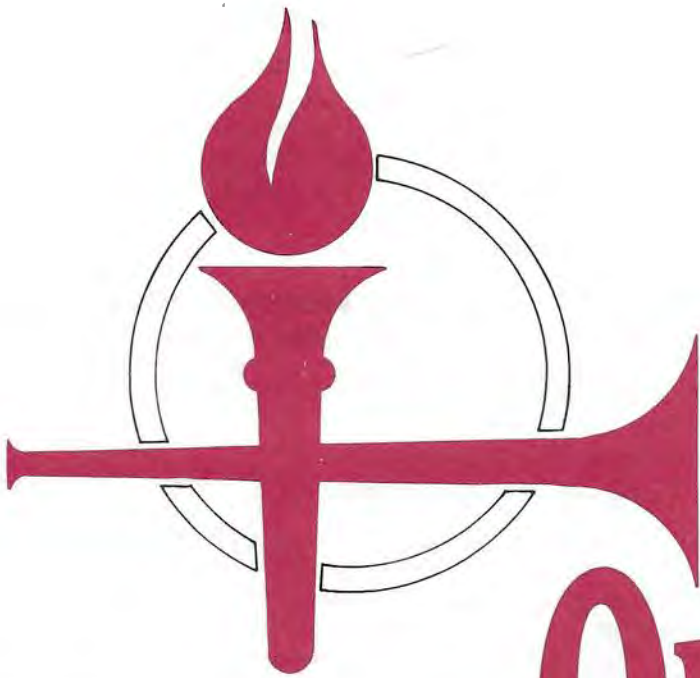




Outlook

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

A Changing Church

World Pictures

**God's or Man's
"Scientific Evidence?"**

NOVEMBER 1988

THE GREAT GAIN OF CONTENTMENT

John Blankespoor

"But godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Tim. 6:6).

• • • • •

The Apostle Paul in this chapter writes to Timothy about the important subject of money and what the Christian's attitude should be towards money. He says that people who want to become rich fall into temptation and a snare and into many foolish and hurtful desires that can plunge them into ruin and destruction. He says that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Notice, he does not say that money is a root of evil, but the *love* of money. Money in itself is not sinful, but a "creature" of God. Paul brings up this matter in speaking of people who were teaching false doctrine and thinking that godliness was a means for financial gain. They may have become religious, or even joined the church because by doing so they would profit materially. Whatever their motives were, Paul corrects this error, saying that godliness with contentment is great gain.

• • • • •

We have come to the fall season of the year, the thanksgiving "season." For many people this past summer has been difficult, because much of North America has been unusually dry and hot. Many farmers and others whose income is related to farming have suffered. It is fitting that they, and we also, see how the Scriptures speak of contentment.

The word contentment brings to mind its opposite, covetousness and discontent. The world has many discontented people — as does the church. People complain and grumble. As I write this meditation

many complain of Michigan's hot summer. People also complain about their work, pay checks, homes, and a hundred other things.

The word "murmuring" brings to mind the history of the Israelites in the desert on the way to Canaan. How bitter they often were. They criticized Moses in the very beginning of their journey when they stood at the banks of the Red Sea and they saw Pharaoh coming with his army of chariots and horses. Weren't there any graves in Egypt that they had to die here? Soon after crossing the Red Sea by God's miracle, they complained about the bitter water, and later they wished they had stayed by the "flesh-pots" of Egypt. This murmuring continued, in spite of the Lord's continuing provision for all their needs. A common complaint was: "Why did the Lord bring us into the desert to kill us and our children and cattle with thirst? They complained about their lack of meat, about the report of the first spies, about their boredom with the food, the miraculous manna. The end result was that God was much displeased with most of them, and most of them were not saved. It is a sobering fact that most of the "church people" of that day were not saved, but lost!

