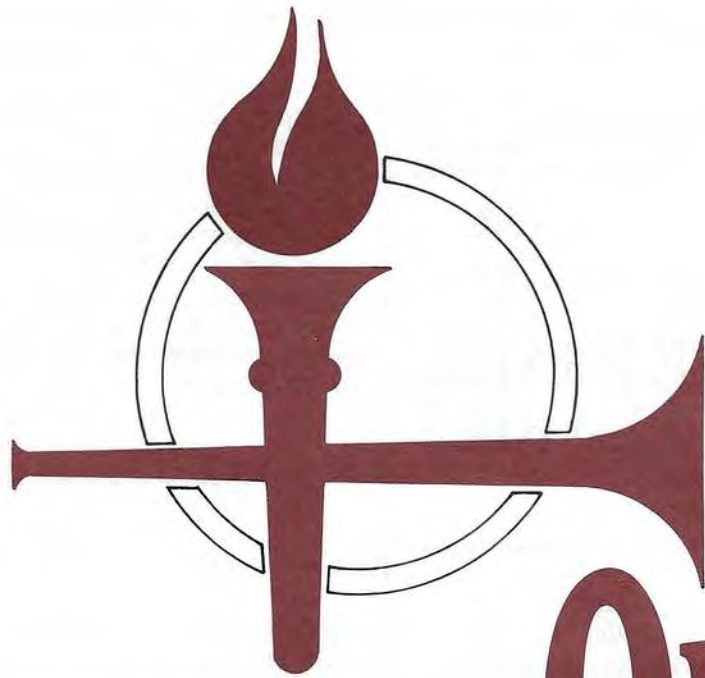




Outlook

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

Of Stars and Babies

What is our Bible?

Theonomy?

SEPTEMBER 1988

THE PSALM OF STARS AND BABIES

"O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! Who hast set thy glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger. When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (Psalm 8: 1-4).

This psalm faces us with the most breath-taking contrast that we could imagine. Can you think of anything bigger and more overwhelming than this vast universe in which we live, and can you think of anything weaker and more apparently insignificant than a tiny baby? The Psalm begins by putting those two side by side to sing about them together and about the amazing things that God is doing with both of them! First, let's take a look, as the Psalm tells us to do, at the stars. Then take an even closer look at the little babies. And then look at the wonderful things God tells us, here and in other explanations in His Word, that He is doing with both of them, and how He is doing it.

A Look at the Stars

The Psalm invites us to step out-of-doors and look at the sky. "Consider the heavens, the work of (God's) fingers, the moon and the stars which (He) has ordained." When was the last time you did that? How many of us ever do that? We usually

go through the routine of living, paying little or no attention to what is overhead — maybe it's cloudy anyway. Yet the Bible says that we ought to do that. Abraham was told by God to look upward and as he saw the multitude of God's stars, to learn from them what God was promising to him and his (long childless) family in His covenant. Other of the Psalms tell us to look at the heavens in this way. And it is striking that we, with all of our pretentious 20th century education, have usually grossly neglected that revelation of God above our heads.

About 55 years ago I took a course in Astronomy. It was given in a very liberal college by a professor who was far from being an evangelical Christian. He told us that we would "never be the same again" after taking this course. A few years ago I became interested in that study again and began reading some astronomy journals and books and using telescopes. I looked especially for material written from a Christian point of view to help us look at that amazing universe overhead as Psalm 8 teaches us to do. I was surprised to discover how rare such books are and even how many Christians working and teaching in such fields only repeat the same kind of (godless) theories and guesses they learned, as I did, from unbelievers who dominated those fields. (Note, for example, Howard J. Van Till's 1986 book, *The Fourth Day* or the 1988 production by himself and two colleagues, *Science Held Hostage*.) A welcome exception to such con-

fusion was Paul M. Steidl's *The Earth, the Stars, and the Bible*. He wrote to show how, "even though most astronomers have been blind to the glory of God in the heavens, they have enabled us to see it much better" with their telescopes and other equipment.

David wrote, "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him?" Seeing something of the grandeur of God's heavens, impressed him with the comparative smallness and insignificance of man. All of our discoveries with modern equipment haven't altered that at all. Rather, they should enormously increase our awareness of what David saw. One winter we were looking upward with a telescope trying to find the tiny light patch in the sky called the Andromeda Galaxy. Experts who have studied it tell us that that hard to find little light patch is evidently twice as big — not as the earth, not as the sun together with all of its planets, but as the whole Milky Way of which our sun and its encircling bodies are only an inconceivably small part! Nobody knows how many millions of stars like our sun and bigger there are in that one little area of sky!

The Bible teaches us to see in this mind-boggling work of the Creator above and around us, how infinitely small we and all mankind are. Job had to be taught this lesson. That sorely troubled man became so preoccupied with his own misery that he began to lose himself in ques-

tioning the reason for it. God shocked him back to reality by directing him to the heaven and asking him whether he could control the brilliant little cluster of the Pleiades, untie the stars in the belt of Orion or manage those other bodies (Job 38:31, 32). And the startled Job realized and confessed that he had been rashly talking of things about which he knew nothing. We, deluged by man's pretentious learning and arrogant and foolish theories, need to learn that lesson even worse than Job did.

God's Word's referrals to the heavens usually stress this point. Isaiah (ch. 40) had to face despairing Israelites confronting captivity with it: "Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things, Who brings out their host by number" and "calls them all by name...." He "sits above the circle of the earth" and before Him "the nations are as a drop in a bucket, and are counted as the small dust on the balance.... All nations before Him are as nothing, and they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless." This "Creator of the ends of the earth" is saving the people who "wait on Him."

A Closer Look at the Babies

Having "cut us down to size" and shown our comparative insignificance, the 8th Psalm also abruptly shifts our attention away from that vast universe to this tiny and apparently insignificant little man and all his kind—more particularly, to the tiniest and most insignificant of all, the little babies! It tells to give even more attention to what God is doing there than to His work in the vast universe overhead. Something more important is happening here than in the whole remote universe. Today some astronomers are giving a great deal of attention to picking up radio signals that come in from the stars. Their evolutionary theory tells them that if our little earth has developed human beings, some of those uncountable other worlds must have developed them too and therefore they are spending a great deal of time and expense trying to pick up from those other beings the radio communications that never come! God tells us in this Psalm, to listen, not (like modern Baal prophets) for

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on Thursday, September 29, 1988.



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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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interstellar communications, but to what He has said He is doing in men and, in particular, in these tiny babies.

The world doesn't think much of babies. If you have any doubt about that, just consider what may be one of the worst atrocities in human history, our nation's slaughter of over 20 million of them before they are even born, sanctioned by our highest court and even defended by apostate churches. We should not be surprised if God judges our land, as he once did his Old Testament people by captivity, because their ruler had filled his capital city with "innocent blood which the LORD would not pardon." (2 Kings 24:4).

Even our Lord's own disciples didn't appreciate the important role He assigned to the little children in what He was doing. A rare time in which He became extremely angry with them was when they tried to keep parents with their children from interrupting a discussion on the problem of divorce. He "was indignant" and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God....whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it" (Mark 10:14, 15).

What God Is Doing: His Holy War

The text draws our attention away from the vastness of the universe and focusses it especially on tiny babies to see what God is really doing. What it says surprises, and, at first glance, baffles us. "Out of the mouth of babes and infants" God has "ordained strength," because of His "enemies," that He may "silence the enemy and the avenger." The scene is one of war, the great war that began with the good creation, quickly followed by the devil's revolt and man's fall. God, in His saving purpose, established an "enmity" and a continuing warfare between Himself and the devil. (Jesus once identified the whole purpose of his coming: "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" [1 John 3:8].) The Bible highlights that age-long war as the real action in the world's otherwise mystifying history. And our seeing this "antithesis" is indispensable if we are to at all under-

stand it. The worst source of confusion and threat to Christendom today appears in the wide refusal to any longer admit that warfare, and to the extent that the war is being denied, would-be "Christians" are being hoodwinked by the Enemy.

Now in this cosmic drama of world war the Psalm spotlights not merely people, but "the mouth of babes and infants" as silencing "the enemy." The prayer at the end of our old form for the baptism of infants dramatizes the same point in asking that these tiny babies may "manfully fight against and overcome sin, the devil, and his whole dominion..." The psalm (echoed by the form) faces us with a real problem, what Dr. Schilder called a "riddle." How can tiny babies, the most helpless things in creation, "silence" and "overcome sin, the devil and his whole dominion?" Look more closely at the text. Does it state that these helpless little children are going to do it? Rather, it says that God "has ordained strength" and will do it. How does He do it? For an answer, we need to turn to Hebrews 2 which is, in fact, the New Testament commentary on this prophetic Psalm. After quoting much of the Psalm, it observes that "now we do not yet see all things put under" man, as the Psalm states that it is. Man, in and despite all his efforts, achievements and triumphs, always eventually appears the defeated victim instead of the victor—that is, until, with the New Testament, "we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor...bringing many sons to glory." In other words, only in relationship to Christ's saving life, death, resurrection and glorification is God fulfilling the promise of the Psalm in the life of believers. And that promise extends even to their infant children, who, in picturesque comments of Dr. Schilder, appear "as a camp of God's recruits...in the moral and religious war." From them "come the hosts of the faithful who...will raise the battle-cry of holy war in the world in order that God may triumph in it."

Training the Lord's Recruits

The promise of the Psalm comes as grand encouragement to us,

believers today who often see our Faith threatened by numerically overwhelming paganism as well as by more destructive compromise and betrayal within. God assures us as He did Luther, that "though this world with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God has willed His truth to triumph through us." That triumph, envisioned and predicted in Psalm 8 for believers and their children, will surely come, but it will not come automatically. God has predicted that he will raise up from these little children His army to "fight against and overcome, sin the devil and his whole dominion," but He has also told us that He will do it by imposing on believers the duty to receive their children "in His name" (Mark 9:37) and to bring them up in His training and discipline (Eph. 6:4). Especially as the school season begins we recall that that most immediate of responsibilities spurs us to Christian education. That does not mean only "Christian" education in name—even by well-meaning church members who may be repeating the same anti-Christian notions that one would get in any secular school. It means training to distinguish truth from falsehood, right from wrong, God's Word from the lies of the devil and his deluded followers. It means the kind of disciplined training required in military service to help them become faithful "soldiers of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2:3, 4) to share in the battles and victories of His kingdom.

An ostensibly conclusive argument of some who brush aside the whole Bible teaching of the creation of the heavens in favor of latest unbeliever's theories rests on the changes that obviously appear over our heads. These changes are hardly "new" discoveries, however. Psalm 102 pointed out long ago that these heavens (far from creating themselves) are "the work of God's hands," and that they "will perish" as they..."all of them...grow old like a garment" and God will change them." The stars grow old and sometimes explode, but because God will not change, the children of His servants will continue and their descendants will be established before Him. (vv. 25-28). PDJ

Robert Grossmann

WHAT IS OUR BIBLE?

(The following [slightly abridged] address was given to the meeting of the "Concerned Members of the CRC" at South Holland, IL on April 29, 1988.)

The theme of this Conference is the Bible, or more specifically, "Where do we stand with respect to the Bible?" I want to begin by making as clear as I can that *this* is the proper form of the question, and not, "Where does the Bible stand with respect to us?" It is the most basic presupposition of Christianity that we stand under the judgment of the Bible, the Bible does not stand under our judgment.

Indeed, we may properly contrast the historic Reformed position on the Bible with other positions, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, by pointing out that the Reformed position attempts to carry out most consistently this point, that we, and everything else must stand *under* the Word of God, so that, as my esteemed teacher, Dr. Cornelius Van Til loved to quote Paul, "every thought might be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." (II Cor. 10:5)

The topic given to me for this conference is, "The Bible - The Historic Position." I believe I can be of the most use to you by focusing upon one basic point in the historic Reformed view of the Bible, and that is the nature of the Bible as the product of inspiration. There are a

number of other points that could claim our attention, such as the nature of inspiration itself, but the heart of the question facing the church today is "*What is Our Bible?*"

In seeking to answer this question, we must, because "true faith" is "holding for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word," look to the Bible itself for our answer. While this procedure will seem wholly inadequate to the mind which pretends objectivity, it is the only one that is fair to and consistent with the nature of the case. If the Bible does speak for God, then what the Bible says about itself is the only acceptable witness to what it really is.

