Bolt is Professor of Religion at Redeemer College. The goals of Dr. Bolt are to bring the best of Dutch Reformed tradition to bear on the CRC, to keep Reformed Theology alive in the CRC, to prepare students to have a solid awareness of what the Reformed tradition is, and to have a solid commitment to it. The prominent truth of the Reformed

faith is "Tota Scriptura." All Scripture is God's revelation to us; it speaks to the totality of our existence, social, political — all of life. What does he think of Genesis 1-11? In the literary structure of Genesis as a whole, Genesis 1-2:4 is pre-history, a prologue, of great relevance for scientific inquiry, for a real Christian world-view. The Bible presents a creation, not an evolving world. History begins with Genesis 2:4. Adam, Eve, Noah and all the rest of the figures are as real as the New Testament figures. "Primeval history" is not history at all; it is a dismissal of history; it is unwarranted. Genesis 1 records creative acts of God; historical interaction comes after ch. 2:4.

Dr. Greenway, Dr. De Moor and Dr. Bolt were all approved for the faculty of Calvin Seminary.

Eastern Avenue CRC

The synod approved an overture from Classis Minnesota South, advising the consistory of Eastern Ave. CRC in Grand Rapids to revise its decision to have women adjunct elders and discontinue this practice because this practice is contrary to the Church Order and previous decisions of synod. Any consistory's refusal to adhere to such rules and decisions disrupts the unity of the CRC. Classis GR East was advised to use its authority to see that Eastern Ave. carries out synod's decision. Eastern Ave. CRC now has six women serving as adjunct elders. The vote on this issue was 112-42. The debate revealed that some voted for the overture without being convinced that women should not be elders. One delegate said, "We don't want to infringe on Eastern Ave. But these are rules. We'll help change the rules; but you must obey them now. Dutton's approach to quotas is the same as Eastern Ave. If Dutton were on the docket, we would not be taking as long as we are with Eastern Ave."

No Statement On Nicaragua

Despite the pleadings of world missionaries in Nicaragua, synod judged it best not to petition the US and Canadian governments to terminate their participation in the Nicaraguan war. One of the elders from Classis Florida who is a policeman in Dade County, said that

the Nicaraguans in his community would be endangered if our synod passed this resolution. The synod said its statement in 1987 regarding its deep concern over the situation in Nicaragua still adequately addresses the current situation.

Uphold Confidentiality In The Church

Synod instructed all the office-bearers in the CRC to keep absolutely confidential the secrets entrusted to them in the course of their work. Synod also declared that all officebearers of the church who violate their privilege make themselves liable to special discipline. One could wish that those who compromise their commitment to confessions of the church would meet the same swift statement of censure.

Encourage Youth At The Lord's Supper

The table of the Lord was opened to younger children with the stipulation that they make a public confession of faith in the church. The profession of faith required for admission to the Lord's Supper is not necessarily an acceptance of adult responsibilities in the congregation. Therefore, the church shall continue to instruct these children in the Word and the Reformed confessions, and the adult responsibilities of membership are to be granted by the church council and assumed by professing individuals at age eighteen or as granted by the Articles of Incorporation of the congregation.

Synod Says "No" To WARC

The CRC was invited to affiliate with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. Synod voted not to accept the invitation on the basis that some member churches tolerate open denials of the most basic and cardinal doctrines of Christianity. In rejecting the invitation, synod upheld the statement that Scripture forbids any alliance between those who are not agreed in mind or who do not share a common commitment to the essentials of our faith. The Interchurch Relations Committee argued for joining WARC to allow the CRC to fulfill its ecumenical responsibilities in wider circles. The majority (90-76) felt that affiliation with WAPARC, RES and NAE are adequate ways to pursue those

responsibilities within the guidelines of Scripture. The synod elected Rev. Norman Shepherd to replace Dr. John Kromminga, Dr. Fred Klooster to replace Dr. Henry Zwaanstra, and Mrs. Eunice Vander Laan to replace Mrs. Thelma Meyer on the standing Interchurch Relations Committee.

Gender-Inclusive Language In Creeds

Synod voted to adopt stylistic changes in the wording of the Heidelberg Catechism to make it more gender-inclusive. All references to "man" and "mankind" were altered to read "people," or "human," or generic pronouns. The impact of the feminist movement makes its way even to old Heidelberg.

Laura Smit Appeal

In response to an appeal by Laura Smit, a 1987 graduate of Calvin Seminary who was denied her request to be processed as a candidate for ministry in the CRC, the 1988 Synod decided in favor of the Calvin Board of Trustees. Laura Smit charged that her rights as a member of the church and a graduating student of the seminary had not been accorded to her. The Judicial Code Committee studied the issue and judged that the Board did not act in contravention of the Church Order of the CRC, and her appeal was not sustained.

Stand Against Pornography

Synod adopted an excellent statement against pornography sent in by Classis Grandville. "Pornography contributes to the break-up of marriages and families, the molestation of children, rape, and other forms of criminal sexual conduct. It victimizes women, children and men." Synod took an official stand against this evil. The church members are asked to examine their own life-styles and attitudes on human sexuality in the context of Biblical directives, and to become actively involved in organizations that promote decency.

Two New Classes Formed

Synod approved the formation of two new classes, which means that in 1989 there will be 176 delegates to synod instead of the present 168. One of the new classes is in Arizona (eight churches) and the other is in the Jenison and Hudsonville area of Michigan (sixteen churches).

The Creation/Evolution Issue

Synod held a six-hour debate on the controversial teachings and publications of three science professors at Calvin College: Drs. Howard Van Till, Davis Young and Clarence Menninga. Synod received more than 40 communications and overtures from churches, classes and individuals expressing concern about the positions of these three men, the decision of the Board of Trustees and its Ad Hoc Committee. The Ad Hoc Committee studied the issue for a year and concluded that the writings of these professors fall within the limits set by the synodically approved guidelines for the interpretation of Scripture and by the doctrinal statement of the CRC. The professors were also reminded of the limitation these guidelines place on their work.

Synod reflecting upon the work of the Ad Hoc Committee, declared that their work was carried out with careful deliberation and due responsibility for the welfare of Calvin College and the CRC. At the same time, Synod expressed regret to the Calvin Board for not giving greater attention to the "ambiguous or incomplete" statements of especially Dr. Van Till.

A motion was made from the floor by the First Clerk, Rev. Peter Brower, that during the three years of committee study the three professors not be allowed to teach the material that could be judged "ambiguous or incomplete" and that they not use a method of Biblical interpretation which would lead to conclusions that would call into question the "event character" of the history in the early chapters of Genesis. The ground: the well-being of the college and the church require this. It was pointed out that Dordt College did something very similar with the problem they had. It was also pointed out that academic freedom is not license, but Christian scholars are free only within the limits of the confessions. However, many voices became alarmed that this was an attempt to "muzzle" the professors. But it was countered, "These men have signed the Form of Subscription and they must be faithful to their commitment." It was said that the churches need to hear that the synod is in control of the situation.