• • • • •

God wants us to be contented, satisfied with what we have. Literally, the text reads "godliness with soul-sufficiency is great gain." It means that at heart you are satisfied. Man was created having a body and soul. Animals are satisfied when they have enough food, drink, and shelter. But that is not true for man who is a spiritual being. Real life for man is more than eating and drinking. What

will satisfy man as such a creation of the Lord? Will enough money, food and other material things satisfy his soul and make him contented? Of course not. Compare some of the translations or paraphrasings of this text. "A man's real life in no way depends upon the number of his possessions" — Philips' translation. The N.E.B. reads this way: "When a man has more than enough, his wealth does not give him life." Material things, money, cannot feed our souls. True contentment, is not found in how much we own and possess of the things of this world. Riches do not bring contentment and rich people as well as poor are often discontented and unhappy. Recall what Jesus said about the rich fool in Luke 12. Faced with a big crop, he planned to build bigger barns, thinking he could then "take life easy, eat, drink and be merry." But that night he died.

• • • • •

"Godliness with contentment is great gain," says Paul. We have to be godly — related to God. This is possible only through faith in Jesus Christ. He is our "righteousness," despite all our failures and shortcomings. And He is our Lord and Master, whom we must reverently try to serve with a holy life. He controls all of our lives and the world in which we live. By His grace, we try to commit our lives to Him and trust in His everlasting mercies. We know that all things, including adversities, work together for good for His people. The hot and dry summers are "from" Him, our crops, pay check and all the favorable and adverse experiences are from the Lord. Faith in Christ produces godly living. In it, we know that we are not our own, but, body and soul, in life

and death, belong to our faithful Savior. In this faith, we acknowledge the Lord's daily love and providence and therefore try to be contented with the cars we drive, the homes we live in, our income, clothing and all our physical assets.

• • • • •

That kind of contentment is "great gain," says Paul.

God wants His children to grow after they have been initially saved, to become more mature children. We must grow in faith and love for God and our neighbors. We must become less earthly-minded and more heavenly-minded. We are usually slow growers, and don't make great gains, even over a period of years. The Heidelberg Catechism says that the holiest have only a small beginning of this new obedience. Paul says that we make *great* gains when we become more contented. To be contented when conditions are adverse, when weather is hot and dry, when the Christian farmer may barely make ends meet, when other people may have much more than we have. We make great gains when we can say with the Scriptures, "having food and clothing, lets us therewith be content."

• • • • •

What is the last word here? A prayer. O God, give us grace to be more godly. We have much more than the Israelites ever had. They had manna for every meal of the day and lived in tents year after year. Compare that with our modern homes and all our conveniences. Because their clothes did not wear out, evidently they never got new clothing and all the adults and children wore were "hand me downs." And they were severely condemned because they murmured. Comparing our lives with theirs suggests our need to pray for forgiveness for all of our discontent and for the Spirit to make us more godly and contented. Let's pray that the Lord will make us more willing to live within our means and not be covetous, but more Christ like. Not the high cost of living, but the cost of high living often makes us dissatisfied. Show us, Lord, that contentment means not to seek what we want, but to gratefully use what we already have. And finally, Lord, make us realize that when we as saved sinners have Christ we can say: "My cup runs over."



Outlook

(USPS 633-980)

Published Monthly

July-August Issue Combined

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

JOURNAL OF REFORMED FELLOWSHIP, INC.

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

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

Production Manager: Peter Wobbema.

Business Manager: Mrs. Mary Kaiser.

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

The publishers of this journal express their adherence to the Calvinistic creeds as formulated in the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dordt, and the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. All contributions represent the personal views of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the members of Reformed Fellowship, Inc.

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

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

EDITORIAL AND CIRCULATION OFFICES

THE OUTLOOK

4855 Starr Street, S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49506. Telephone 949-5421

OFFICE HOURS: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 9-11 a.m.