What, Exactly, Is It That Is Inspired?

Many people happily use the word "inspired" in reference to Scripture but there is wide-ranging opinion about what this means. When we ask what it is that is inspired, we have to make a basic distinction, realizing that several things in the Bible have been called "inspired." Some hold that the thoughts of the writers were inspired, others that what the Bible says about faith is inspired, still others, like the present writer, that inspiration extends to every word of Scripture.

The Bible comes to us in words. As the Belgic Confession states,

"God commanded his servants...to commit His revealed word to writing;" in the Bible we are dealing with *words*. At the same time, we must realize that the words by themselves are just words; it is the message the words convey that is the purpose of the words. The words are the servants of the message.

A good dictionary, for example, will contain all of the words we find in the Bible, but in the dictionary these words do not convey a message. Dictionaries are peculiar books in the sense that they convey no overall message. Here the point must be clear that we need not just the words, but also the "Word," the message of the Bible.

At the same time we are making this distinction, we must understand that the message of the Bible is inextricably bound up in the words that convey its message. In other words, while we may make a distinction between words and message, we may not separate, (or make a dichotomy), between words and message, or we will destroy them both. You simply cannot have the message without words that convey that message. Furthermore, it is totally illegitimate to have and hold the words of the Bible and then to ignore the particular message those words convey.

One way in which the Bible is under attack today is by Neo-orthodoxy. It is the nature of Neo-Orthodoxy to separate words from

message and to assert that the message of the Bible is "true," but its words are often in error. This is the problem with the "form" versus "content" view of the Bible presented by Dr. Howard Van Till. The method of separating "form" and "content" and concluding that the Bible is only "metaphorically" God's "Word" releases those who hold it from conforming their teaching to what the words say when taken in any serious sense.

We see this kind of dealing with God's Word as being like that of the serpent in the Garden of Eden when he said, "Yea, has God said?" meaning, "Did God really say *that*? He must have *meant* something else." God, of course, meant every word He said about eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We must believe that He also means everything else He says in Scripture.

One further point must be explored about this business of words and message. That is the point that the same message may come in several different sets of words. We may say, "he died," "he passed away," "he was taken from this life," "he cashed in his chips," or "he kicked the bucket," all meaning the same thing. However, while we freely admit that a variety of words might communicate the same message, in the Bible we are dealing with only *one* set of words. We have only one Bible, not a variety of Bibles. We rephrase and explain the Bible in preaching and teaching, but we do *not* replace it.

The Bible Itself Teaches VERBAL Inspiration

When we look into the Scriptures themselves to find out exactly what is inspired, we find that the Bible refers not to "thought" or "message" inspiration, but to "word" inspiration. This is very important; the message of the Bible is the infallible "Word" of God *because* it is conveyed by inspired words, words which inerrantly record *WHAT God SAID*. Get this, the infallibility of the Bible's message is based upon the fact that its words are God's words. Infallibility rests upon inerrancy; the two cannot be separated from each other in our thinking about the Bible. A common device of liberalism is to say that the teachings

about spiritual things in the Bible are infallible, although its words and history may be in error. The problem then is, who decides what in the Bible is infallible, and what is not?

The evidence for this particular understanding of the product of inspiration is found in those texts which are constantly (and rightly) quoted to prove inspiration.

Prophets do not say, "I am thinking an inspired thought," they say, "this is what the Lord *says*." David, in II Samuel 23:2, says, "The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and *his word* was in my mouth." So also in II Timothy 3:16, the focus is on words, "all scripture [Greek-'each writing'] is God-breathed," declares Paul. And, in 2 Peter 1:21 the emphasis is on words, "the holy men of God *spoke* as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." Finally, in Matthew 5:18, our Lord speaks of the "jot" and "tittle" of the Law being permanent. Jots and tittles are written letters and punctuation marks, they indeed are but servants to communicate the message, but *they* are what will not pass away.

This view of Scripture as the written words of God which convey His message to human beings in their own language is the historic Reformed position. Biblical theologians, whether Paul or his followers, have always exegeted the words of Scripture; they have never discarded them as so much "wrapping paper." This is why Reformation theologians, like Calvin, have often been accused by modern commentators of believing a "mechanical" view of inspiration. The truth is that Calvin never held a mechanical view of inspiration, but he did hold that the result of inspiration is "that the teaching of the law and the prophets came to us not by the will of man, but as dictated by the Holy Spirit." (*Commentary* on II Tim. 3:16) He goes on in the same place to say, "So, the first point is that we treat Scripture with the same reverence that we do God, because it is from God alone, and is unmixed with anything human." These, of course, are words on which the modernist chokes.

Honest study will show that Calvin did not at all reject the idea that God used the minds and words of the writers of Scripture to produce

His own word; this view is today called "organic inspiration." But Calvin's view of reality was such that the words of Scripture were both 100% Paul's (for example) and at the same time 100% God's. What has happened today is that most people, including many who think of themselves as "Reformed," have taken what this writer calls the "Arminian presupposition about reality." This Arminian presupposition is that in looking at an event we must choose between the will and act of God, and the will and act of man, as the source of the event. The Arminian holds that since I must believe unto salvation, faith must be produced in my heart completely out of my own ability without the intervention of God. When he hears a Calvinist say, "Regeneration must come before faith," he throws up his hands and says, "Oh, then we are just puppets."

Calvinism, on the other hand, believes the biblical teaching that *both* God and man can be and are active in the same event. This is true, even when man sins, in such a way that God is not the author of sin. Peter teaches, in Acts 2:23 concerning the crucifixion of Christ, for example, that this happened according to the "determining counsel and foreknowledge of God," and yet that those who crucified Christ were sinning. In the *single* event of Christ's crucifixion, man was acting sinfully, while God was acting in love and mercy to save his people from their sins. God and man *do* act in the same event, God in perfect love and righteousness, man in rebellious sin!

This point has direct application to the inspiration of Scripture. It is a serious mistake to think that we have to make a choice between the Bible as man's word and as God's word. It is fully and completely both, and that without contradiction. Thus the words of the apostle Paul are fully Paul's words, reflecting his understanding and grammatical choices; yet at the same time they are the very words the Holy Spirit inspired him to write. That this is the case is further demonstrated by the fact that the Holy Spirit at times inspired men to write words they themselves did not completely understand. Direct mention of this fact is made in I Peter 1:10-12, and there are dozens

of examples of Old Testament prophecies that were not fully understood by anyone until they were fulfilled in Christ.

God, of course, knew that we would be stuck with words. This was His plan from the beginning and He therefore saw to it that we could trust those particular words He inspired to be His words. This word-for-word inspiration of Scripture is further demonstrated by the use Scripture makes of itself. Jesus, for example, rests his case for the continued life of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob on that fact that God used the *present tense* when speaking to Moses about them at the burning bush (Matt. 22:32). Again, Paul rests his case in Galatians 3:16 that Christ is the "Seed of Abraham" to whom the promises were made on the fact that God uses the *singular*, "seed," not the plural, "seeds," when speaking to him. Changing a word, changes the message.

Because of all of this, the church has depended upon the grammatical-historical meaning of the words of the Scripture to understand what message they communicate. Calvin, in his commentary on II Corinthians 3:6-10 ("the letter of the law") argues strongly for this view, in opposition to Origen's allegorical methods of interpretation. The claim that the Scripture says something else than what its words communicate is not new, nor should we have difficulty in finding a Reformed answer to this claim.

• • • • •

Implications of the Nature of Scripture for the Life of the Church

In John 8:31-32 Jesus tells his disciples, "If you continue in my words, ...you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." In Christ's teaching, truth is something we can know through words! He then goes into a discussion with the Jews, whom he shows have Satan, the father of lies, as their father, and he concludes of them, "because I tell you the truth, you do not believe me." It is significant that our first parents fell into sin by *believing* a lie. Since then the natural man cannot and will not believe the truth. It should then be no surprise to us that

people play games with the words of the Bible.

This means that when we are dealing with the Bible as Christians we must be very careful *how* we read it. In the strictest sense, we should not "interpret" the Bible, but really only listen to it. Our exegesis, our hermeneutics, should simply be means for listening carefully to what the Bible says, always remembering the Scripture is its own best interpreter. Such listening, of course, is often called "interpretation," and it is legitimate. But notice that this kind of "interpretation" stresses the primacy of the Bible, it does not allow for "interpreting" the Bible on the basis of anything outside of itself. Neither history, nor science, nor philosophy, nor personal religious experience provide legitimate bases for "interpreting" Scripture. On the contrary, all of these must bow to the interpretation given to them by Scripture.

This is where the waters get muddy very quickly. "But, but, but," I hear people shouting, "everyone has *some* basis outside of the Bible on which he interprets what he finds there." To which we must retort with Calvin, that the first principle with which we come to Scripture must be, "it is from God alone, and unmixed with anything human." It is no problem that this fact is not seen by all men, "For, even though the majesty of God is displayed by it, only those illumined by the Spirit have eyes to see what should be evident to all men, but in fact is seen only by the elect" (Both quotes from Calvin on II Tim. 3:16).

This discussion about the Bible and truth should make it evident that for the Christian Church, the Bible, as it comes to us in words, is the only valid standard of truth. As Isaiah already declares, "...if they speak not according to this word, is it not because there is no light in them." Again, in the words of Christ, "And if I say the truth, why do you not believe me? He that is of God listens to the words of God: you therefore do not listen to them because you are not of God." It is hard for the Pharisees to wriggle out of that one, and for us too!

But this discussion also has implications for salvation. Jesus

equates rejecting his words with rejecting him personally. In John 12:48 we read, "He who rejects me and does not receive my words...." The tremendous ignorance of Scripture and audacity of unbelief in our day is demonstrated by the widespread opinion that it does not matter what you believe, you will be saved if only you are sincere. Without the authoritative words of the Bible, we cannot have the Christ of the Bible. Can anyone doubt that when Christ says to those who reject his words that they "are of your father, the devil," that he is threatening them with eternal damnation? Or, that when he describes those who "hear my words and do not do them," as building their house upon sand, that he is not talking about danger of real destruction?

A final implication of this view of Scripture is for the unity of the church. Our point here is that true unity is only by discipline which is focused on who is truly listening to the God's Word. True Christians believe the *same* things and that makes them one. The Greek word for "confession" means literally "to say the same thing." Christians confess by saying the same things because they believe the same Word of God. Again, it is of interest in this light that the apostle Paul speaks in terms of "words." He writes in I Timothy 6:3-5, "If anyone teaches otherwise, and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, ...from such withdraw yourself...."

We do well to consider the Bible seriously, for we must be unified in our view of Scripture. But no matter how unified we are in our views, if we do not act on the implications of those views, we are not different from many of the rulers of Christ's day, who indeed believed on him, but they would not confess him for fear of being excommunicated from the synagogue - because, as gentle John observes - "they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."

Rev. Robert Grossmann is a professor at Mid-America Reformed Seminary at Orange City, Iowa.

GOD'S UNCHANGING WORD

Steve M. Schlissel

"I am the Lord. I change not."

Make no mistake. We are engaged in a solemn and holy war for the truth, honor and glory of God. This war for the Word (and against the word) has been raging since the beginning of time. Jesus confessed to Pilate that He is a King, The King of Truth. Those on the side of Truth listen to Him. They are soldiers who seek to bring every thought captive to Him.

It is part and parcel of the unchanging character of Scripture that it provokes some to opposition and others to submission. The Word of God is unchanging in its divisive character. God's Word is a separating word. As such, those who believe it are duty bound to defend it against all attacks, without and within the covenant community. It is simply a fact of life and history that the church's greatest threats have arisen from within.