"Let's not alienate the churches any further," some said.

The President of Calvin College said, "These men teach within the confessions. Tonight we have heard different opinions. The Ad Hoc Committee has studied this; we must respect due process. This motion is unwise because it violates freedom and the rules of the college. The Board of Trustees governs the college. This motion would come close to violating this principle." The vote was taken: 60 yes, 101 no. An elder from North Central Iowa said: "I fear that what we're doing (by only appointing a committee) is putting a band-aid on a cancer that is gnawing away and sapping our strength."

Our people are looking for more than a study committee. The Synod appointed a three-year, ten-man study committee to address the relationship between the Bible and scientific investigation of the universe. This task should include, but not be limited to, such matters as the following: the concept of "vehicle/packaging/contents," the designation of Genesis 1-11 as "primeval history," the creation of Adam and Eve in God's Image, the fall into sin, and the doctrines of creation and providence as they relate to evolutionary theory."

Synod adopted several pastoral reminders to the churches affirming the churches' "complete subjection to the Word of God and the Reformed Creeds, acknowledging the Calvin faculty's public commitment to these truths, including God as Creator, the event character of Genesis 1-11, Adam and Eve as first parents, the actual fall into sin, and the authority of Scripture for scientific activity." Synod also stated its distress over avenues used by church members to level charges regarding Biblical and confessional infidelity by college and seminary personnel.

Some Reflections

I was generally pleased with the decisions of Synod 1988. It is very obvious, however, that there is some deep division in the CRC. The division is not between areas of the country or ages of the people. The division centers in the view of Scripture. Those who have a high view of the authority of Scripture also have a high view of the confessions. Unity is

built on truth. There is also an unhealthy, almost blind, loyalty to the institutions of the church. It was said that if Satan wanted to destroy the CRC he would whisper in the ears of the people: "Don't trust your leaders." How little we learn from history. It was precisely the leadership of Israel that led them away from God. The leaders want loyal devotion on the part of the membership. But that devotion must be earned by a total, uncompromising commitment, not to the institution, but to the Christ, the Word, and the confessions. I felt that in the creation/evolution debate, there was so much fear in saying even the slightest thing about the professors in question. The study committee is good, but it does not address the issue of evolution being openly taught at Calvin College. I do not believe that we need three years to determine whether evolution is to be taught to our covenant youth as the way in which this world and everything in it came to be. People who say what I have just said are considered "trouble-makers." I ask, "Who really are troubling the church? and are they not those who refuse to bow before the Word of the Lord?" The response to what I have said would probably be, "But the issues are far more complex than you seem to indicate. Only biblical scholars can really understand the issues and clarify the position to be taken." So we are back to our institutions and leaders again. The priesthood of scholarship must tell us common, unlearned, simple believers how to read the Bible. Again, how little we learn from history. In the days of Jesus Christ, the scholars despised Him, would not bow to the authority of Scriptures, but the common people heard Him gladly. Our devotion and commitment must be to Christ and to His Word. It is my prayer that the CRC will be preserved, but preservation will only happen through faithful obedience.

Rev. Thomas C. Vanden Heuvel is the pastor of the First C.R. Church of Byron Center, Michigan.

David A. Kloosterman

THE BELGIC WHAT?

Several years ago I remarked to a seminarian friend (now a minister) that very few people in the pew, and not very many more in the consistory room, had much of an idea what the Belgic Confession said. His reply stunned me: "Maybe it's a good thing."

Ignorance of the Belgic Confession—one of our confessional standards, one of our forms of unity—ignorance of it a good thing?

One might well think this was the current consensus in Reformed churches considering the widespread neglect of it in preaching and in teaching. Year in and year out I hear sermons which follow the Heidelberg Catechism. And this is good. Several times I have been privileged to hear sermon series which follow the "five points of Calvinism" of the Canons of Dort. And this is good too. But a sermon series on the Belgic Confession? Never. This, in my opinion, is not good.

The same situation prevails, in my experience, when it comes to catechism and adult education. When I was a youth (some 14 to 22 years ago), year after year we studied the Compendium. Sometimes we even got to look at the actual Heidelberg Catechism which stands behind the Compendium. I think that one year we even touched on the Canons of Dort and the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds. But the Belgic Confession? We had heard of its existence. Years later the Young Married Couples group at church decided to use Dr. Cornelius Plantinga's *A Place to Stand* (1979, Board of Pub. of the CRC) for its lessons. Eighteen of the thirty-one lessons in this book deal with the Belgic Confession. We used only the lessons on the Canons. A couple of years later the same book was used in the Adult Sunday School class. Only the lessons on the

Ecumenical Creeds and the Catechism were used. The Belgic Confession? "We'll cover that next year." Except next year different materials were chosen and the Confession was never studied.

And good materials on the Belgic Confession are certainly not in oversupply. Plantinga's *A Place to Stand*, in this writer's estimation, must be used, if it is used, with caution and discernment. A more trustworthy work, but also more difficult to use in a church setting, is Dr. P. Y. DeJong's *The Church's Witness to the World* (1980, Paideia Press). DeJong's lengthy (446 pages) and scholarly yet highly readable book will at the least afford the teacher or preacher with a very reliable and valuable resource. At present I am awaiting the delivery of H. Hoeksema's *Study Outlines on the Belgic Confession* (available for \$3.00 from Reformed Book Outlet, 3505 Kelly, Hudsonville, MI 49426). I would be happy to learn of other study materials on the Belgic Confession which are currently available, but these are the only ones of which I am aware.

The Belgic Confession is neglected, and this is not good. For the Belgic Confession is a vital complement to the Catechism and Canons. It is the Confession which most clearly sets forth the Biblical doctrine of Scripture as well as the canon of Scripture. It is the Confession which most clearly delineates the Biblical doctrine of the church and her government and offices. It is the Confession that deals, more than the Catechism or Canons, with the relation of church and state. It is the Confession which contains some of the strongest statements affirming the historicity of Genesis.

And it is precisely these areas of Christian doctrine which are being abandoned in this age of apostasy.

Indeed, this very fact probably accounts for the Confession's having fallen into widespread disuse in the preaching and teaching of the church. Those who wish to accommodate Biblical doctrine to worldly imperatives in such matters as Biblical errancy, false ecumenical alliances, abandonment of church discipline, women in church office, liberation theology, evolution, etc., are apt to regard ignorance of the Belgic Confession as "a good thing." But the true church neglects the Confession to its great loss.

The Belgic Confession must not be just the BELGIC Confession. It must be OUR Confession. It must not be just a confession of 16th century Belgians and 17th century Netherlands; not merely an artifact from the past, an historical curiosity. Rather, it must be a living statement of faith. It cannot function as OUR confession if most of us do not even know what it says. By the grace of God, let us aggressively reclaim the Belgic Confession as our very own in our preaching and in our teaching.