After Office Hours - please call: 452-9519

Mailing Address: 4855 Starr Street, S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49506

CONTENTS

November 1988	VOLUME XXXVIII	No. 10
The Great Gain of Contentment		2
by John Blankespoor		
More Questions for a Changing Church		4
by Neal Hegeman		
Questioning the Scriptures		5
by Richard Blauw		
The Not-so-Hard "Facts" of Man's Evolution		7
by David A. Kloosterman		
An Attempt to Correct Disastrous Decisions		9
World Pictures		11
by Aaldert Mennega		
The Christian Reconstruction/Theonomy Movement (Part 3-Conclusion)		12
by David K. Watson		
Our Catechism: 425 Years Young		13
by J. Oosterbroek		
Who Am I?		15
by Glenn P. Palmer		
The "Original" Authorship of Consistories		16
by Jelle Tuininga		
Would God Mislead Us With "Scientific Evidence?"		18
by Peter De Jong		
Church Growth		22
by Jelle Tuininga		
What Is the Time?		23
by Thomas Spriensma		

MORE QUESTIONS FOR A CHANGING CHURCH

Neal Hegeman

In the June 20 issue of *Christian Renewal* I asked ten questions about changes which have taken place within the Christian Reformed Church during the 1980's. That article was written on the mission field while preparing to come home on a three-month home service duty. Having visited many Christian brothers and sisters, preached in 16 churches, talked with mission agency directors and college and seminary professors, as well as having been present at the 1988 Synod (in order to interpret for a Dominican pastor), my impressions and picture of what is happening are becoming clearer. Let me share them with you and see if they make sense.

The changes in Bible versions, hymnody, liturgies, church order, mission agencies, creeds, ecumenical relations, publications and denominational mandates, all point to the denominational building at 2850 Kalamazoo Ave. S.E., Grand Rapids. Even the building got a much needed facelift. The new psalter hymnal shows many of the above mentioned changes and it looks like the second and future editions will have to catch up on more changes. The 1987 first edition is already being replaced by the 1988 edition. How much in time, energies, jobs, dialogue, has it cost the church and the board of publications to put out the new Bibles, psalter hymnals, the new church order changes, etc? The denominational energies seem to be concentrated on the weekly periodical and yearly publications and the ideological discussions associated with the changes the "pro-change people" have brought about.

Change of anything at the denominational level has to be brought before synod. Did the churches ask for a new Bible translation, new creed translation, new psalter-hymn book, new ecumenical relationships, new liturgical forms, a new mission board

(World Ministries) and a new denominational building? Perhaps there was a request here and there from the churches and classis, but during the 1980's the majority of classical appeals and overtures dealt with matters such as women in office, and lately, the uncertainty of the views and teachings of three Calvin College professors concerning the doctrine of creation and evolution. The changes proposed by the appealing churches and classis were dealt with very hesitantly. One would ask the question whether synod overprotects its committees and institutions? Several very lengthy and unsuccessful attempts were made to challenge the views of *The Banner* editor. One seminary professor and three Calvin college professors (representing synod-controlled schools) were protected from efforts to stop certain teachings about evolution.

Any who observe church politics must tip their hats to a small group of Grand Rapids ministers, professors, and denominational employees, who have coached the denomination into making changes, which now the denomination must live with. Will the new changes help us to be more faithful to God's Word and Spirit and to edify the Body? Or will they have a reverse affect?

On the other hand, within the church there are many different movements of renewal and concern. The charismatic movement is very strong in certain areas of the CRC. Increasingly, CRC members are looking for fellowship with other evangelicals, be that in the form of attending other evangelical churches or going on special retreats like the *cursillo* movement. The movement of the concerned is also growing. The concerned are not united however, at this stage. There is the Concerned Members organization for the members of

the church, there are two consistorial alliances, one from Lynwood, IL., and the other centered in Classis Hamilton. The periodicals: *The Outlook*, *Christian Renewal* and *Grass Roots* represent a more vocal minority. The Mid-America Seminary continues to grow, be it slowly, but its professors have made solid contributions to denominational life. These three renewal movements: charismatic, evangelical and the concerned are different from the above mentioned movement of synodical changes. The rewriting of creeds, changing Church Order, inclusive-language changes, joining of liberal ecumenical councils, are not a renewal movement but a growing trend towards an inclusive and compromising pluriformity. The CRC has quickly become a pluriform church in which many movements make their home. The liberal ecumenical camp wants to settle into the CRC and it will be interesting to see their efforts during the 1990's.