The book of Hebrews tells us that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. The author "uses the dramatic imagery of an athletic contest in which the competitors down in the arena are surrounded by the crowded tiers of an amphitheater... (the) author pictures himself and his readers as competitors who, as they contend for the faith in the arena of life, are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, namely, those champions of faith and perseverance of earlier generations...(these) have triumphantly completed their course, and we who are now contestants in the arena should be inspired by their example to give of our utmost in the struggle." (P.E. Hughes, *Commentary on Hebrews*).

I am inspired by those who have gone before us in the battle of the Word and honor and glory of God.

Inspired by Phinehas: Numbers 25:1-13

Inspired by the Levites: Exodus 32:25-29

and God's commendation of them: Dt. 33:8-9

Inspired by Micaiah: 2 Chron. 18:1-13, 22-27

Inspired by Ezekiel's commission: Ezek. 2:1-8

Inspired by our Lord Jesus Christ: Jn. 2:12-17

Inspired by St. Paul and his conviction about an unchanging Word: Gal. 1:8-9

Inspired by Jude: v. 3

Inspired by John: Rev. 22:18-21

Inspired by Athanasius in his struggle against Arianism

by Augustine against Palagianism

by Luther against Romanism

by Calvin against syncretism

and by the fathers of Dordt against Arminianism

Now we are engaged once again in battle: this time against humanism, spear-headed by relativism, with feminism in the lead. And the greatest foe of these evils, that which they dread the most, is an *unchanging* Word from God.

Many fail to see the critical nature of our struggle, a struggle to which Christ himself calls us. J. Gresham Machen was involved in a painfully similar struggle against modernism in the Presbyterian Church. He wrote:

"The plain man in the church has difficulty understanding (the nature of the struggle); he does not yet appreciate the real gravity of the issue. He does not see that it makes very little difference how much or how little of the creeds of the church the modernist preacher affirms, or how much or how little of the biblical teaching from which the creeds are

derived. He might affirm every jot and tittle of the Westminster Confession, for example, and yet be separated by a great gulf from the Reformed faith. It is not that part is denied and the rest is affirmed; but all is denied, because all is affirmed merely as useful or symbolic and not as true."... "A thing that is useful may be useful for some and not for others, but a thing that is true remains true for all people and beyond the end of time." [*What Is Faith*-pp. 34-35]

Now we find ourselves becoming a church that echoes Pilate's pitiful plaint: "What is truth?", when all the while the truth was standing in front of him. Yes, the truth is in our hands and it is above all, as our confession says: "it is unlawful for anyone, through 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 evidently appear that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects. Neither may we consider any writings of men...of equal value with those divine scriptures, nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, since the truth is above all...therefore we reject with all our hearts whatsoever does not agree with this infallible rule..."

Despite the clarity of our confession regarding the clarity of Scripture and its teachings, more and more Scriptural teaching is being classified as "unclear." Now it's Creation. Why not Resurrection, as well?

"Anyone who denies the authority of Scripture at one point has denied it at all points. If we assert that we can set aside the six-day creation doctrine, we have asserted our supremacy over Scripture. Our mind and our convenience now have a higher authority than the Bible, so that we have denied its authority totally and asserted our authority instead. If we claim the right at any point to set aside Scripture, we have established ourselves as the highest authority at every point. Clearly, therefore, the question of authority is at stake in Genesis 1: God or man? Whose word is authoritative and final?" (R.J. Rushdoony, *Mythology of Science*).

At the root of many of today's attacks we find research, writings, pronouncements, and policies erected on the presupposition of epistemological neutrality and a bastardization of the common grace doctrine. These effectively (in man's imagination) subordinate the Word of God to sinful autonomous human reason and observation. The epistemology of unbelief is this: "Nothing is known unless man knows it."

We have among us a frightening parallel to what occurred in the Machen case. The modernists in the Presbyterian church had been drinking deeply from the fountains of the world. Their grumblings originated, not exegetically, but from the extra-scriptural considerations which determined the way they then handled scripture. They were latitudinarian and anti-antithetical. They wanted, above all, to be 'respectable,' respected, that is, by the world (cf. Luke 6:26).

The spirit of the modern world is far more sophisticated and subtle than in the days of Dordt and Westminster, even than in the 20's. But if we stand back a bit, we will hear the same question being asked now that was asked in the garden of Eden and ever since: "Yea, hath God said?" This doubt was followed by denial: "You will not surely die." Satan offered a word of possibility, a word of flux, a word of chance, against God's certain Word.

Sinners will always choose a word of possibility over a word of absolute authority, even if it means death. "Rather to rule in hell than to serve in Heaven." But, serve we must. And

that according to God's *unchanging* Word.

It must be understood that God and man do not run on a continuum. God is Creator; man is created. God is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in all attributes; man is finite, temporal and changeable. Therefore, we are utterly dependent on Him for being, knowledge, and ethics. Adam and Eve were tempted to determine for themselves, not according to a Word of God, what was good and what was evil. God never permits man to make that determination. But that is what's being attempted today. The effort amounts to the attempt to bring God down to our level of being, even though he remains "higher" on that scale. The infinite distance between God and man is being "bridged," not in Christ alone, but in the minds of men through autonomous reason. *A compromise here is the end of the faith in seed form.*

In their efforts to make their own rules, the visionaries must pay lip service to the confessions. They talk about unity and peace, but they want it on their terms. "Let's call a truce about women in office and the new *Psalter* and evolution," *The Banner* says. But here is the proposed peace plan: "You say 'Everything is black-and-white.' We say, 'All is grey.' Since we have differing opinions, and no one can be sure who's right, let's compromise and say 'All is grey.'""

The Banner hasn't always been so muddy on issues. Consider this: "Now if our contention [that the evolution-hypothesis is a part of an *antitheistic* theory of reality] is correct, then we must do away with every easy-going attitude. The evolutionist is then soldier in that great, that seemingly all-powerful army of antitheists that has from time immemorial sought to destroy the people of God. *We must then prepare for a life and death struggle if not in the courts of the land then in the higher courts of human thought.*" (*The Banner*, December 11, 1931)

Compare that to Editor Kuyvenhoven's posture today, running two weeks of Professor Van Leeuwen as John the Baptist preparing the hermeneutical way for three weeks of unopposed Professor Van Till (without so much as a hint that the

man and his teachings were then under review by the Ad Hoc Committee of the Board of Trustees). May I say, is that what we are to regard as journalistic integrity? Should the official denominational news organ be promoting views and doctrines which are currently being reviewed as possibly heretical, without mentioning the possibility? How *The Banner* has fallen!

And is it a *life and death struggle* that we are engaged in for the minds of men, when evolutionary presuppositions which contradict Scripture are taught to be valid? Are we not then fighting on the wrong side? Has The Truth changed since 1931? If not, how do we account for these new norms?

Things are indeed complicated and subtle today. Churches used to argue (or even split) about what was true. Now we are arguing about "What is truth?" And we are hearing two radically different answers, evident in these characterizations:

Some, perhaps most, in the CRC desire to explicate, preach and live out the truth *once for all delivered*. Others seem to believe that truth is found in the search itself. We may (possibly over) simplify this as a conflict between two factions, between those who believe truth is in the content, and those who believe truth is in the process (this is evident in our current obsession with style rather than substance-which concern often becomes evident when churches look for a new pastor).

Now, of course, truth for the church involves process (history, time and providence under our sovereign God, even as the scriptures were compiled distributed, studied, systematized, and as God's one plan will be lived out). But those who have succumbed to the lie of seeking truth in process have elevated history not as the realm of revelation and redemption, but as prior to and determinative of both revelation and redemption. Thus, they tend to view all scriptures as an accommodation-all scripture is *necessarily* culturally determined (i.e., the emphasis is more "God's revelation was limited and determined by cultural considerations" than "God determined the cultures through which His revelation would be given"), and therefore relative,

even subject to change. For Truth, you see, is behind, above or outside of Scripture, in history, especially in the future.

Thus, we have a regional home missionary who has no problem praying "Our Mother who art in heaven." A careful reading of Bavinck would help him and others learn that there's a difference between *condescension* and accommodation. There is a difference between the necessity of God revealing Himself anthropomorphically and God's revelation being culturally determined. Man knows God truly without knowing Him exhaustively. We apprehend without comprehending Him.

God's choosing the male pronoun to refer to Himself, and denominating Himself "Father" (for no creature may name God!) must be regarded as Pure Word of God, not to be tampered with, under penalty of death. Unless, of course, God can change. If He wasn't "Mother" during the period of revelation, and it is appropriate to address Him as such now, He must have changed. If He hasn't changed, i.e., if He was "Mother" back then, why didn't He say so? Accommodationists will be hard pressed to convince us that it was because the culture of the ancient East wasn't ready for a female deity. (Consider Ashtaroth who was "the local manifestation of the mother-goddess celebrated throughout the ancient Semitic world.")

Viewing revelation as an accommodation puts it in our hands, so to speak. It becomes anthropocentric, not simply anthropomorphic. *Both God and man are seeking to find themselves in history.* Thus we read in a publication of the "Committee for (really "against") Women in the CRC" about this "struggling" God, altogether impotent, not ruling history but wimpishly being ruled by it, pitifully unable to effectively and adequately reveal "Him"self.

Changing sexist language did not come easy for me. Due to peer pressure, I first began altering people-words. You know, "chair-person," "mail carrier," and no more generic "he." These terms still provoke laughter, and they felt awkward to me as well. When some more radical women suggested addressing God as "She," I

laughed some more.

But God finally caught up with me. I had just heard that our pastor had once again failed to recruit any women to preach at our church during his vacation. Driving home that night, I was screaming and crying (with the car windows up, of course!). It was unfair that God would never understand what it meant to be a woman. How could he help but be on the "men's side?"

God broke into my rage with the thought, "But I'm not on their side. I'm not 'one of them.' I'm at least as angry over this situation as you are."

What? God was not "He?" Slowly I began to explore my previous perception of God as male. It is hard to describe the depth of freedom I felt as I experimentally called God "She." Over time I gained a new vision of God and myself.

[NO DOUBT!] *That is the issue!* Changing the way we talk about God and God's people will change us. And change is hard. The NCC inclusive Language Lectionary... has changed traditional biblical language. These changes are causing incredible controversy. As we ponder the pros and cons of speaking inclusively, let's be open to what the Spirit may be saying to the Church today.

What the Spirit is saying where? Certainly this is not a Scriptural argument. The Spirit says nothing to the church that is not already in His Word. If it's true, it isn't new, and if it's new, it isn't true. The original temptation suggested that freedom was to be found in liberating one's self from the awful determinative Word of God. But such 'freedom' always equals death.

The Arminian controversy sought freedom from God's decrees; a refuge was imagined in having God somehow made dependent on man's will. The argument was that freedom for man required a measure of independence, even a little. But the Synod of Dordt said: God alone is absolutely free." B.B. Warfield noted long ago that it is not predestination as such that bothers man, but rather predestination by someone other than himself, particularly God. The attributes of God don't go away

when denied-they're relocated in man.

The woman's issue is part of a world view which sees not decrees and laws and God as ultimate for man, but "potentiality" itself. Freedom is not found in Psalm 1 or 119 ("I walk at liberty because I keep your precepts"). Rather, these feminists view the law as a spring board to freedom. You leap to freedom *from* the Word, you don't find it *in* the Word.

Thus the character of the Word of God as propositional, eternal, unchanging, and normative, is changed. Now the Word is where man encounters God as man becomes-it is the *medium* for existential confrontation-it merely provokes man to become. It is a mystical tool, and/or a collection of principles.

But this new view is really just the old Greek view of flux, revived and dressed up in biblical language. Heraclitus lives!