The author of the Confession, Guido de Bres, together with many of our forefathers in the faith from of old made good on their promise of being ready to "offer their backs to stripes, their tongues to knives, their mouths to gags, and their whole bodies to the fire," rather than deny the truth expressed in this Confession. Shall we not make good on our promise "DILIGENTLY TO TEACH and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine?" If we are faithful to that promise, it will be a good thing indeed.

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A SOCIAL THEORY OF THE TRINITY?

Henry Vander Kam

In the March 4, 1988 issue of *Christianity Today*, Dr. Neal Plantinga, professor of Dogmatics at Calvin Seminary, in an article entitled "*The Perfect Family*," seeks to cast some new light on the doctrine of the Trinity. This by itself is laudable because the more light we receive on the age-old doctrines of the church, the better. Surely, no one believes that the last word has been spoken on the doctrines which the church professes. When one then reads an article of an able young theologian on this subject, he rejoices.

In the past there have been various attempts to shed more light on this very difficult doctrine. Often psychological analogies were used to clarify what the church has believed these many years. In this century, says Dr. Plantinga, there have been more attempts to give some sociological analogies of the Trinity. These social theorists emphasize the fact that God is not to be thought of as a single "Self," but, rather as a society, as a community. Some of the Latins thought that there would have to be a plurality of persons in God for love to be true. In the last decades some theologians even offer some ethically and politically ambitious Trinity statements. These tend to associate Monotheism with oppression. In the doctrine of the Trinity they find implications for life in community and even for socialism.

The German theologian Moltmann believed that the Trinity, especially in the Easter weekend, was a model of suffering love and of solidarity in the face of the evil that love must suffer. The Trinity, to him, is the model of "social personalism" or "personal socialism" in human community.

After Dr. Plantinga has given us an interesting short review of the thinking of others on the doctrine of the Trinity during the past ages, he seeks to give his own view of the matter. He realizes that we must be very careful regarding the views he has reviewed. As he puts it nicely concerning the Social Trinitarians: "they do not linger long over Scripture." Some scarcely mention the Scriptures. Many of them make a God in their own image. This is a real danger, because the liberation theologians would thus be able to use the doctrine of the Trinity to advance their political views. Some other Social Trinitarians believe that the right view of the Trinity is that it is like the nuclear family. Adam, Eve and Seth form this family in the Biblical history and Eve represents the Holy Spirit!

Dr. Plantinga will have nothing to do with the excesses of the Social Trinitarians he has mentioned. But, he says, shorn of these excesses, the analogy of the social Trinity is probably the most Biblically fruitful and theologically redolent theory now available. Much of Western Trinitarianism, he says, reduced the three persons of the Trinity to roles or modes of one person. This certainly does not do justice to the Biblical view of the Trinity. He continues: "The precincts of heaven are occupied by more than one divine person. Christian Monotheism must include more than one divine thinker, doer, actor, lover. Their unity is more like a marriage in which two persons become one flesh, or like persons bound together in a single community."

If the New Testament suggests any analogy, says Plantinga, it is in John

17:21-23. This is a model for social Trinitarianism. Just as Father and Son, though distinct, are "in" each other, so the new community must be unified both vertically and horizontally. As the three persons are yet communally one God, so the church, though many members, is still only one church. The author says that the Holy Trinity is a transcendent church family. So viewed, he says, the idea of the image of God takes on new and richer meaning.

I have tried to do justice to the article of Dr. Plantinga. I have quoted as much of his article as I thought necessary and, not being able to quote the whole article, quoted enough to give the meaning of the writer, I believe.

The first major doctrine the church sought to set forth in the New Testament times was the doctrine of the Trinity. The church felt that this doctrine was basic to all the others. The "God-concept" had to be made clear to all men. The Old Testament people of God had been taught in the clearest possible terms that there was only one God (Deut. 6:4). The people of Israel were not to fall into the error of the surrounding peoples who served many gods. The God who had created them was the same God who provided for them. We have often been taught that the Old Testament gives various proofs for the Trinity. It is true that there are many passages in the Old Testament that *point* in that direction but a clear *proof* is lacking. God did not confuse Israel by telling them that there was but one God and then telling them that there were three persons in this Godhead! No Jewish theologian at the time when

Christ came had any inkling that there was a doctrine of the Trinity.

When the New Testament age dawned the people still held to the idea that there was but one God. They had to continue to believe this, but a fuller revelation now came. When Jesus came into the world the question naturally arose: Who is He? The same is true concerning the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Now the church was faced by the problem: There is but one God, but the Father has spoken, He has sent His Son and the Spirit completes the work of redemption. The New Testament gives clear proof that God is Triune even though the word is not used. When the church began to reflect on this problem it was difficult to make a clear statement which would do justice to Scripture and be understandable (as far as possible) to the members of the church. Tertullian and Origen had both spoken of the Trinity but their views did not do justice to the

teachings of Scripture. Not until the council of Nicea in 325 was a definitive statement drawn up concerning this doctrine. Especially in the Athanasian Creed the terms tumble over each other to try to give the accurate Biblical teaching. This doctrine will always remain a mystery. It must be believed.

Dr. Plantinga has given us a clear picture of the teachings of the various theologians as they have wrestled with this doctrine. He does not want to fall into the errors into which many of them have fallen. I wonder, though, whether he has not fallen into some of the pit-falls which surround an interpretation of this doctrine?

There is and there has always been the danger of rationalizing a doctrine such as this one. As a child in the Christian school, I can remember, we were told that there are many examples of Trinity in the world of nature. The familiar H₂O—as solid-ice, liquid-water, and gas—

steam. This simply is not true. I do not believe that there are any illustrations of the Trinity which do justice to the teaching of the Scriptures. Nothing here below is like the Trinity above and, surely, nothing in the Trinity above is a model of anything here below. This doctrine is unique—it is the only one there is. It is revealed! Man would never have come to this conclusion. It cannot be defined because a definition places it, first of all, into a class. Here there is no class into which the Trinity fits. To liken the Trinity to the *family* does not do justice to the revelation. The doctrine of the Trinity is basic to all that we believe. The fundamental question is: Who is your God? The only answer comes from Scripture.

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John D. Teague

A CRISIS: "COMMERCIAL" CALVINISM

The problem with Calvinism is not that it has been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried.

Readers will recognize in these words both G.K. Chesterton's famous comment on Christianity and the liberty we have taken with it. Perhaps they will also recognize this quotation from Peter Borgdorff's guest editorial in *The Banner* of 14 December, 1987:

They (who have been called to lead the church) must show why not every leadership principle is acceptable in the church of Christ.

To this we say a hearty "amen" and add: not every leadership principle which is acceptable in the church of Christ is acceptable in a Reformed church of Christ.

A Crisis Perceived

We wish we could be so sure as Mr. Borgdorff is, that church leaders have no desire to borrow organization and leadership models from non-Reformed sources. We suspect that he is mistaken. We believe that we can detect just such borrowing. In fact there is already a growing sense among our people that the integrity of their congregations is eroding, that authority is slowly but surely being centralized in Grand Rapids, and that they are powerless to reverse this trend through due process.