The CRC is a pluriform church, as opposed to being uniform. This is due to its inability to maintain its Biblical and Confessional standards in a disciplined way. When congregations, ministers, professors and denominational employees deviate, the mutual accountability discipline process is too difficult to apply. Enough time, resources and encouragement are given to those who deviate in order to try to change the churches stance on certain issues.

What is the positive alternative to CRC bureaucracy? I learned a long time ago that when you point one finger at someone, three are pointing back at yourself. It is high time we stop depending on the denominational professionals to do the work we should be doing. Our experience with the World Missions board is that the denominational employees do a very good job and they should be ap-

plauded and encouraged as they had to adjust to many changes that were imposed upon them by the powers that were. Yet a healthy CRC would not need a super-powerful denominational building operation in Grand Rapids. It's high time we regionalize and localize. It's high time the classes and local churches exercise their duty of sending missionaries, preparing materials and training Church leaders, just like we have done with Christian education and congregational life.

In world missions we need to see the local congregation as the main mission agency. From the local church our missionaries should be sent and supported. How many young (or older) missionaries have joined parachurch mission organizations because their own denominational agency could not hire them nor did the local congregation have the vision to support them. At the denominational level we could have coordination and even strategy councils, but the main agency for worldwide missions must be the local church, if the CRC is going to make a dent in the great and urgent need for world evangelization. So my question is: "Is anyone stopping the local church from doing just that or is it more convenient to pay someone else to do *your* job?"

Home missions proposes to add more than 90,000 members before the year 2000 to the CRC. Realistically,

that means all churches should multiply. Is Home missions willing to finance the cost of supporting the hundreds of full time workers it takes to do this job? Of course not. But why can't the local churches simply, on their own, multiply? It will cost and takes people.

In many ways the CRC is a lethargic church, because it pays professionals to do its job. The professionals are happy to have jobs and most do their jobs well. But the real job is not getting done. Can the local church be mobilized?

I have seen parts of the church mobilized. We get mobilized for Christian education, the building fund, disaster-relief funds, and, paying the church budgets, quotas and professionals' salaries. We have a good theology, to have people pay for such causes. But most of those causes are self edifying. What about outreaches? Is church council willing to support young or older couples who express a desire to serve the Lord throughout the world? It's just as important to help your church missionaries who were called to world missions, be it in a place where the denomination mission is not present, than it is to pay Christian school teachers.

Some will read this as a plea for congregationalism. There is a responsible congregationalism, just as there

should be responsible presbyterian rule and synodical rule. If we err in the CRC it is on the side of synodicalism and boardism. The only way to counteract synodicalism is a strong and stable Reformed congregationalism. Grand Rapids Christianity is not the answer, but the church must be all that Christ has mandated the church to be, now. With or without 2850 Kalamazoo Ave. S.E., the kingdom will come! We should give credit where credit is due to the denominational employees and support staff, but the job is not getting done, nor is it realistic to think that it will get done through denominational agencies. Why cannot the denominational professionals be consultants for the local church in how to set up their own home missions and world missions programs? On the mission field we encourage churches to multiply, pray for God to raise up leaders from the congregation (and He does), and help the churches with their mission outreaches. If most people in your town are evangelized, go where they are not. There are still a lot of places which need churches and above all, Christ.

Dr. Neal Hegeman is a CR missionary in the Dominican Republic (address: Aptd. 747-2 Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic).