To "deliver" us from the certainty and finality of God's unchanging Word in Scripture, we hear visionaries appeal to revelation before enscripturation. "A final word is anathema! We want a possible word." Thus Howard Van Till finds a *sound* exegesis of Gen. 1-11 to be destructive of "true" science which requires OPEN-NESS [but see Cornelius Van Til, *Doctrine of Scripture* p. 5]. The faculty at Calvin College are offended when people use the Bible to shackle "academic freedom" which requires OPEN-NESS. *The Banner* rejects much dogmatism, seeing it is contrary to the spirit of OPEN-NESS. Home Missions has visions that may be aided by continuing revelations, or at least signs and wonders-so they have conferences that call for OPEN-NESS.

All the struggles we face today can and must be seen in the light of this hatred of a final and unchangeable Word of God and a willingness, if not a lust, to cash it in for a few thrills and some possibilities. Sure, everyone pays lip service to the Word and confessions. But listen to this from Ezekiel: "Son of man, my people come to you as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy...indeed, to them you are



He said the Bible is clear with respect to the status of women. "There is no possibility of misunderstanding." He said Wesley taught there are four ways to "understand God's Word for our times: Scripture, church tradition, reason and personal experience.

Abraham Kuyper rightly said, Satan knows that he can undermine the structure of the church by slyly removing just one fundamental doctrine at a time, and he frequently loosens a large foundation stone gradually, chiseling it away bit by bit. That is why tolerance for the sake of peace may be dangerous....

That is where we are—at a crossroads. The siren song calls us

from the narrow, particular, well-defined and precise, to the broad, the general, the sweeping. The flow is from distinct to blurred. The drift toward indistinctiveness was seen in the recently adopted Contemporary Testimony—It's not so much that it contained anything particularly harmful, as that it contains nothing particularly helpful. A statement of the great theologian William Shedd is most pertinent in this regard:

"When the popular feeling of a period is becoming less correct and healthy, nothing in the way of means does so much towards a change and restoration as strict accuracy, which is the same as strict orthodoxy, in the popular creed." (*History of Doctrine* p. 268)

This is true. Yet we find ourselves running—or floating in the very opposite direction. Like Jonah we have been called to preach against the specific sins of our generation to our generation, but we have taken a ship called 'vague' in the direction away from our calling.

This is, in the last analysis, not just a matter of a new evangelicalism, a new reformation, or a new hermeneutic—it is the world in the grip of an idea—time vs. eternity. Man vs. God, Man's word vs. God's Word. The questions are "Who is God?" and "How do you know?"

We have already answered those questions in our confessions (which serve the function of skin: to keep in what you want in, and to keep out what you want out). Scripture is unchanging in its character precisely because its Author is unchanging. Here we must stand.

I am afraid the Christian Reformed Church has contracted "Ecclesiastical AIDS": Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. We seem not to have the will to fight those who have invaded the body, be they ever so insidious, calculating, dishonest, arrogant, or destructive. Above all we want comfort, not truth, and we want to be "polite." We are politely dying. Along with the loss of the will to fight many have lost the will to live. Where my brothers and sisters, is your Dutch blood, and why dear friends, is it not boiling?

I offer a 12 point program (one for each tribe!). We do not need to leave, but we dare not promote

decay. We must fight, as the cloud of witnesses cheer us on.

1. Cancel the Banner (It doesn't measure up to Phil. 4:8). That is the mosquito which carries the virus (2 weeks of Van Leeuwen followed by 3 of Howard Van Till with no rebuttal/a feminist poem ridiculing the godly opposition to women's ordination/calling those "simple minded" who believe that God regards homosexuality as an unqualified abomination/promoting birth control/hinting at more occasions for abortion than the life of the mother/and on and on and on. The latest: A column by a pastor from the Crystal Cathedral!).

2. Expand and improve Christian Renewal and the Outlook. Absolutely get them into the hands of all consistory members. I have heard of and from consistory members who hadn't heard of H. Van Till until 3 1/2 weeks ago! In articles, let's aim at providing more names, dates, and witnesses so that the factuality of our concerns will be self-evident, thus accelerating self-consciousness.

3. Provide solid and simple expositions of our confession (esp. 27-31) to all consistory members. Make clear to them their holy obligations on particular issues of moment.

4. Compel your consistories to take stands on issues - in writing. Don't accept doubletalk. Exercise your confessional rights as a congregant. Require biblical justification for important decisions and policies. Watch the form of subscription and keep it fresh in everyone's minds.

5. Plan and strategize (like Joshua). Do it before and at classes and synod. Provide an agenda for concerned elders. Have a speakers bureau (like the Committee for Women—what a sexist name!). And have many conferences.

6. Watch boards and agencies and get written answers to specific questions. Home Missions is especially manipulative and avoids adequate accountability (*I am not referring to missionaries*). Calvin Seminary lies through its teeth and has a manifest feminist agenda. Sit on these guys.

7. Engage an investigative reporter to chronicle the near demise of our denomination - expose the politicking. We need some-

one gifted with guts, integrity, a fair mind, and diligent hands.

8. Explore alternatives to Calvin College. Even better, let's clean house there and at the seminary, as the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod did (see *Anatomy of an Explosion* by Kurt Marquart, Baker Books, 1977). John Whitcomb commented,

The Missouri Synod Lutherans exercised...stringent discipline in their main seminary (Concordia, in St. Louis, Missouri), dismissing every non-fundamentalist teacher and instructing all students who were sympathetic to them to leave within one week. That was one of the most drastic successful examples of institutional church discipline I am aware of in the history of the church.

The theologically radical groups, students as well as faculty, all left and started their own seminary called Seminex-seminary in exile in another part of the city. They actually marched out under banners as if they were Moses and the children of Israel leaving Egypt, and they gained great sympathy in the media. Nevertheless, in twenty years, their school, having no solid doctrinal position, finally collapsed.

In the meantime, Concordia Seminary under the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church, quickly regained its size, and the rest of the evangelical world noted with amazement how these Lutherans handled the new evangelical invasion of their main training center. I do not for a moment suggest that the Missouri Synod Lutheran denomination is free from all theological problems, only that they provided a lesson in how to handle cancer in the ecclesiastical body by drastic, determined surgery, before the whole system is destroyed.

9. Ordain qualified men from Westminster, Reformed, and Mid-America. A 5th year at Calvin is unbiblical and cannot be made a requirement for sacred office. At first some might call 'em "adjunct-ordainees." No matter. Ordain qualified holy men even if we need to gather an ordination council from beyond single-classis boundaries.

10. Quota is acceptable only when there is heartfelt and justified con-

fidence in the integrity of an agency. It is foolish to pay for the knife that would stab us. Forget about being "good little quota payers" or forget the CRC. Defend and defund.

11. Repent. Not of conservatism, per se, but of an unwillingness to examine yourselves and practices in light of the Word alone; and of timidity and self-interest which permitted things to get this bad, this gangrenous relativism to have spread so far; of a lack of zeal in sharing with others your confessional treasure, thus giving opportunity to the enemy to get a foot in the door.

12. Pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. (1 Chron. 5:18-22).

We are in the arena. Many have gone before. The battle is tough and will get tougher. God is able. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. Is the spirit of Phinehas among us? Has the zeal of the Levites been passed down with the covenant? Is Micaiah in the audience today? Many are saying this battle is over. I call two witnesses from the pages of Scripture "Joshua and Caleb, What say ye?"

"The land we passed through and explored, even this Christian Reformed Church, is exceedingly good. If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with the milk of the Word, and the honey of a heritage of confessional truth and many faithful

sheep. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the relativists, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them. We should go and take possession, for we can certainly do it" (Nu. 14:7-9/13:30).

That is from the Word, which, like our God, changes not.

Rev. Steve M. Schlissel is the pastor of Messiah's CRC, Brooklyn, N.Y. This address was presented to the Concerned CRC Members' Conference at South Holland, Ill. April 30, 1988.

Suggestions have been made from time to time that the OUTLOOK should give some attention to the increasingly publicized and sometimes controversial "Theonomy" movement. I have usually replied by asking for a factual and fair evaluation of it. Mr. Watson has responded with these articles which we hope our readers will find informative and helpful. The writer, who lives at 3 East Manoa Rd., Havertown, PA 19083 has a BA from Wheaton College, an MACS from Calvin College and (in May '88) an MAR from Westminster Theological Seminary, and has written a thesis on this subject, which is in the Calvin Library. Editor.

THE CHRISTIAN RECONSTRUCTION/ THEONOMY MOVEMENT (PART 1)

David K. Watson

Introduction and Origins

Within the Christian Reformed Church, due to our size and heritage, we are somewhat isolated from the theological currents and controversies which affect the smaller conservative Presbyterian and Reformed denominations. Nowhere is this more evident than in our relative lack of knowledge and concern about the Christian Reconstruction, or Theonomy, movement.

Theonomy has been a hot topic of discussion within the PCA and the OPC for almost a decade. More recently, both the Reformed Church in the U.S. (until recently referred to as the "Eureka Classis") and the

Reformed Churches in New Zealand have had study committees which examined the issue. This past year, an issue of *Covenantal Witness*, the monthly publication of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (the "Covenanters"), was devoted to Theonomy. In addition, a new denomination has been spawned by the movement, the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the U.S.

But discussion of theonomy has not been limited to historically Calvinistic churches. The theonomic perspective has gained both proponents and opponents among a wide range of evangelicals, from fun-

damentalist Baptists to Charismatic televangelists. Its influence has been growing such that it was the subject of a cover story in *Christianity Today* (February 20, 1987) and a national public television documentary hosted by journalist Bill Moyers (December 23, 1987).

What is Theonomy?

Defining "theonomy" (literally, "God's law") can be a difficult task, because its advocates operate with several working definitions. Broadly speaking, theonomy could be defined as "the opposite of antinomianism" (and, thus, some proponents of theonomy are quick

to label their opponents "antinomians"). Sometimes an inclusive definition is advanced which recognizes anyone who holds that the decalogue continues to be normative to be a theonomist. But a more precise and helpful definition of theonomy would be "the view that the penalties attached to crimes in the Old Testament law are binding on current civil governments."¹ Therefore, the civil magistrate is obligated to execute witches, homosexuals, parent-abusers, and blasphemers among others).

Theonomy does not claim to be something new. Rather it "sees itself to be consistent, Reformed, covenant theology."² It appeals to certain precedents in Calvin's Geneva, Westminster Assembly Presbyterianism, and New England Puritanism. It faults the Reformed tradition for having drifted from its moorings and pleads for a return to former times, when the church boldly proclaimed the "Crown Rights of King Jesus."

Postmillennialism

In the majority of cases, the theonomic perspective is coupled with a belief in postmillennial eschatology. Many theonomists not only claim to have a hold of the biblical blueprint for society, but they are optimistic that the edifice will be constructed before the Architect returns at His Second Coming.

Here is where the alternate terminology of "Christian Reconstruction," "Dominion Theology," and "Kingdom Theology" come into the foreground. The Kingdom of God, most theonomists teach, will eventually triumph on earth "primarily through the actions of the Church and of individuals....Reconstructionists anticipate the day when all the nations will be explicitly Christian 'theocracies.'"³ In the meantime, Christians must learn to exercise dominion in all the spheres of life, including education, family life, the church, the marketplace, and local government.

Origins

The "leading figure" and "patriarch" of the theonomic and postmillennial revival is Rousas John Rushdoony. Rushdoony's family background helps to explain his own theological stance. His father had

been ordained in the Church of Scotland and had served as a Presbyterian minister in his native Armenia, which was then under the control of the Ottoman Turks. After World War I broke out and the Turks started to lose on the battlefield, they turned on the Armenians, commencing the first genocide of this century. Rushdoony's parents fled to the U.S. and Rousas was born shortly thereafter.

He was raised in a succession of Armenian Presbyterian manses around the country. As a child, Rushdoony says, he read the Old Testament constantly, even though some of his father's friends objected that it was too harsh for a tender youth.⁴ Elsewhere he states that "the book of Job had a formative influence in my childhood and made me a Calvinist."⁵ Rushdoony also attributes his position on postmillennialism and Biblical law to a saturation with Scripture from childhood on. Rushdoony followed in his father's footsteps and was ordained in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). He conducted mission work among Chinese-Americans and American Indians.