One such borrowed model is hierarchy, known to Christians as "episcopacy" and to secular industry as "centralized management." But it was the conclusion of the Genevan

Reformers, based on their study of Scripture, that nothing in the New Testament justified spiritual hierarchies. On the contrary, everything suggested that each believer had an individual relationship with God, and that the function of the church was merely to nurture, instruct, and correct his pursuit of Christian maturity. And so they replaced the episcopal system with the collegial. Thus collegia (fellowships) of function, jointly exercising gifts bestowed by God's grace, replaced strata of clergy, personally wielding authority conferred by human consent.

Just as the collegial model assumes that maturity should be the goal of *all* Christians, the hierarchical model assumes that immaturity is the inevitable state of *lay* Christians.

Children, of course, must be controlled. And they who enjoy controlling others wish them to remain childlike. Indeed, one respected sociologist has noted that the primary purpose of hierarchy is control, and any shift in the nature of control threatens those who might lose their authority.

Now, it wasn't likely that the leaders of the Christian Reformed Church could be tempted by the forbidden fruit of episcopacy. No, given the nature of things, it was while Doctrinal Security kept our doors under close surveillance that Hierarchy crept back in through the windows. For they are not bad churches *but good businesses* which are admired by some of our well-meaning but unthoughtful leaders.

Centralization is seen by some as an antidote to growing congregationalism. Congregationalism is seen by others as an appropriate response to escalating denominationalism. This is like the old U.S. dilemma of state sovereignty and federal uniformity: only, for our Church, the issues are congregational integrity and denominational cooperation. We do not pretend to have final solutions to this inherent tension, but we do wish to point out some built-in problems of commercial-style centralization. And we wish to list some of its forms which, when observed, ought to warn our people that their Reformational liberties may be in danger.

A Crisis Explored

"Centralized," "hierarchical," and "pyramidal" are interchangeable adjectives for the same model. In our own "Grand Rapids trend" and elsewhere, this is characterized by organization charts, chains-of-command, increased headquarters staffs and costs, recruiting-officers, five-year strategies, Management By Objectives (MBO), employee manuals, (some already heavier than the Bible and still fattening,) and choirs of soothsayers to "say it isn't so."

All this is happening, oddly, at a time when hierarchical management is under growing criticism from the well-qualified analysts which business pays to monitor its own performance. From such eminent journals as the *Harvard Business Review* we ought to have learned, for example, that the wise executive subdues his passion for writing policy hand-

books. Detailed pronouncements on institutional objectives and departmental strategies, with all-inclusive organizational objectives and departmental strategies, with all-inclusive organization charts and job descriptions - these are often the first pang of a mortal illness.

A worker's worth in the world of MBO is determined by the overall cost-effectiveness with which he can achieve the decreed objective. For once that objective has been determined, it can only be altered by up-chain and down-chain jugglings of responsibility that push credit upward and blame downward. And at every step along the way, each official must take care to cover his own...tracks. Only think of the time lost, the feelings hurt, and the objectives missed - all because of an *undue* preoccupation with Objectives in the first place! But perhaps it is chiefly because it tends to give his achievements greater importance *than the worker himself* that MBO is unsuitable for spiritual enterprise in general and ministry in particular.

Some other weaknesses of centralized businesses are that, revolving as they do around Chief Executive Officers, they tend to be unstable. They extract unquestioning loyalty to superiors as the price of survival and advancement. They foster fawning, politicking, and other unseemly manipulation. They shun bad tidings and punish their messengers. They emphasize corporate uniformity to the detriment of individual inspiration. They prefer corpo-babble to plain speech. They proliferate management jobs, inflating overhead costs, then play bookkeepers' games to conceal the fact. And they create climates in which rivalry, intrigue, and bitterness replace genuine cooperation.

Why should the Christian Reformed Church just now be building corporate structures which corporations themselves are coming to doubt? Why did she not know that this doubt was growing? Actually we should not be surprised, for it is a wryly-acknowledged fact that churches are usually twenty years behind the times!

A Crisis Deplored

The Reformed objections to such novelties are several and strenuous. Where the front-line, "lowest

echelon" worker is actually a minister, (one called by God Himself to work specifically for His kingdom,) a hierarchical model subverts the Reformed model. For in such cases, the church can have no higher function than assessing the validity of his call, monitoring his faithfulness to it, and supporting him to the best of her ability. Truly the "servant of the servants of God," the church is his *enabler* rather than his *employer*.

Nor do chains-of-command find any justification in the New Testament. On the contrary, history demonstrates that every effort to systematize the operation of the Holy Spirit, whether by sacraments or structures, has ended in spiritual disaster. So unimpressed is God with man-made boxes that He will not confine Himself in them. Indeed, one can almost say that where human artifice prevails, there God's Spirit does not. No other organizational forms have any warranty of Scripture than those unimpressive rules which convene "humble and holy men of heart" to wait with patience for His leading.

Recruitment to service in the church of Christ is not done by agents with quotas to meet or bonuses to merit. It is done by the Spirit of God, as a promised result of the faithful preaching of the Word "which will not return to Him void."

Long-term gameplans and MBOs are not scriptural concepts. How often have we read,

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.... Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will...do this or that" (James 4:13-15 NIV).

Reminded of these words, directors are apt to retort, "Well! Of course we *meant* 'Lord willing!'" But this does not change the fact that Management By Objectives makes *us* the planners and gives *God* no more than veto power over our pet projects.

Of course no system or model of human organization is flawless, but we must always be on guard against thoughtless acceptance of structure which are foreign to our Church Order. The Christian Reformed

Church Order was carefully constructed by our ancestors. Now, it is becoming the property of those who may or may not understand it and respect it. We cannot claim that all

other forms of polity than ours are intrinsically evil or unproductive. But we can strongly urge that such forms be seen for what they are and weighed accordingly.

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The April Conference of Concerned at South Holland, Ill., was probably the most spirited and best attended such meeting yet held. In view of the merit and importance of the major addresses, the OUTLOOK's board decided to publish them as provided by the speakers. They are included in this and coming issues.

"To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn." Isaiah 8:20

INTRODUCTION

The topic assigned, "The Bible in the CRC Today," is difficult to address, especially because there is a great and growing diversity today within the church on the subject of the Bible, and because our church is in a period of transition.

Let's take as standard for comparison the "classical" or "confessional" view of the Bible that has been and continues to be the "official" view of the CRC. Specifically, this means that I will set forth three of what have been called in Reformed theology "attributes" or "perfections" of the Scriptures, and consider in each case where we stand in respect to each of these today.

1. The Confessional View of the Bible

This involves (1) its divine authority, (2) sufficiency, and (3) perspicuity or clarity.