Richard Blauw

QUESTIONING THE SCRIPTURES

Some time ago I read an article which said in effect that we as Christians ought to have the spiritual and intellectual maturity to be able to question the Scriptures. In the name of academic freedom, we ought to be able to put questions to the Bible without being vilified by fellow Christians. Now that sounds plausible, indeed commendable. Certainly, we Christians ought to be charitable towards one another. The fallacy in this approach, however, is the failure to distinguish the kinds of questions

which may be asked of the Scriptures. The church through the centuries has always put questions to the Scriptures. It must continue to do so in every age if it is to survive as a living vital witness of God's truth to each generation.

However a few principles must be kept in mind if we are to ask the right questions of the Bible. *The first* is this: we may only question the Scripture about subjects which the Bible itself introduces. It would be utter foolishness to look to the Bible for information on how to fix a car, fly an airplane, or per-

form open heart surgery. Obviously it does not address these issues.

The Bible, however, does speak of creation, the fall into sin, redemption in Christ, the hope of the Christian life, suffering, the issue of authority, life in the church, marriage, and a host of other issues. Nicodemus asked Christ, "How can a man be saved?" That is a question that can and must be asked of the Scripture. Or, one might ask how a passage is exegeted. What is the primary emphasis on the parable of the sower? Is it on the

sowing of the seed or the reception of the gospel? One might even ask questions about Jewish wedding customs in order to better understand the context of Christ's first miracle in the wedding of Cana. These are questions which the Scripture itself introduces and without asking questions of the Bible we will never arrive at a better understanding of God's Word. The Catechism is full of questions.

The second principle has always been basic to a Reformed hermeneutic; *Scripture must be used to interpret Scripture*. That is not to say that Christians should not use other disciplines such as archaeology or science, or sociology or history but these disciplines are of secondary importance. If they conflict with the clear teaching of Scripture they are not to be accepted.

The third principle is that questions must be addressed to the Scripture *confessionally*. The parameters of our questioning must be set by the confessions of the church. The form of subscription is quite correct in this emphasis. We live in a very individualistic age. Individualism leads to lawlessness. From a certain perspective there is not much difference between the theological liberal and the charismatic fundamentalist. Both are subjectivists, both care little about the historic confession of the church. Both are rather cavalier in their treatment of the scriptures. For the liberal, the Bible is subservient to a certain intellectual mind-set and for the charismatic fundamentalist the Scripture is secondary to the subjective emotional religious experience. If the church decides the confessions are unbiblical, they ought to be changed or disarded. But that is to be done ecclesiastically. If that is not done, then questions addressed to the Scriptures must be addressed within the context of and in agreement with the historic confessions of the church.

The fourth principle is that questions must be addressed to the Scripture in the humble awareness that the Bible is a regal word. The Scriptures come with the force of royal command. They are marching orders from the King. As such they are to be understood and obeyed. They are not to be re-interpreted and disobeyed. God's Word does not come to us as polite suggestion or soothing advice. It may not be received with indifference, nor may it be intellectually

patronized. We servants are not greater than our Master. Far too often the Bible is re-interpreted as an excuse for disobedience. This disobedience is validated by pious platitudes about the Spirit's leading, heart warming anecdote, and hand-wringing sincerity. But the force of the Scripture as a regal word to be obeyed is totally eclipsed.

The fifth principle is that *the Bible must speak for itself*. It must be understood not merely literally but "literarily." If there is a poetic line, if there is a parable, if there is a metaphor or a simile in the Scriptures they must be understood and interpreted as such. Also, when the Bible presents history, we accept it as history, when it presents miracles we accept them as miracles and when it presents facts we believe them as such. If the Bible presents something as history and it is re-interpreted as a parable we do violence to the very nature of Scripture and stifle the proclamation of the Word of God.

This is the crux of the problem the church now faces. It is not that questions are being put to the Scriptures. That has always been the case. But there are new categories of questions that are being raised—questions that are not appropriate to the text of the Scriptures, and answers are being offered that are no longer shaped by the authority of the Scriptures themselves. These questions involve "re-interpreting" the Bible. Is the account of the creation a parable? Do we have to believe that miracles actually happened? Is the Bible merely the mythology of Christianity? These questions are being asked by those who claim they are Christian and who often sincerely believe they are making the Bible more acceptable or more palatable to the modern mind. But they boil down to asking, is the Bible true, is it trustworthy, can we accept its "event-character?"