Van Til

Early on in his ministry he became acquainted with the works of Cornelius Van Til and found them "to be the philosophical analog to the book of Job. (They) gave focus to everything that I had read in Scripture and studied in school."⁶ Soon, Rushdoony began to display his penchant for writing and controversy, as he contributed articles to the *Westminster Theological Journal* and other Calvinistic magazines. The *Torch and Trumpet*, the *Outlook's* predecessor, contained its first contribution from Rushdoony in the mid-1950's. Later, installments from his first book, *By What Standard?*, a vigorous defense of Van Til's philosophy, appeared initially on its pages.

Lester DeKoster, then an editor of *The Reformed Journal*, wrote a scathing review of the book, stating that he "could not conceive of a more explicit endeavor to identify a man's thought with God's."⁷ Articles by Rushdoony continued to be published in *The Torch and Trumpet* periodically, as well as reviews of his books as he became an increasingly productive author.

In April, 1963, Rushdoony came to Calvin College to debate DeKoster on the topic, "Philosophy and Politics." Much of the actual bone of contention centered on what the proper Christian approach to the state ought to be. Both of them cited Calvin's practice and Dooyeweerd's critique of Western political thought. But while DeKoster maintained that it was the role of the state to protect the spheres, as when Calvin's Geneva "fixed" the price of corn or set up a state industry to provide jobs for the unemployed, Rushdoony asserted that was not the state's role, "but, rather, the Christian man as he stands in respect to his faith, he alone can protect the spheres."⁸

Chalcedon Foundation

Just prior to the publication of *By What Standard?*, Rushdoony had led some members of his church out of the mainline Presbyterian denomination into the OPC. He served as their pastor for a couple of years while he began increasingly to be called upon to lecture around the country. In those early years he addressed several regional conventions of the National Union of Christian Schools (now CSI). A number of those speeches were drawn together into a book, *Intellectual Schizophrenia* (1961), which *The Banner* reviewer lamented "suffers from generalization and fails to realize the gray in all our institutions, including our Christian schools."⁹

Rushdoony left the pastorate in order to devote more time to writing and lecturing. He acquired his first protege, Gary North, in the summer of 1963. He encouraged North to attend Westminster Seminary, which he did for one year. North then returned to California to eventually pursue a doctorate in economics and to begin his own writing career.

In October, 1965, Rushdoony began sending out a newsletter to people who supported him financially and otherwise. This was the humble beginning of the *Chalcedon Report*, which is still being published today. In June, 1966, Rushdoony and his backers established a non-profit organization, Chalcedon, Inc., to promote "Christian Reconstruction."

The name of the organization was inspired by the Council of Chalcedon and the creed it composed

(451 A.D.). That creed emphasized the doctrine of the two distinct natures of Christ united in one person. Incidentally, the Armenian church had historically rejected this creed, a move which isolated it from most of the Christian church. Rushdoony identified Chalcedon as a turning point in Western history. By maintaining that the human and divine were distinct, even in Christ's own person, the Council had forbidden the deification of any human institution. Therefore, the state could not claim a greater share of divinity, and therefore, power, over the family, business, or the church.

Rushdoony became disillusioned with the OPC. For a number of years he continued to preach periodically and speak at the summer family camps, but he came under criticism from some quarters. One minister wrote him to say: "I think that you would be in a more effective position if you were to lecture on such a subject as economics as a lay specialist rather than an ordained minister. Perhaps it would even be helpful to use a public auditorium rather than a church building"⁹

In 1970, Rushdoony completely severed his relationship with the OPC, which he later called the "Orthodox Pharisees Church, wherein

failure is a mark of election. Pastors who produce growth are regarded with suspicion, because growth is a mark of compromise."¹⁰

About this same time, another young man, Greg Bahnsen, came into contact with Rushdoony and was stimulated by his thinking. He, too, attended Westminster Seminary where he wrote a master's thesis which was later refined and incorporated into his influential work, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (1977).

In the early 1970's, Rushdoony's immense work, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (1973) and North's *Introduction to Christian Economics* were published and their reputations grew. Bahnsen soon was reunited with them in California while he worked on his doctorate in philosophy. All three men contributed to the *Chalcedon Report* and a new publication, *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*.

After finishing his studies, Bahnsen took a position as an apologetics professor at Reformed Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi. His tenure there was one of tumult, as the number of his friends and foes grew. The controversy spilled over into the PCA at large, and has continued at varying degrees ever since. (To Be Continued)

Notes:

PART 1 - INTRODUCTION AND ORIGINS

¹John Frame, *Thoughts on Theonomy - and Second Thoughts* (Westminster in California, privately distributed), 1.

²Carl Bogue, "What Does the Decalogue Summarize?" *Covenanter Witness* (May, 1987), 4.

³James Jordan, "Christian Reconstruction: A Definition," *Journey Magazine* (November-December, 1986), 9.

⁴Letter to John Child, Appendix A in *Biblical Law in the Theology of R.J. Rushdoony: A Systematic Theological Analysis and Appreciation* (University of South Africa Th.M. Thesis), 323.

⁵Ibid, 324.

⁶July-August, 1959, 21.

⁷Tape, Calvin College's Heritage Hall Collection (April 30, 1963).

⁸J.K. Van Baalen, February 9, 1962, 28.

⁹Quoted in Rushdoony, "Heresy of the Faithful," *The Biblical Philosophy of History* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), 142.

¹⁰*God's Plan for Victory* (Fairfax, VA: Thoburn Press, 1977); 9.

MORE ORTHODOX

(News Release, June 17)

CHURCHES LEAVE REFORMED ECUMENICAL SYNOD

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) has resigned its 39-year membership in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES). The action followed the refusal of that body to request the resignation of a member denomination that accepts homosexuals as in good standing and eligible for office in the church. The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN) have held steadfastly to their homosexual position since 1980

when it first came to the attention of the RES. Although the RES protested the church's position at its quadrennial meetings in 1980 and 1984, it failed to take definitive action at its recently-concluded 1988 meeting after the GKN had refused to rescind their policy. Three other denominations, from the Netherlands, New Zealand, and South Africa, also announced their intention to withdraw. That will bring to

nine the number of churches that have withdrawn from the RES in the past 10 years.

The RES is an international body of churches that are committed to maintaining the Reformed creeds, including the Westminster Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Belgic Confession, based on the infallible Scriptures. It was founded in 1946 and is composed of some 30 denominations in all the continents.

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church was one of its early members, joining at the second assembly, 1949. There are now two other North American denominations remaining in the RES.

The withdrawal of the OPC was taken at the RES's meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe, May 30-June 10, 1988, after years of struggle to bring about the reform of the Netherlands church or its expulsion. During that time the Netherlands church had been allowed to remain in the RES, even though it differed with the RES not only on the homosexual question, but also on such other matters as joining the World Council of Churches, starting to ordain women as ministers and elders, retaining ministers who had held heretical views on basic doctrines and, more recently, a doctrine of Scripture that resulted in their stating that "we know better than (the apostle) Paul."

The withdrawal of the OPC came on the final day of the meetings, after the previous day's decision to retain the Reformed Churches as a member. The quick response was due to the fruitlessness of the many years of seeking reform. It was made possible by the General Assembly giving full authority to its four-man delegation to withdraw the denomination from the RES. In their resignation statement the delegation said that "until yesterday we could not leave the RES because of conscience; today we cannot remain because of conscience."

The statement also asked the RES to recognize what it called "the enormity of what it has done and is doing to churches seeking to be faithful to the Word of God," as the RES "has forced" such churches to withdraw. The statement also claimed that those decisions are keeping other churches from joining. The delegates also pleaded with the RES "to keep the disease that infects the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands from spreading to other member churches."

The OPC has long had fellowship with other Reformed denominations both in the U.S. and abroad and will seek other fellowship to replace that of the RES.

Orthodox Presbyterian Church,
John P. Galbraith, Stated Clerk

2345 Willow Brook Dr.
Huntingdon Valley, PA 19006

Statement of Resignation of the OPC from the RES June 10, 1988

Mr. Moderator,

The General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church has given its delegation to this Synod full authority to act on behalf of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church at this meeting of the RES. We therefore speak on behalf of our denomination.

First of all, we wish to express our deep appreciation for the blessings that God has given us over a period of nearly 40 years, as members of the RES. We have experienced a wonderfully enriching fellowship with believers from all parts of the world. Our horizon has been increased, and we have learned much. Relationships have been established over these years, and we hope that we may continue some of them in the years ahead. So much have we valued this fellowship that nothing could bring us to relinquish it but the strong conviction that we must do so in order to be faithful to the Word of God.

We leave because of the persistence of the GKN in holding positions well known to the RES over a period of 25 years, that the RES has judged to be out of accord with Scripture and because the RES is unwilling to enforce its own qualifications for membership. We leave also because for us to remain in an organization that harbors a church in such a condition as the GKN so implicates our church in its sin that we have no choice but to separate ourselves from it.

We now have become *another* church that feels itself forced out of the RES by the Synod's decision to continue the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKN) in the RES membership, and we hereby resign the membership of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church from the RES, effective immediately. Until yesterday we could not leave the RES because of conscience; today we cannot remain because of conscience.

But we assure you, Mr. Moderator, that we do not leave this organization in pride or bitterness. We are too sinful ourselves to be proud,

and because God is sovereign we cannot be bitter. We are all losers because of the decision yesterday. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church loses because we shall not have the benefit of the close fellowship with many of you who want to be faithful to the gospel and the Reformed Confessions. The GKN loses because it has been deprived of the blessing of much needed correction. And the RES loses because it has again demonstrated its unwillingness to maintain the Basis which requires member churches to "profess and maintain" the Reformed faith, has lost its credibility as a Reformed body, and thus becomes more akin to such organizations as the WARC and the WCC. Yet we know that though we lose, Christ the king of the church, will triumph.

We wish you to know that we do not depart with an inward-looking focus. Our zeal for international ecumenicity among Reformed churches worthy of the name is stronger than ever. And we can assure you that we will seek, now, in some other way to have such fellowship. If the RES should, in future days, return to a credible maintenance of its Basis we would certainly feel obliged to consider returning.

We close with some pastoral advice which we hope the RES will be willing to receive. The RES must face up to the enormity of what it has done and is doing to churches seeking to be faithful to the Word of God as the RES by its decisions, *not* the GKN, has forced nine or ten churches, *so far*, out of the RES and has kept other faithful churches from joining. And you must face up to your responsibility to member churches to keep the disease that infects the GKN from spreading to those churches. Some of them live in fear of that spread, and we plead with you to help protect them from it.

Mr. Moderator, we shall continue to pray for all the churches that remain with sincere love in our hearts. We hope that you will understand that we cannot participate further in the schedule of this Assembly. As others have already said, we bid you farewell, may God help you — and us.

WHAT MAY WE STUDY?

It is about 25 years ago that a theological professor of De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland addressed the Ministers' Institute of the Christian Reformed Church held every June in Grand Rapids. The churches he served had already concluded that Genesis 1-11 was not historical in the sense in which we understand history. I should not have been surprised at his views because I had read his articles and books. Yet, to hear it directly from his lips shocked me and many others. One CRC minister asked the professor: What, then, do you do with Romans 5:12, 14, 15, 17, 18 and 19 where Paul draws the clear distinction between Adam and Christ; and I Corinthians 15:22 where the Apostle says: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." What answer did he receive? With a chuckle the professor answered: That was Paul's view, but he was wrong!! This answer made my blood run cold. I suppose that if you have denied the historicity of the first chapters of Genesis and have no room for the Adam spoken of there, this view of Romans 5 and I Corinthians 15 would be the natural consequence.

This same church to which this professor belonged (GKN) asked its fellow-members of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod to help them come to the proper view of the doctrine of Scripture in 1969. We decided to do this. Report 44 "The Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority" accepted by the Synod of 1972 was our answer. Were they struggling with this problem? No, five years earlier their professor had made it clear in Grand Rapids what their view of Scripture really was.