Cornelis P. Venema

"THE BIBLE IN THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH TODAY"

a. The Divine Authority of the Bible:

The first attribute concerns the authority of the Bible as the written Word of God. In Article III of the Belgic Confession, on the "Written Word of God," "We confess that this Word of God was not sent nor delivered by the will of man, but that men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit, as the apostle Peter says; and that afterwards God, from a special care which He has for us and our salvation, commanded His servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit His revealed Word to writing Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures." And in Article V, the authority of the Bible is beautifully affirmed in the following terms, "We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith; believing without any doubt all things contained in them, not so much because the Church receives and approves them as such, but more especially because the Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts that they are from God...."

It is not difficult to ascertain the thrust of this confession concerning the authority of the Word of God. The authority of the written Word of God derives from its divine origin and authorship. Thus, Calvin, in his Commentary on 2 Peter 1:20, remarks on the authority of the Scriptures: "You will never come to read it well prepared unless you bring to it reverence obedience, and willingness to learn. A proper reverence arises from the conviction that it is God who speaks with us and not mortal men.... They did not blab their inventions of their own accord or according to their own judgments. The gist of all this is, that the beginning of a proper understanding is when we give His holy prophets the same trust that is due to God."

b. The Sufficiency of the Bible

A second attribute or perfection of the Scriptures, one which is especially highlighted in the Belgic Confession, Article VII, is its Sufficiency. Here the emphasis is placed upon the sufficiency of the Bible as an "infallible rule for faith and practice." We have in the written Word of God

a complete and sufficient revelation of God's will, next to which all other authorities are subordinate and of lesser value.

The confession of this in the Belgic Confession, Article VII, is again worthy of quotation: "We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein. For since the whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in them at large, it is unlawful for any one, though an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures: nay, though it were an angel from heaven, as the apostle Paul says. For since it is forbidden to add unto or take away anything from the Word of God, it does thereby appear that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects. Neither may we consider any writings of men, however holy these men may have been, of equal value with those divine Scriptures, nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, since the truth is above all: for all men are of themselves liars, and more vain than vanity itself. Therefore we reject with all our hearts whatsoever does not agree with this infallible rule, as the apostles have taught us, saying, Prove the spirits, whether they are of God. Likewise: If anyone cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into your house."

This was a great dividing point in the Reformation time and continues to be so today. Who has the last and final word in the churches of Jesus Christ? Bishops? Synods? Classes? Ministers? For the Reformed, the Scriptures alone were the first and the last Word for the regulation of the faith and practice of the churches.

c. The Perspicuity of the Bible:

In traditional Roman Catholicism, the Bible was a "closed" book, whose meaning was obscure and inaccessible. Only by means of the church's official teaching and interpretation was it possible to have access to the message of Scripture and to its revelation of the mind of God. In this respect, the church through

its teaching office assumed the status of "priestly mediator" of God's truth in the church.

Against this doctrine of the obscurity and inaccessibility of the Scriptures, the Reformers confessed the *clarity* and *perspicuity* of the Scriptures. Although they did not deny the difficulty of interpreting certain passages in the Bible, nor the necessity and usefulness of the office of "teacher" in the churches—they insisted that the written Word of God was accessible in the main, to all who read it in faith and in the company of the faithful. This is the reason the Belgic Confession speaks of *the Bible*, as contrasted with the relatively more obscure revelation in *creation*, as a book in which God "makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us...," that is to say, as far as is necessary for us to know in this life, to His glory and our salvation." It also accounts for the confession's confidence that the Scriptures may serve the church as an "infallible rule" which serves "for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith." Even the Reformed churches' practice of supervising the preaching and administration of the Word by the Elders, assumes the perspicuity and clarity of the Bible to those who read it submissively and humbly.

These are the attributes or perfections that are clearly confessed by all Reformed churches that maintain a substantial and unbroken tie with the Reformers. We believe that the Bible is of divine origin and therefore has the authority of God Himself; we believe that the Bible alone is a sufficient and infallible rule for the regulation, foundation and confirmation of our faith, and we believe that it is clear and perspicuous in revealing the holy will of God.

2. The Bible Today in the CRC:

This brings us to the main question before us—where do we find ourselves in the present situation? What do we believe today about the Bible—about its *authority*, its *sufficiency*, and its *clarity*?

My general thesis, which I hope to elaborate in the following, is that we are facing an erosion on all fronts. Though it may well be true that our "official" statements and declarations are generally consistent with

the confessions, there is a great deal of evidence that those who occupy positions of leadership and influence in the church, particularly those who teach at the colleges and Seminary, have departed from this confessional standpoint.

a. Where We Stand In Respect to the Bible's Authority:

As many of you are aware, we have been debating as a denomination for a number of years the question of the "extent and the nature of Biblical authority." During the course of this debate, we have been moving in the direction of a view of Biblical authority that attenuates our historical confession by limiting the authority of Scripture to its "saving content." Whereas our historic confession speaks of "*believing without any doubt all things contained therein*," we are now faced with a view which only believes that which directly concerns redemption through Christ, however and by whatever arbitrary means this is discerned. We are witnessing the triumph of a "Christomonistic" delimitation of Scripture's authority—that which concerns Christ and only that is authoritative, all else being the "form," the "husk," or the "packaging" of this divine content.

Those who are acquainted with the discussion of Biblical authority in the CRC over the last decades, know that these discussions were occasioned in the late fifties and then the early seventies by views of Scriptural authority which argue for just such a distinction—better, separation—between the "husk" and the "kernel" of the Bible, and which limited the Scripture's authority to its so-called "saving content." Sadly, this history has witnessed a remarkable degree of similarity to events in other churches, particularly the Dutch GKN, where the same view, even the same respect to the Scripture generally and the Genesis account in particular was used in describing Scriptural authority. (see H.T. van Bochove, *Gemeente in Veelvoud* (Franeker: T. Wever, 1981; p. 85).

This Christomonistic *reduction of the authority of Scripture*, though evident at various points in this history, is most evident and radically described in Howard Van Till's treat-

ment of Scripture in *The Fourth Day* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986). For example, consider the following descriptions of what it means to "take the Bible seriously": "The primary purpose of Scripture is, in my judgment, to bring the reader into a right relationship with God, with fellow human beings, and with the rest of Creation. This is the kerygmatic heart of Scripture's proper function—the bringing of the gospel message" (p. 12). "Yet another function of Scripture, of considerably less importance than the primary and secondary functions, is to provide the reader with information concerning things in themselves. I say 'in themselves' as opposed to 'in relation to God' or 'in their function as vehicles of divine revelation. Such information, is incidental to the principal themes of Scripture and is drawn solely from human experience. This includes information about persons..., information about events, or information about the material world expressed in the pre-scientific language of the day." Consequently, Van Till goes on to distinguish the divine content of Scripture, the revelatory meaning which the Bible "carries," from the packaging in which it is contained. "To press the model still further, we might note that when goods are carried by a vehicle, it is wise to package the goods appropriately in order to protect the contents from damage and to provide convenient units for handling and delivery. Similarly in the Scriptures, each vehicle is loaded with its content (God's message) contained in appropriate packaging—the specific story or account of an event" (p. 15).