These questions are not really a frontal assault on the Scriptures but are more subtle. It is one thing to say, I do not believe in the existence of God and I think the Bible is false. It is quite another thing to say, I believe in God, but the Bible must be understood differently than it has historically been understood by the church. The modern educated, scientific mind simply will not accept it. So questions are being asked about the doctrine of

creation, about miracles, about the historical veracity of the Scriptures.

There is something about the Scriptures that is antithetical to modern science. Miracles are beyond the pale of science. The German theologian Rudolph Bultmann cut to the heart of the matter when he asserted flatly "Resurrections don't happen." From an observable scientific perspective he is correct. Something does not come from nothing, seas are not parted, axe heads do not float, giant fish do not swallow people, virgins do not conceive, men do not walk on water, and there is not a living soul that has ever witnessed a resurrection. But it is not merely the modern scientific mind that knows these facts; the average Roman citizen in the first century understood this as well. The Athenians mocked the Apostle Paul on Mars Hill when he preached concerning the physical resurrection of Christ.

Some think that it is a mark of Christian academic freedom to cultivate a healthy skepticism regarding the Scriptures. Indeed to vigorously defend the Scriptures is to run the risk of being labeled a "Biblicist." That is the rhetoric of unbelief. Far better to cultivate a child-like faith, than a perverse skepticism. Modern liberal theology, because it asks the wrong questions, has become a barren spiritual wasteland. The study of God's word is reduced to an empty, hollow exercise in theological jargon and linguistic trivialities. The plain clear sense and teaching of the Scriptures is ignored. In a word, it promotes another gospel and, as such, is anathema.

The Scripture notes that ultimately we understand things by faith (Hebrews 11:2). Faith is not irrational but it does challenge our sin-tainted powers of reason. It is the "conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). That is why it must be a gift of the Spirit. Calvin once noted that he who is to be schooled by the Spirit must attend the Spirit's school. The school of the Spirit is the Scripture, the Word of God. Students at this school will not only be judged by the answers they give, but also by the questions they ask.

Rev. Richard J. Blauw is the pastor of the First C.R. Church at Chino, California 91710.

David A. Kloosterman

THE NOT-SO-HARD “FACTS” OF MAN’S EVOLUTION

Not long ago many influential scholars spoke of the “certain results” and “assured findings” of the “science” of higher textual criticism as having rendered untenable the orthodox conception of Biblical history. Over the years numerous archaeological discoveries have blown up one “assured result” after another. The existence of the Hittites, of writing at the time of Moses, of a king named Tiglath-Pileser (II Kings 15:29) who destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel, of the first century authorship of the gospel of John—all of these in the past have been confidently denied by the liberal scholars; and all of these have more recently been confirmed by archaeological discoveries. Such examples can be multiplied; yet the higher critics continue to spin off new theories from their ivory towers of unbelief, undeterred by the lack of solid support such theories have found in the past.

And they continue to slay their thousands. When freshly spun, many of their theories and arguments—such as the past assertion that writing did not exist at the time of Moses—seem unanswerable. Yet those who have retained their belief in the historical trustworthiness of an inerrant Bible have time and again lived to see their own position vindicated rather than that of the “scientific” higher critics.¹

There is a second group of influential scholars who today are slaying their *tens* of thousands. They too speak of the “scientific facts” which have done away with the orthodox conception of Biblical history as it is recorded in Genesis 1-11. They too have persisted in spinning off new

theories only to have them rapidly blow up due to the absence of supporting evidence and the eventual discovery of contradictory evidence. The subject of their speculations? The evolution of man.