Although many believe that there is very little similarity between our problems and their history and those of the GKN, I believe that the one is a mirror image of the other. The difference is that we come about 25 years behind them. In Holland the question of origins arose in the biology department of the Free University and Dr. Jan Lever was the first to bring the question of the his-

toricity of the first chapters of Genesis to the fore. It was soon accepted by others including the theological professor of whom I spoke. In our circles it has arisen out of the department of astronomy. Theology cannot ignore this question because a part of the Bible is at stake.

The history of this matter has not been very long in our circles. Dr. Van Till wrote his book "The Fourth Day" in 1986. Protests were brought to the Board of Trustees in February, 1988. The Board, realizing that it was not a minor matter, appointed an *ad hoc* committee to study this matter in some depth and to serve the Board with advice. Although Professor Van Till was very outspoken in his book and was not seeking to hide any of his beliefs, the *ad hoc* committee reported back to the Board at its May, 1988 meeting informing the Board that the teachings found in the "Fourth Day" were within the guidelines of Scriptural interpretation which the CRC has adopted and not contrary to our confessions! This brought action from various quarters so that when Synod met it had no less than 32 overtures dealing with this matter and 8 communications. Synod's advisory committee was a little more hesitant than the *ad hoc* committee had been, but, not much. The *ad hoc* committee had expressed certain concerns about the professor's teaching but the advisory committee "regrets" that the Board did not address these concerns sufficiently.

Synod adopted the advice of its advisory committee and decided to appoint a committee to study the matter further and to report in three years! Among other things, this committee is to study the relation between special and general revelation as found in Belgic Confessions Art. II, focusing primarily on the implications for Biblical interpretation and the investigation of God's creation. In this study they should include the concept of "vehicle/packaging/contents" (wording taken right out of the mouth of our Gereformeerde brethren), 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. Isn't it always the safest way to proceed when faced by a difficult problem to appoint a committee? Everyone knows that Synods have been very free in appointing study committees throughout the years and the undersigned has had his share of study committee work in the past. Of course, committees must often be appointed to study a matter when the problem cannot be handled at the meeting where it is brought. Lack of time at Synodical meetings is reason enough to appoint various study committees. However, may we study anything and everything? My answer is *NO*. No study committee, e.g., may be appointed to study the question: Is there a God? That would be blasphemy. No study committee may have a mandate to study the question: Is Jesus Divine? That is to be taken for granted. Hebrews 11:6 informs us: "...for he that cometh to God must believe that he is.... We have something similar in this problem. May we have a committee study whether Genesis 1-11 is actual history? Is this negotiable? Could we have a majority and minority report? Could this committee decide that it isn't really history? May we place ourselves above the Scriptures? I realize, that no one would want to fall into the traps shown here, but the danger is there. I believe that Synod erred greatly in appointing a committee for this purpose. I would urge each one of the brethren appointed to this committee to decline to serve. If such matters as these are "up for grabs" then we have wandered a long way from the faith of those who have gone before us, and, far more important, we have then loosed our grip on the one thing which shall never change.

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

THE FOURTH DAY

Paul N. Archbald
Edward J. Marcusse

The Christian Reformed Church has recently become embroiled in the creation-evolution debate especially through the teachings and writings of three Calvin College professors. Because we believe the issues at stake are important, we have studied the views of one of those professors, Dr. Howard Van Till. We have based this analysis on his two publications; *The Fourth Day*, and *The Cosmos: Nature or Creation*. We have written this for those who have attacked Dr. Van Till in ignorance of his views; for those who feel the issues are "above them;" for those who feel the whole thing is a "storm in a teacup;" and for those who believe Dr. Van Till has introduced a breath of fresh air into the creation-evolution debate. Let us consider his views.

1. Scripture and Science: How Are They Related?

Dr. Van Till points out that there are two ways of looking at the cosmos: through the spectacles of *Scripture*; or through the lens of *scientific investigation*. Each view is different, neither one is complete by itself.¹

On the one hand, science deals only with "internal affairs," such as the properties and laws of behavior, and the history of the physical world. On the other hand, Scripture deals primarily with "external affairs," namely, the *relationship* between the Creation itself and the God who is its Creator, Originator, Preserver, Governor, and Provider.

Dr. Van Till attempts to put these two domains together in what he calls a "creationomic perspective": the view of the cosmos that is obtained when science is placed in the framework of the Biblical doctrine of Creation (*TFD*, preface p. ix and p. 250). This is a worthy aim, and true

to the Reformed understanding that *all* of life is to be viewed through the spectacles of Scripture. To some extent, Dr. Van Till succeeds in carrying out this aim. He frequently stresses the importance of holding to Biblical presuppositions; namely, that Creation is distinct from God the Creator, and that it is entirely dependent on Him.²

Clearly, Dr. Van Till wishes to maintain some kind of priority for Scripture. He indicates that we must not remove the spectacles of Scripture when we peer through the telescope of astronomy (*TFD*, 93). Yet, he does not consistently allow the Bible to come first.

The first respect in which the Bible is not given priority is that the number of guiding presuppositions it provides is reduced. Apart from the two basic assumptions that God is Creator and rules providentially, the Bible is not allowed to speak to science. Dr. Van Till *assumes* that Scripture has nothing to say about how the cosmos or the earth were formed, how long it took, etc. That, according to Van Till, is a purely scientific matter, not the domain of the Bible: "the question of temporal development...is exclusively and exhaustively the domain of the natural sciences" (*TFD* 269-270).

We believe that this reduction of the Bible's authority is the *fundamental error* in Dr. Van Till's position - one which then leads him into a host of other problems. Because he refuses to let the Bible speak on matters of cosmic history, and on the processes and sequences of events, he then makes many statements in which science is viewed as independent of Scripture, if not above it. The two categories, the "internal affairs" of science, and the "external affairs" of Scripture, are not wholly independent of each other in Van

Till's eyes; but "neither are they so closely related that the answers for one category of questions unequivocally determine the answers to the other" (*TFD* 268); "Neither biblical theism nor atheistic naturalism can justifiably make a priori demands [i.e. presuppositions] upon the results of empirical science" (*TFD* 208). Dr. Van Till calls his idea that the Bible and Creation deal with two different sets of questions "categorical complementarity." And he goes even further.

Prof. Van Till, while partially silencing Scripture by saying it deals with different matters than science, also insists that the Bible should not be "interpreted in isolation from the rest of God's revelation in the Creation..." (*TFD* 77). If we are to avoid a naive view of Genesis, for example, we need "auxiliary information that must be incorporated into the process of biblical interpretation" (*TFD* 76). In other words, we need the spectacles of *science*, or history, or whatever, to understand Scripture. So, according to Van Till, General Revelation (or man's interpretation of it) may speak to Scripture after all.

In addition, Dr. Van Till appears to take certain scientific theories as incontrovertible fact, while leaving the Christian community to somehow fit the Bible around the theories. For example, Dr. Van Till seems to be quite comfortable with the idea of biological evolution (*TFD* 172, 188, 254). What that does for our doctrines of the Fall and Creation, Van Till leaves as a problem for the Christian community to work out. We would question whether it is responsible of a Christian teacher in a Christian college *not* to work out the theological implications of his views before he begins expounding them in public, and if his views do

cause problems with the doctrine of the Fall (among other things), who or what should give way?

Further evidence that Dr. Van Till grants too much to science (or to modern scientists) is seen in the way he contrasts secular scientists with "creation" scientists: Van Till claims that secular scientists today have enough integrity that they can carry out their work without letting their religious bias seriously affect them (TFD 209, 210, 214); whereas creation scientists are people who "know" the answer to some questions and then search for evidence to support it. Because of this "fault," they overlook or disregard any evidence to the contrary (TFD 242).

Against this, we would maintain that every person's religious bias, Christian or non-Christian, affects *everything* he or she does. If our view of life as a whole is biased, all the component parts that we build into our "system" will be biased also. There is no such thing as religious neutrality.

One shudders to think what would happen if every professor at Calvin College adopted Dr. Van Till's approach. What would happen if *all* the scientists took the so-called "un-biased" results of their non-Christian colleagues, and applied them to their field? If the history professors or the biology professors took the "un-biased" findings of their secular colleagues? What would happen if all this were considered to "complement" Scripture - leaving the Christian community to pick up the pieces, asking it to change its "merely human and fallible" theology, to rewrite its Confessions? But astronomy and geology are not that different from any other area of knowledge. *ALL* areas of general revelation need to be interpreted in the light of the Bible, *not the other way around!* Our starting point for understanding all things is Scripture and Scripture *alone*.

This does not mean, of course, that the Bible is a science textbook, or a history textbook. There are many questions that the Bible does not raise which the different branches of knowledge do deal with. Nor does it mean that the study of General Revelation may not, at times, cause us to re-examine our interpretation of Scripture. For instance, ar-

chaological studies have helped us better understand the Bible. These studies and scientific endeavors should not be downgraded *as long as they are pursued in a Biblical way*.

The problem comes when the fruits of such study are made *essential* to the "proper" understanding of Scripture and when the Bible is denied its unique role as the "spectacles" through which all facts must be viewed and interpreted. Scripture is its own interpreter. Other information can be of great help, but it may not dictate the interpretation of Scripture. As Report 44 says, "any reinterpretation must be based on principles germane to and garnered from Scripture itself. Ultimately, the validity of every interpretation must be judged in terms of whether it agrees with Scripture's own interpretation of itself..."³

2. Scripture: How Do We Use It?

Dr. Van Till's view of Scripture bears more resemblance to that of Neo-Orthodoxy than to Reformed theology. He distinguishes between a thoroughly Divine *content* of Scripture (the gospel message), and its thoroughly human *form* (TFD 8). He uses the analogy of a vehicle (the literary "type" of the part of Scripture, eg. the story of Creation); which has within it the contents (the trustworthy teachings of God). Only the "contents," it seems, are God's word. In Van Till's view, we must therefore distinguish the contents from the package, the husk from the kernel - or we will miss the intended meaning (TFD 15).

According to Dr. Van Till, the Bible contains much that is drawn solely from human experience, for example, the man from Gath who had 24 digits. This is "merely incidental information of little importance or relevance to its gospel message" (TFD 7); "taking the Bible seriously does not require us to treat such matters as the product of divine revelation" (TFD 13).

In contrast to this view, which we believe does *not* take Scripture seriously, consider II Timothy 3:16; "all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful...." Dr. Van Till claims that the Bible is the "Word" of God, not the "words" of God. The term "Word," he believes, is merely metaphorical: it simply acknow-

ledges divine revelation; it is not meant literally in the sense of "mere words" (TFD p. 65). The 1961 Acts of Synod decision on "Infallibility and Inspiration" does not support Van Till: commenting on II Timothy 3:16, it says "Paul's own use of Scripture indicates that the quality of 'God Breathedness' extends to the very words of Scripture....[They are] God's own utterances (pp. 9-10; also see what Report 44, *The Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority* has to say about this on pages 51-52).

When Prof. Van Till applies his method to Genesis, the Creation story becomes more like a poem or a parable, and therefore not to be taken literally. After all, he argues, there were no human observers at the dawn of Creation; so we should expect an "artistic" type of literature, which tells us about God's character and His relationship to Creation, rather than the actual means He used to establish and maintain the relationship (TFD 58). Genesis 1-11, according to Van Till, is a special brand of literature: "primeval history." It illustrates eternal truths, but the specific details are not very important. Those details are the "packaging" in which the truth is conveyed. The stories were "never intended to answer questions about precisely what happened" (TFD 82-83). The "days" of Genesis 1, for example, are simply literary devices - they are not literal days. (TFD 91).