Thus, for those who adopt this Christomonist view of Scriptural authority, the only thing(s) to which the Belgic Confession refers when it speaks of "believing without any doubt all things contained therein" is the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. There should be no mistaking the consequence of this approach. It is the end of any meaningful affirmation of the Bible's divine authority. It renders any claim truly to know the "Christ of the Scriptures" (the only Christ accessible to us!) impossible. And though we may still retain the semblance of piety by referring to the Bible politely as "God's Word,"

these words no longer mean what they say!

3. Where We Stand on the Sufficiency of the Bible:

It is not difficult to notice that this view of the authority of Scripture has also brought about a shift on the issue of the sufficiency of the Scripture. For, if the authority of the Bible is limited by and extends only to that which touches directly upon its kerygmatic function and center, then the Bible is only sufficient to regulate our believing in this limited sphere of concern. It cannot be considered regulative and sufficient as a rule to govern our conduct in a wide variety of areas touching the life and practice of the churches or the Christian.

This is precisely what is taking place. Whereas the Reformers and the Confessions assume that the Bible is a sufficient rule for the regulation of things pertaining to our faith and practice as churches and as Christian believers, there are many signs that we are rapidly moving to other authorities in determining the pattern of our faith and practice as churches. Whereas the Confessions reject an appeal to "tradition," to the "leading of the Spirit," to any human authorities, and the like, contrary to the Word of God, we are finding today that many are happy to make their appeal, not alone to the Scriptures, but to any one of such alternative authorities.

This is true, when it concerns the view of many in the church of the decisions of church assemblies. Quite apart from the fact that it is becoming less and less customary for any *direct appeal to Scripture* to be made in connection with these decisions, there is an increasing assumption that these decisions are "*settled and binding, whether they agree with the Word of God or not!*" It is even alleged that those who resist unBiblical decisions are "congregationalists!" "Synod has decided" is becoming the CRC counterpart to the historic Catholic view of its papal pronouncements and Councils, *causa finita sit!* (that ends the case!)

Consider the issue of women-in-office. How often are we not faced with arguments whose substantial appeal is not to, but outside of, the Scriptures? Seldom in our denomina-

tional discussions of this issue is much interest any longer expressed in listening to the text(s) of Scripture. It is enough that the church's tradition ("look at these Synodical Study Committees which show that the Scriptures are at best *unclear* on this issue and at least *allow for the possibility...*"), the sociological trends of the time, and the findings of modern psychology (not to mention the fear of embarrassment!), seem to open the way to a new view.

But perhaps the most striking instance of a denial of the sufficiency of Scripture to regulate our faith and practice, is the view which, having limited Scripture's authority to its "saving content," treats the findings of science (which reads the "book of creation") as a separate and independently valid authority. Whereas the confession speaks of the Written Word of God as a "more clear and full" revelation than the book of creation (and thus the "spectacles" by which we see this book properly), it is now argued that the allegedly *sure findings of modern science* must serve as the "spectacles" and standard by which to see and measure what we know from the Scripture. Consequently, another more sure and sufficient rule for our faith and practice is to be found in "enlightened science," and it is by this rule that the Scripture is to be governed.

Here again we are witnessing considerable evidence that our confessional view of the sufficiency of Scripture to regulate and norm the faith and practice of the church is in jeopardy.

4. Where We Stand on the Perspicuity of the Bible:

However, perhaps the most obvious and oftentimes frustrating evidence of an erosion in our commitment to the confessional view of the Bible is the rejection today by many of the perspicuity of the Bible. More and more appeal is made to the fact that the Scriptures are *unclear*, that multiple interpretations are possible and therefore legitimate, and that one cannot begin to understand them apart from the intermediation of sophisticated scholarly techniques and approaches.

Most of us sense how this is happening. It will not do any longer to

say in the church, "the Bible clearly teaches," "the only proper interpretation of this passage," "the plain and obvious sense of the text" — are rejected outright. Accusations of "obscurantism" and "fundamentalism" are quickly hurled at those who think the Scriptures clearly teach such things as the creation of all things, complete and perfect from the beginning, by the Word of God; the creation of Adam from the dust of the earth and Eve from Adam; the historical rebellion and fall of our "first parents in Paradise"....

This denial of the perspicuity of the Scriptures can be easily demonstrated. Take the issues of women-in-office or the Biblical account of creation again.

When it comes to the issue of women-in-office, perhaps the single most frequently met argument for opening all the offices to women is the one which cashes in on the alleged lack of clarity in the relevant Biblical passages. Furthermore, it is considered useful to present a variety of alternative historical hypotheses about circumstances which *may have influenced* the author to write as he did. These introduce the possibility that the directives in the text may only have been fitted to *a situation no longer present* in the church, and therefore they are not to be considered binding upon us today. This "hermeneutic" or approach to the interpretation of Scripture (following the rule — *what was conditioned by circumstances then cannot be considered binding upon us now*) effectively takes the Bible out of the hand of the church member who is not privy to the "historical scholarship" of the teaching priesthood. What concerns us here is not the doubtful assumption that, because something is historically conditioned it cannot be continually binding, but the scholarly conceit and arrogance which underlies this 'hermeneutic.'

The same difficulty occurs in respect to the Biblical account of the creation and Fall. One would be hard pressed to establish from the Bible that this account is not intended to describe events or occurrences that took place. It would not be too far fetched to assert that

the whole Biblical record of creation, fall, redemption and consummation, is founded upon and essentially dependent upon the historicity of these events. There is ample evidence throughout Old and New Testaments that these events are not to be construed as "pictures" of "poetic fiction" and the like. And yet, this is precisely what is being argued. Not now because the Bible demands it, but because those who are privy again to the latest scholarly and scientific theories about origins, think themselves compelled to adjust and accommodate the Bible to those theories.

At this point again the churches are left in a fog of pseudo-scholarship and "high-level gossip" about the Bible. Not able to engage in the sophisticated forms of genre-criticism and 'de-mythologizing' (for, if you once adopt the dichotomy between form and content in your view of Scriptural authority, you must utilize the interpretive approach of de-mythologizing, discriminating between 'husk' and 'kernel'), and ignorant of the latest in scholarship when it comes to cultural anthropology and evolutionary theory — the presumably "unenlightened" Elder or Teacher in the church who finds these views contrary to the plain and obvious teachings of Scripture is treated with haughty disdain. To appeal to the confessions is likewise treated with a measure of bemused condescension — after all, these confessions must also be treated and interpreted according to the same scholarly techniques. They are "sixteenth century documents," and we should not expect to discover in them a binding interpretation of the Scriptures.

It is quite legitimate, therefore, to ask what becomes of the clarity of the Bible in this situation? Here again there is evidence of a marked decline and manifest erosion in our historic, confessional view of the Bible.

CONCLUSION

The concluding question is — does this really matter?

Let me say to that question — Yes, indeed, and more than most of us realize! Undermine the divine

authority of the Scripture (treat it as the opinion of men in all areas but that called its "saving content"), deny the sufficiency of Scripture (set alongside it other rival authorities and sources of truth), or reject its clarity (say that only the scholarly experts understand or are able to discern its "hidden" meaning) — and the church has no future! For the church lives out of and upon the basis of the Word of God! Without that Word it must necessarily perish. Is this not the clear and compelling sense of our text — "To the law and to the testimony! If they speak not according to this word, they have no light of dawn."

The reason this is so, is not hard to discover. How can the church be "the pillar and the ground of the truth," when its own words are unreliable? It is a very bad situation, when the church compromises and equivocates on her own confession of faith about the written Word of God. But it is a situation made the more evil, when this is done contrary to her own public commitments and claims.

For it is our integrity as churches in respect to our good confession before and in the world that is finally at stake in this. We have all pledged together as office-bearers before God and His church that we believe that the confession's doctrine of Scripture "fully agrees with the Word of God." Does our "yes" mean "yes," our "no," "no"? Nothing less than this is at stake today in the present situation — our integrity, the truth of our confession. It is a pitiful and lamentable situation we face — that we who are beneficiaries of the testimony of the Belgic Confession, made by its Confessors with a willingness to "offer their backs to stripes, their tongues to knives, their mouths to gags, and their whole bodies to fire" rather than to deny its truth, should have to insist upon the simplest fidelity from those who "with the mouth" claim it to be their own.

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Wayne Leigh

INSEPARABLE LOVES

In the June *Outlook* there were articles concerning Professor Van Till of Calvin College by men whom I highly respect and who are without a doubt my superiors in wisdom. I do not wish to offend these ministers in any way nor seem to be opposing them. They are friends and we are in the same camp. However, one thing that they both wrote spurred me on to write about the matter that I have thought about for a long time.

One statement was made by Rev. Henry Vanden Heuvel concerning interviews with Drs. Van Till, Young and Menninga. "What began to emerge from these contacts was that we were dealing with men who are devout Christians. We found them to be in no way out to destroy the church, or to destroy the faith of the students under them." The other statement was made by Rev. Arthur Besteman concerning Dr. Van Till. "We are told that Professor Van Till is deeply committed to Jesus Christ and that is not to be questioned."

The surprising thing is that both of these men go on to say that Van Till's view of Scripture is, according to one, not acceptable, and according to the other, downright dangerous for the future. What has happened here is very common nowadays. That is, love for Jesus Christ is separated from love for Jesus Christ's Words. Deep commitment to Jesus Christ is separated from deep commitment to Jesus Christ's Words. After all, let's remember that the latter is exactly what the Bible is. It is the Word of Christ "who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18).

Jesus Christ is called "the Word" (John 1) and "the Word of God" (Rev 19:13). The words of the Bible are Jesus' words. "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10). The angel said to John, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place" (Rev. 22:6). A few verses later it is written, "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches" (Rev. 22:16). Jesus is the Lord who is the God of the spirits of the prophets. The Bible is the Word of Jesus Christ. How can love for Him and commitment to Him be separated from love for His Word and commitment to it?

Furthermore, Jesus Christ is the "truth" (Jn. 14:6). The words He speaks to the church in Philadelphia are the "words of him who is holy and true" (Rev. 3:7). The words He speaks to the church in Laodicea are the "words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness" (Rev. 3:14). Jesus told Pontius Pilate, "In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me" (Jn. 18:37). Jesus, our beloved Savior, is the God for whom it is impossible to lie (Heb. 6:18).

And part of the truth that Jesus came to testify to and did testify to was the absolute word-for-word truth of the Bible. He said, "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen will by any means disappear from the Law

until everything is accomplished" (Matt. 5:18). He scolded the Sadducees with regard to the Scriptures, "Have you not read what God said to you?" (Matt. 22:31). The Scriptures are the Word of God which must be fulfilled because it is impossible for them not to be true (Matt. 26:54, 56; Lk. 24:26). Jesus told the Jews who were ready to stone Him "the Scripture cannot be broken" (Jn. 10:35). The One who is the Truth incarnate testifies to the absolute truth of the Word, the Bible.

Now, I ask, is anyone who questions the literal truth of a word written in the Bible of the same Spirit as Jesus Christ? Absolutely not! If I say, "I love my wife and she loves me, but I cannot trust every word she says" will anyone believe that I really love her, and that I believe she loves me? Probably not. And, yet, we are to believe that men who say, "I love Jesus Christ and He loves me, but I cannot trust every word He says," are men who are deeply committed to Jesus Christ?

Someone will say, "These science professors are not questioning the New Testament or the gospel at all, only the beginning chapters of Genesis in the Old Testament." Here is another place where false dichotomies are often made. The Old Testament and New Testament are one Bible, not two. The New Testament is built on the foundation of the Old. The Scriptures which Jesus affirmed as true were the Old Testament Scriptures, not the New. The Christ of redemption is also the Christ of creation. "For by him all things were created: things in heaven

and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him" (Col. 1:16). "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (Jn. 1:3).

Jesus Christ created all things. He has testified to us about that creation which He accomplished. He is the Truth. Did He tell us something that was not true in Genesis 1? He testified to the truth of the Old Testament, including the fact that in the beginning there were two people, Adam and Eve, who were the first married partners in the world. Jesus quotes from Genesis 1 and 2. "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'" (Mk. 10:6-8). The One who was there, the One who created all things, the One who is Truth in the flesh testifies to us of what He had done and seen. He was there! And He who is the Truth tells us of the truth and authority of Genesis 1 and 2. These two chapters also are the true and authoritative Word of God.

To return to the marriage illustration, if my neighbor tells me that he really loves me and my wife, but that he is not sure my wife's words are trustworthy, will I not tell him to leave my house immediately and not come back until he is ready to apologize to my wife and me? Well, then, why should I feel any different about a man who says he loves me as a Christian brother and also loves Christ, but is not really quite sure that Christ's words are completely trustworthy? I should not feel any different at all. Such a man is repeating to me and you the words of Satan in the garden of Eden, "Did God really say?" To question God's Word is to do the work of the evil one, because, to question God's Word is to question God's character as the true and trustworthy One.

Dr. Young's father wrote a wonderful book called, *Thy Word is Truth*. In it he writes:

The very nature of God therefore is at stake. If we assert that the autographs of Scripture contain error, we are saying that God is guilty of having told us something that is not true. It may be a matter

which we ourselves would call minor, but in this case a minor error is no less than a major one....If God has communicated wrong information even in so-called unimportant matters, He is not a trustworthy God.¹

He is correct, and I truly wish his son would follow in his father's footsteps, for he is truly calling into question the character of God as trustworthy when he doubts the Genesis record means what it says.