At no stage does Dr. Van Till justify his conclusions that Genesis 1-11 is a special kind of "history." He sets forth no evidence for saying that the first eleven chapters of Genesis are any less historical than the rest. In contrast, Report 44 (on page 42), explicitly refutes interpretations of Genesis 1-11 like Van Till's. Furthermore, we note that Jesus and Paul understood Genesis to be recording literal, historical events. Both the *words* and the *events* of Genesis are considered significant throughout all of the Bible. Some questions arise at this point: if the Creation story is highly symbolic, as Van Till would have us believe, rather than literal, what becomes of the fourth commandment, as Exodus 20:11 grounds it in a six day creation/one day rest pattern? What becomes of the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness and life to His

people, paralleled as it is in Romans 5 with our relationship to the first man, Adam? What becomes of the principles of the husband's headship, or of monogamy, grounded as they are in that first marriage of one real man to one real woman (see I Timothy 2:11-14 and Ephesians 5:31)? What becomes of Hebrews 11:3? Van Till does not grapple seriously with these issues.

The danger facing our denomination in all of this is that when one begins arbitrarily dismissing certain details of Scripture as symbolic, simply because they appear to conflict with the opinions of some modern scientists, the door is open to those who would dismiss other parts of Scripture as timebound, or culturally determined, or symbolic, simply because they do not happen to agree with whatever that part of Scripture is saying. History should teach us a lesson here. Wherever this approach to Scripture has gained a foothold, the Bible has not been more fully appreciated, but, on the contrary, it has been increasingly seen as an outdated collection of human laws and thoughts. Consider, for example, the denominations in Germany, the Netherlands, Canada, and America which have accepted this view. More and more of Scripture was eroded until even the "gospel-content" was gone. Today, we are firmly convinced that whatever happens within our own denomination, the Lord will preserve His Truth; but if we are irresponsible in our handling of it, we should not be surprised when we suffer the consequences in our churches.

Prof. Van Till has taken a dangerous and unsound approach to handling Scripture. We believe this must be opposed. We do appreciate his emphasis on the basic nature of Genesis 1-11 as being covenantal, and his teaching of Genesis on the relationship between God and His Creation is of prime importance. But why should this rule out the literal nature, the historicity, of Genesis 1-11? In fact, it supports it: the Covenant "introduction," or prologue, to the Law in Exodus 20:2 also deals with a relationship. Does that mean God did not *actually* bring Israel out of Egypt as it describes? Is that, as some claim, mere symbol also? Not at all! It really, literally, happened! By stressing "relationship" at the ex-

pense of "event-character" (i.e. historicity) in Genesis, Van Till is once again showing affinity with Neo-Orthodoxy.

3. Science How Do We Use It?

One of the key assumptions underlying Prof. Van Till's view of science is what he calls the "Principle of Uniformity." Specifically, this assumption states that 1) matter behaves in an orderly, patterned, non-contradictory, continuous manner, and that it always has throughout time; 2) this pattern is intelligible to human observers; and 3) it exhibits a cause-and-effect character. These assumptions apply to all phenomena in the category of material behavior.

Notice here that, strictly speaking, this principle of uniformity rules out the Biblical miracles in which Prof. Van Till professes to believe (e.g. the Resurrection). Yet he rejects the miracle of a six day creation, and he accuses Special Creationists of being "Interventionists" (they overemphasize God's miraculous intervention, at the expense of His ongoing, regular, providential activity). Dr. Van Till has done to Creation what Liberal theologians did to miracles in general: Report 44 criticizes the Liberals for making nature a closed system of cause and effect relationships; their acceptance of a current scientific theory concerning what was possible in the areas of nature and history led them to reinterpret the miracles (p. 30).

Working with the Principle of Uniformity necessarily results in a very old age for the cosmos and the earth. Present rates for various geological and cosmic processes can be used to calculate approximate ages needed to produce the features presently observed, e.g. the present speed of light implies that light from distant stars we are now "seeing" must have taken billions of years to reach us. Dr. Van Till treats these matters as facts, not as theories based on certain assumptions, which they are. Similarly, he is convinced that by geology, "the evolutionary character of planetary history is firmly established" (TFD 172). He is a little more tentative about the certainty of biological evolution, but seems to think it likely (TFD 254). He firmly states these things because of his as-

sumptions about uniformity: for Van Till, a denial of evolution, is a denial of the coherence and continuity of life (TFD 169). That is why he rejects Special Creationism, for it makes God upset the ordinary, patterned behavior of matter (TFD 188, 253; *Cosmos* 260. Likewise, the "Apparent-Age" or "Mature-Age" Theory of Creation is rejected by Dr. Van Till. This view says that God created some things already mature e.g. man, many geological features, the stars. Van Till believes that if God had created the cosmos with an appearance of age, this would make Him "the perpetrator of a grand hoax" and most of creation would then be an illusion, a deception, a fiction (TFD 237; *Cosmos* 34, 36, 43).

We believe, however, that God has given sufficient evidence that "evolution" is not correct. If there is deception, it is *self-deception* on the part of those who have pressed the "Principle of Uniformity" too far.

Dr. Van Till has tried to avoid emphasizing "Special Creation" at the expense of God's regular, providential control of the cosmos. But he has fallen into the opposite trap: God's Creation of the cosmos has been almost entirely reduced to His providential control. What, in the end, is the "event-character" of Genesis 1-3 as he understands it? He certainly reminds us that God is ruling our world day by day, that our *relationship* to God is as of creatures to Creator. But the actual *event* of the making and fashioning of Creation recedes into the distant mists of time past, billions of years before our planet even existed. The actual event of the Creation of something out of nothing "stands as but one grain of sand on the endless seashore of the Creator's eternal relationship with His Creation" (TFD 226)-providence is made to swallow up creation.

This emphasis on uniformity is all the more surprising in view of increasing trends in science (particularly geology) to rely more and more on invoking "catastrophes" to fill the gaps in the theory of evolution. Scientists are apparently beginning to see that "nature" is not so "orderly" as we once thought. Of course, it can still be argued that "catastrophes" also occur according to uniform principles, but the unifor-

mity of creation under God's rule is not the point in question here: rather, it is whether the *present* uniformity is a reliable guide for interpreting *past* events. The presence for "catastrophes" in the past makes it harder for us to reach reliable conclusions today. Because they are generally irregular, little known events, they make things happen at different rates compared to what we presently observe; they introduce new factors. It is inconsistent to argue that Special Creation cannot be true because it contradicts the present, observed pattern of uniformity, while at the same time allowing of other "catastrophes," and even miracles, which also disrupt the *present* degree of uniformity.

4. Conclusion:

Dr. Van Till insists that he is not advocating "theistic evolution" (TFD 265). Despite his rejection of the term, theistic evolution is essentially what he is teaching. Moreover, the arguments he uses against Special Creation, are, by and large, the same old arguments one has been hearing from secular scientists for some time. His uncompromising rejection of Creation Science places Dr. Van Till in an even more extremist position than many unbelieving scientists today. Consider, for example, his rigorous application of the "Prin-

ciple of Uniformity," which many secular scientists would now be willing to moderate.

At the same time, we appreciate Dr. Van Till's rejection of naturalistic science; and his attempt to maintain at least some Biblical presuppositions in constructing his scientific views. In practice, however, we believe he allows science (or rather, scientists) to dictate what Scriptures may, or may not, say on certain issues.

Dr. Van Till's doctrine of Scripture, with his content/form distinction, and his emphasis on relationship over-against events, is more typical of the Neo-Orthodox position than of sound, Reformed theology. We believe this is the most serious defect in his work, and represents the biggest danger for College and Seminary, Church and School.

In conclusion, we would like to quote from Report 44: "Synod, acknowledging that Scripture is self-authenticating, reminds the churches that the authority of Scripture is not dependent upon the findings of science; while scientific findings can serve as occasions for a better understanding of Scripture, nevertheless the church may appeal to the authority of Scripture alone as the basis for its faith and life, and accordingly must seek to develop a Christian community within which all scholarly work is carried on in faith-

fulness to the authoritative Scriptures (p. 53).

Notes

1. Howard Van Till, *The Fourth Day* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1986) preface vii-viii. From this point on, all references to this book will be made parenthetically within the text, thus: (TFD ____).

2. Howard Van Till, *The Cosmos: Nature or Creation* (Grand Rapids: Calvin College pamphlet, 1984) 18. From this point on, all references to this pamphlet will be made parenthetically within the text, thus (Cosmos ____).

3. Synodical Study Committee Report #44, *The Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority*, presented to Synod 1972, 30.

Humbly submitted by:
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A review of THE GREAT DIVIDE - *Christianity OR Evolution*, by Gerard Berghoef and Lester DeKoster. Grand Rapids, The Christian Library Press, c1988; 176 pages.

Edward Heerema

WHAT ABOUT THEISTIC EVOLUTION?

Just what is wrong with theistic evolution? This question is often asked. And frequently it is asked with a hint of prejudice in favor of what may seem to some to be a legitimate position for a Christian to take. After all, so the feeling goes, if the sovereign God is said to be in charge of the evolutionary process,

then why can't such a view be perfectly proper for a Christian who seriously wants to be true to the Bible and who at the same time wishes to do justice to scientific evidence?

Those who think they can be comfortable with a theistic evolutionary view should consult this very

readable book by Berghoef and De-Koster. Written in brisk and articulate language conveying the ring of conviction and contemporaneity, it is a compact treatment of a subject that has become crucial in the Christian community, particularly in the Christian Reformed Church.

The subtitle says what the book is about—Christianity OR Evolution. Most Christians are, it may be presumed, ready to say that evolution as it is most commonly espoused is incompatible with Christianity. The authors argue the case that theistic evolution is just as incompatible with Christianity. "Theistic evolution, also called 'creationomic science,' " say Berghoef and De-Koster, "perverts Christianity into just another man-tailored religion. This is the thesis of this book" (p. 13). ("Creationomic science" is the term H. Van Till uses in his book *The Fourth Day*).

The book has an interesting and helpful format. Each chapter is preceded by a brief three-point summary stating what Genesis teaches, what Evolution teaches, and then what Theistic Evolution teaches. Chapter 1, entitled "In the Beginning..." has the following three-point introduction:

GENESIS

Reveals that in the beginning there was the God who further reveals Himself, as we confess in the Apostles Creed, as "God the Father Almighty."

EVOLUTION

Theorizes that in the beginning there was a burst of energy called the Big Bang.

THEISTIC EVOLUTION

Attempts to tie God and the Bang together, and in so doing begins its reduction of Christianity to the status of just another religion.

Not surprisingly, a good many of these chapter introductions represent Evolution and Theistic Evolution as teaching the same thing. The authors leave us in no doubt as to their rejection of Theistic Evolution, it being just as unacceptable as other types of evolutionary teaching. The "Great Divide...separates Christianity from evolution, all brands" (p. 122).

How do the authors argue their case? They do it in a manner that

may seem a bit surprising to many. Early in the book the question is raised as to how we go about choosing among Genesis or Evolution or Theistic Evolution. "The answer to that crucial question," Berghoef and DeKoster go on to say, "is not to be found in arguing the 'case' for or against evolution, nor in trying to prove the reliability of Genesis. Such arguments always bog down somewhere short of conviction" (p. 27). The observation is most likely correct.

Significantly the book's line of argumentation turns around God's Plan of Redemption. This approach is as astute as it is significant. After all it is generally agreed among Christians that God's redemptive plan in and through Jesus Christ is the very heart of the Bible. THE GREAT DIVIDE demonstrates on many counts how this plan of redemption is set forth throughout the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, with important elements of that plan anchored in the book of Genesis. We cannot reject or compromise the teaching of Genesis and still think we can embrace God's plan of redemption in Christ, who in many ways certified the teaching of Genesis.

And this line of argumentation is astute for another reason. Those who subscribe to theistic evolution often stress their personal allegiance to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The authors put the question very directly, "How can the theistic evolutionist, who rejects Jesus' certification of Genesis, still lay claim to being Jesus' disciple?" (p. 72). On pages 172-173 a chart displays "some of the Genesis elements of the Plan of Redemption." This chart makes "vividly clear," the authors declare, "that theistic evolution (including 'creationomic science' distorts Christianity into just another man-made religion, as does secular evolution" (p. 171).