Jesus Christ is the Truth. His Bible is the Truth. He has testified of this fact to us. If anyone says I deeply love Jesus Christ as my personal Savior but am not sure He knows what He's talking about when it comes to creation, he is either very confused or else he is not telling the truth. In either case, such a person is not fit to be a Christian teacher. As a matter of course, Christian teachers base their entire worldview on the truth of the words God has written through holy men in the Bible. Their worldview is of necessity *controlled* by the words in the Bible, word for word. Christian teachers are people under the authority of the King who came into this world to testify to the truth. Any attempt to escape this controlling authority is nothing but mutiny. And it is certainly anything but gratitude for the fact that "we are in him who is true—even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life" (1 Jn. 5:20).

It is often said that one does not have to believe in an absolutely inerrant Bible in order to be saved. I suppose that is true. However, rather than comfort people in their unbelief of the words of Scripture, the wise course seems to be to warn them of the dangerously slippery path they are walking on. As soon as one admits that there are errors in the Bible, he admits that the Almighty, all-provident God was not able to keep His written Word from error. Therefore, not only is God's character as the truth called into question, but also His character as the One who works out all things in conformity with the purpose of His will. Furthermore, a Christian is saved through believing the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that gospel is found nowhere other than in the Bible. If the Bible is not inerrant, then how can the Christian be sure

the gospel is true? The reason the Christian has assurance that the gospel is true is that the Bible is completely true as a whole and in all its parts. To quote from Young again, "If, as a matter of fact, the revelation of God is not free of error, the message of Christianity must ever remain in doubt."²

Why is the foregoing so? Because the Bible is a unified whole. All of its parts stand together in testifying of the grace of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. If one part is not true, none of it may be true. Also, since God nowhere in the Bible indicates that any part of it is untrue, someone besides God has to decide which parts are true and which are not. In this way, man becomes the judge of what is true in the Bible and of what is false. The authority of God is lost with regard to telling lost sinners what they must believe in order to be saved, and the lost are left to man's opinions about what to believe. Thus, man returns to the garden of Eden where he decided for himself what commands of God he would not follow. There all of mankind was cast into ruin and destruction because our first parents doubted the truth of God's Word.

Therefore, if it is true that one can be saved without believing in an absolutely inerrant Bible, why say so? Is such a statement helpful? Does it not try to assure those who ought not to be assured until they repent of their sin of not believing God's true words? It seems the much wiser and God-pleasing approach would be to give clear and unbending testimony that those who do not believe that every word of the Bible is true are calling God a liar and are in grave danger of suffering for that sin in the everlasting fire of hell, in order that such people may be brought to repentance and complete submission to their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He is the Truth.

Edward J. Young, *Thy Word is Truth* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), pp. 165, 166.

² Ibid., p. 166.

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TODAY'S GOSPEL CONQUESTS

"...My gospel, wherein I suffer trouble, as an evildoer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound" (2 Tim. 2:8,9).

It must have been very irksome to Paul, the zealous missionary, to endure four years of imprisonment — apparently just because of unconscionably dirty politics — when he might have been roaming the Roman world as an itinerant missionary. He wrote his friends in Philippi (Phil. 1:12 ff.) pointing out how, in God's amazing Providence, his imprisonment had "actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel." What he saw was his influence on the guards and other Christians. What he could not see was the coming immeasurable role of his letters as a large part of our New Testament. Although he might be bound, "the Word of God is not bound!"

That ability of God's Word to surmount all kinds of physical and political barriers has possibly never been more dramatically demonstrated than it is in our time as that gospel goes out around the world by means of radio (and TV). And in the Lord's Providence, few if any churches have been granted greater opportunities for world-wide Gospel outreach by this means than our own church family through our denominational broadcasts, the Back-to-God Hour. Recent events have spotlighted especially two of these outreaches in areas of the world long closed to ordinary missionary access — China and the Arabic world.

The China Story

When the Communists overran China in 1949, slamming shut that land's "open door" to missions, we who were involved in the effort to reestablish our mission there left it with burdened hearts. We knew that God's word assures us that He will bring His gospel testimony "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8) and in that summer's mission rallies there

were many occasions to point out that especially Acts 11:19-21 outlines how He used the very persecution intended to destroy the gospel and church to spread it more widely. But for 30 years we heard virtually nothing about what was happening to the believers and the gospel testimony under bitter persecution in the world's most populous country. Only recently has the remarkable story become known of how the Lord has preserved that persecuted church and made it grow to number many millions.

The death of Rev. Isaac Jen on June 9 highlighted the way in which he for 14 years has been spearheading our churches' radio outreach into mainland China in effort to strengthen and extend the gospel testimony there. At Jen's June 9 funeral service Rev. Joel Nederhood recalled that his great great grandfather and great grandfather had both been Protestant ministers in China. Born in 1927 and reared in Shanghai, he came to the U.S. in 1949, to study at Westminster and Calvin Theological Seminaries and was ordained to the gospel ministry in 1955. He served as home missionary among Chinese-speaking people in Chicago and later as a missionary in Taiwan. There he contracted the hepatitis which made him invalid for some years (and ultimately took his life). In 1970, however he was able to become the Chinese voice of the Back-to-God Hour for the next 17 years. The (anti-Christian) government's policy of imposing Mandarin Chinese as the official language among the multitude of dialects has contributed enormously to opening the whole nation to the broadcast gospel. In reaching toward his native land, a key feature of the program was the helps to build up the lay-leadership of the untold number of "house churches" in their enormous gospel testimony among China's millions. The multiplying mail response

from within China testifies to the Lord's continuing work through such faithful servants. Recall the words dictated to John, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord... says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labor, their works follow them" (Rev. 14:13).

Into the Arab World

The June meeting of our churches' synod recalled that 30 years ago they had begun their first foreign language outreach among another large block of people mostly excluded from other missionary contact, the Arab world, through the Arabic ministry of Rev. Bassam Madany. He was born and reared in Syria. His father had been converted from the Syrian Orthodox church by Reformed Presbyterian missionaries and was a preacher and school principal. After education in British, French and Syrian schools in Syria, Bassam came to the U.S. in 1950 to study at the Reformed Presbyterian Seminary in Pittsburgh, PA. Ordained in 1953, he and his Canadian-born wife, Shirley, returned to Syria as missionaries. In 1955 government restrictions on missions there led to their return to Canada. Influenced by Dr. Peter Eldersveld, our Back-to-God Hour minister, and his own Reformed convictions, he came into the CRC, to eventually become the minister of its first foreign language broadcasts, in his native Arabic. Over the following 30 years the continually growing mail response to the Arabic gospel message is one of the many indications of the ever-widening opportunity for world-wide Christian testimony which the Lord has granted our relatively small family of churches. Acts 19:20 summarizes what had been happening in ancient Corinth: "So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed." Let's wake up and realize that it is still doing so. May we have an ever larger part in it in our prayers, support and action. PDJ

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