In this review two segments of this discussion are presented to demonstrate the effectiveness of the authors' line of approach.

The creation was brought into existence by God's Word—"And God said..." (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9 etc.) This Word, the New Testament tells us in the first chapter of the gospel of

John, was Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior who "became flesh and dwelt among us." "Your salvation depends on the creating Word who became flesh and lived and died for us. St. John identifies Jesus the Savior with Jesus the Agent of God's creation as revealed in Genesis. Only this Jesus is the heart of Christianity" (p. 35).

In fact, it is by speech that God reveals himself and his works. He is the sovereign divine person who "is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him." This is the mark of God's personhood and his freedom, and by speech he called the universe into being, he sent forth his Son as the Word become flesh, he gave his written Word, he stilled the storm at sea, he called Lazarus from the grave, and by his Word he stirs living faith in the hearts of believers. It all began with "And God said..." Indeed, "The Bible is unrelenting witness to Word-creation, and thus weaves the Genesis revelation into Christianity" (p. 35).

A second segment of the book's line of discussion has to do with man's sinfulness and the salvation he gains in Christ. Genesis reports man's creation by God, after or in God's image, and God declared that his work was "very good." And then came man's fall from his "very good" status, as reported in Genesis. But this Genesis account is not that of theistic evolution. According to the evolutionary scheme "God is Evolutionist-in-Charge of man's development from the Bang to the present. Man is the product of God's work. Whatever God finds wanting in man is His own doing. How could God, then, condemn human misbehavior? Man is what God's evolutionary 'strategy' has so far made us. Why all the fuming and threatening in the Bible over sin and evil? God is denouncing His own handiwork—on theistic evolutionary ground" (p. 80).

This compelling line of thought moves on as we read that "evolution makes the death of Christ a kind of dramatic gesture, an act detached from any Plan of salvation. Why, on evolutionary grounds, should God's Son *die* to atone an original sin and guilt which, for evolution, man never incurred? Indeed, what, for evolution, has death to do with sin at all? But, if *death* is not a penalty on sin,

then Christ's dying cannot pay that penalty. And evolution thus negates the whole Plan of Redemption" (p. 107).

These samplings from the book's manner of dealing with the subject should be enough to show that the authors present their case in devotion to the Bible and with language that is clear and often arresting. These samplings should, I trust, prompt the reader of this review to get the book for himself, and for his growing children, so that many in the church may be better equipped to deal with a matter of great concern to the thoughtful Christian today.

Is the language of the book too blunt, too abrasive, at times? It may seem so to some. One of the authors (DeKoster) is well known as a student who has immersed himself in the writings of the great Reformer, John Calvin. Any one who has done any reading at all in Calvin's writing knows that Calvin could use sharp language in dealing with views he thought were false. Compared with some of the language used by DeKoster's mentor, this book's wording is fairly mild. If the conviction of Berghoef and DeKoster is valid, that evolution, also theistic evolution, constitutes a serious threat to Christian thought and life, then their language anent that threat is hardly excessively sharp. Surely a book's language should never be personally abusive, nor should the style of writing be dull or diffuse or murky. The book in hand violates on none of these counts.

This pointed critique of theistic evolution is not narrowly focussed. It does not single out the writing that has recently caused a stir in the Christian Reformed Church, namely, *The Fourth Day* by H. Van Till of Calvin College. This is good, lest some dismiss the study of Berghoef and DeKoster as being just part of a limited family squabble in a particular denomination. At the same time it is obvious that the writers are well acquainted with Van Till's book. They refer several times to the term "creationomic science," Van Till's description of what is more commonly called theistic evolution. More than that, they make clear that they are very much aware of a facet of Van Till's argument that is most vulnerable.

In pressing the point that the Word of God, active in creation, remains active in God's universe, Berghoef and DeKoster refer to Christ's use of the word to still the waves of the storm-tossed Sea of Galilee. "Observe well," say the authors, "this divine intrusion on the evolutionist's cherished principle of uniformity. His God is supposed to remain 'external' to the universe. But that is not the God of Christianity, nor the Word who is the Christ" (p. 36).

The word "external" is Van Till's word (*The Fourth Day*, p. 195). The Calvin professor of Astronomy says plainly, "we believe the patterns of material behavior to be spatially universal and temporally invariant: they are the same everywhere and 'every-when'" (p. 116). The universe and its system of material objects are to be thought of in terms of "rigorously patterned behavior" (*The Fourth Day*, p. 205), of "very strict patterns which can be precisely described and mathematically represented" (ibid., p. 221). These rigid patterns of behavior have been going on invariantly "everywhere and 'every-when'" for an alleged fifteen billion years, since the original "Big Bang."

And in relation of these ongoing, rigidly patterned, invariant processes covering billions of years, God is, according to Van Till, given a place among "external, non-material entities, powers, and beings" (ibid., p. 195). Such a banishment of our sovereign, miracle-working God from His world is totally intolerable to Berghoef and DeKoster and ought to be so to any Christian. Van Till's ascription to God of the roles of "Originator, Preserver, Governor, and Provider of the Creation" (ibid., p. 65) does not relieve the problem. Giving God such titles is much like relieving the team's manager of his duties and kicking him upstairs to an office position with a fine sounding title, but the game goes on without him.

The book, commendable as it is in its main thrust, does reveal some incidental features that leave this reviewer somewhat uncomfortable. There is, for instance, a strain of allegorizing in the understanding of certain scripture passages. Does the making of Eve out of the side of the

sleeping first Adam prefigure the making of "the new Eve, Christ's bride the church, out of the side of the second Adam 'asleep on the Cross?'" And do the blood and water flowing from the crucified Savior's side symbolize the sacramental signs of the church? (p. 66). St. Augustine taught the latter idea and Calvin was not minded to reject it. But one looks in vain in later exegeses for such allegorical notions, meaning exegeses like Meyer, Alford, Godet, F. W. Grosheide and Hendriksen. Allegorizing appears also in the reference to Christ's likening himself to the serpent of brass that Moses lifted up in the wilderness. Parenthetically the authors say "brass combines two elements as Christ combined God and human flesh!" (p. 142).

Does God take risks? Very likely most thoughtful Christians have difficulty with the idea. Berghoef and DeKoster say that God took a "risk" when he created man in His image as a free agent, a being with the freedom to disobey. In fact, God in so creating man took a "triple risk" (pp. 97-98). It would be a cheap shot to charge the authors with shabby theologizing. And I have too much respect for the debating prowess of at least one of the authors to engage in an argument over semantics with him. Yet, the word "risk" does contain an element of uncertainty which does not harmonize with the omniscience of God and with the all-inclusiveness of his decrees. I think the authors would have been well advised not to use the word.

There will be those who will express displeasure with the chapter entitled with these words: "SCIENCE" in Capital Letters (and Quotation Marks) (pp. 155-165). Some will not accept the derogatory attitude that comes through with regard to what the authors label SCIENCE, in contrast with the positive feelings expressed toward applied science. Applied science has been made possible to a large degree because of the prior and continuing work of theoretical science. SCIENCE is charged with being speculative, and so ought not to be taken too seriously. The advice is appropriate, but science surely must be allowed its speculative aspect. Theorizing with its components of

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wonderment and musing are an incapable part of the scientific adventure.

This is not to say that the chapter is without value; by no means. Surely science has its pretensions, which are sometimes intimidating to the uninitiated. The authors are surely correct in reminding us that there is no such thing as a commanding entity called SCIENCE before which we must bow in awe. Science is not to be regarded as a set, objective body of fact and truth. Rather, it is something found in and produced by the minds of people, people with prejudices, foibles and limitations like those marking the lives of the rest of us. And the following commentary is worth noting as a description of the manner in which science often goes about its business:

The "scientist" has to begin with some hypothesis, some thesis which he hopes to test and validate or invalidate. His hypothesis "leads" him to "facts" which will support or contradict it. The hypothesis points to the "facts," not the "facts" to the hypothesis. This is common knowledge. And if the "scientist" is strongly disposed to finding support for his hypothesis, oddly enough most of the "facts" he finds will do just that (p. 160).

The reader who wishes to do more study in the area of the scientific aspects to the debate over evolution can consult the book *THE EARTH, THE STARS, AND THE BIBLE* by Paul Steidl. The author, a student of astronomy like H. Van Till, coolly and dispassionately evaluates many of the various items of scientific evidence in the debate and comes to a conclusion quite different from that of Van Till.

The authors are to be congratulated on producing this useful and timely book. The Christian community is the better off for this presentation of a line of discussion

that cannot be ignored in this ongoing intense debate. With their hearts and minds deeply committed to the redemptive Word with Jesus Christ as its living center, the authors may well declare toward the end of their study, "It is not we, but He, who set the Great Divide between Christianity and evolution" (p. 170).

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

"YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN"

What for years has given me deep concern is the real possibility of numerous church members, in our Reformed circles particularly, taking for granted that church membership is tantamount to being born again.

Our Lord Himself practically swears that we must be "born again" to enter heaven. John 3:3 reads, "Verily, verily, [or truly, truly], except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." Is this need ever emphasized in our pulpits, or in our Christian magazines? I personally have never as yet heard a sermon that was based on that all-important text, (outside of my own).

We do well to remember two factors in particular. One of them is the fact that our eternal welfare depends on whether, in our infancy, or later on, we actually were born again, or not. And the other one is the fact that the Savior directed this warning to a person who was as active a church member as perhaps there ever was. His name was Nicodemus, a Pharisee, and a member of the lofty church hierarchy, the "Sanhedrin."

If we minimize the need of being born again, we fail to face the Scriptural truths that we all are conceived in sin, and born in iniquity (Ps. 51:5), that by nature, we are all dead in trespasses and sins. (Eph. 2:1), that we must be saved by God's grace, through faith, and that church membership, alone and by itself, has no significance.

For these reasons, we must "examine ourselves." God's Word warns that many shall think to enter, but not be able (Matt. 7:23). Do we differ from the unchurched as light differs from darkness, as God demands? Do they

even hate us for being different, as Christ and His apostles were hated? Has the Lord been given the place in our lives that He demands, the first and the highest?

Should not also the perilousness of our times drive us into examining ourselves? Consider the fulfillment of prophecies regarding the Savior's return. Whoever thinks that the multiplying homosexuality in our time and the slaughter of millions of unborn babies, as a still greater atrocity, is going to go unpunished much longer, must never have read history.

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A PLEA FOR INSIDE EVANGELISM

In recent years CRC people have come to realize that the teaching published in 1892 in the book *E VOTO* by A. Kuiper is not founded on Scripture. He taught that children born of believing parents may be presumed to be saved.

The result of this misconception is that INSIDE EVANGELISM practiced by Paul and Peter is not followed by our churches today and as a result, church growth has been stymied. Their synagogue, the covenant people, alert them to the need for salvation. They did not assume that the circumcised of that day, and for us the children who were baptized as infants, were exempt from the gospel challenge.

At Pentecost Peter was addressing a Jewish covenant audience when he said: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2:38).

Jesus strongly emphasized this when He taught INSIDE EVANGELISM in John 3 with Nicodemus. This Pharisee was a covenant member in the church, and yet was told he had to be born again. Jesus did NOT presume he was already saved!

Another aspect of this Kuiper false teaching is that someone can be saved because of the parents' faith. This is nowhere taught in the Bible. When Abraham was promised that God would be his God and the God of his children, this was not a current event but a future promise. A promise only fulfilled when the child placed his faith in Jesus later in life.

At the same time, we must agree that infants who die young will go to heaven because the Lord can create faith in that little one so he or she can believe in Jesus. We cannot project from this belief and say that ALL infants are saved who live to adulthood. John 3:16 teaches that a conscious belief is prerequisite for eternal life. Only an older person implied.

Biblical church growth starts with evangelism IN the church and then branches out to the environs near us.

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