Yet many non-technical people who hear only the confident pronouncements of the evolutionists and who do not have the opportunity to read and evaluate the scientific literature find it hard to deal with these challenges. Especially so since many of the evangelical intellectuals—the scientists and theologians—have displayed greater skepticism with respect to the historicity of the Genesis account than they have to the ever-changing theories of paleoanthropology. As a result, many Christians are unaware of the complete lack of compelling scientific evidence to account for the recent widespread abandonment of belief in God’s miraculous creation of Adam and Eve. Yet the scientific case for man’s evolution is no stronger than it was a hundred years ago, despite the on-going diligent search for the missing links.

A half-century ago the thrice-censured Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (whom a recent Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship book describes as a “great Christian thinker”) arrogantly asserted “It is irreconcilable with what we know from biology that our human species should be descended from a pair (quoted by Malachi Martin in *The Jesuits*; p. 287).” De Chardin was confidently parroting the classical Darwinian dogma that evolution occurs very gradually in large populations. Today, as anyone knows who has kept at all abreast of

developments in paleontology, this conception of evolution has fallen on rather hard times. The trouble is, fossils of the supposed transitional forms, which ought to be plentiful, are in fact absent. Since Darwin’s *Origin of Species* was first published in 1859, over a century and a quarter of diligent fossil collecting has failed to discover the hypothetical transitional forms. This is as true of the supposed ape-man transition as it is of other transitions. So a new theory of evolution, called saltational or punctuated equilibria evolution, has recently been formulated by leading paleontologists such as Niles Eldridge, Stephen Gould, and Steven Stanley. To account for the lack of transitional forms in the fossil record they theorize that in general evolutionary change has occurred rapidly (in thousands instead of millions of years) and in very small, isolated populations (perhaps starting from just a pair of individuals). This theory also has problems,² which I shall not deal with here; however, it is clear that the “scientific knowledge” confidently trumpeted by de Chardin is increasingly being rejected by modern paleontologists.

Teilhard de Chardin made a further abortive contribution to establishing the myth of man’s evolution through the role he played in the discovery and evaluation of Piltdown Man: This “fossil,” on which over fifty PhD theses were written, was “discovered” in 1912 and finally proved in 1950 (38 years later!) to be a complete fraud constructed of a doctored ape’s jaw fitted with a human skull. The bones were deliberately stained to give the

appearance of age; the teeth had been filed down to the desired ape-man shape. De Chardin is considered by many as a prime suspect as at least being a co-conspirator in the perpetration of this fraud.

Nor has this been by any means the only such instance of a much-heralded ape-man "missing link" fossil turning out, on closer analysis, to be not such after all. Nebraska Man was extrapolated from a single fossil tooth, which was later shown to be that of an extinct peccary, or wild pig. Creationist author Dr. Duane Gish comments that this is one instance in which a pig made a monkey out of an evolutionist.

Joining Piltdown Man and Nebraska Man as "scientific facts of evolution" at the famous Scopes trial in 1925 was Java Man. The discoverer of this hodge-podge collection of fragmentary fossils, Eugene Du Bois, later dismissed his own find as the unrelated parts of a human and a giant gibbon.

Some other evolutionists who knew less than Du Bois did concerning the poorly documented excavation of the Java Man fossils, continued to claim the bones belonged together, were quite man-like (as indeed the human bones were), and of the same species as Peking Man, whom they classified as *Homo erectus*.

Peking Man provides us with yet another strange story. As Gish chronicles, the descriptions of the Peking Man fossils evolved remarkably in the scientific literature. In earlier descriptions the fossils are very ape-like, in later descriptions very man-like. But no one has been able to examine the Peking Man fossils for the last forty-seven years since they mysteriously disappeared during the Japanese occupation of China in World War II. Wonderfully, cast of reconstructions of the Peking Man fossils have been preserved. It is interesting to note that our supercilious evolutionist crusader de Chardin played a leading role in the excavation of the Peking Man site.

In general, real fossils which were once touted as "missing links" between the apes and man on closer analysis have proven to be either very much apes (Pilbeam's *Ramapithecus*, L. Leakey's *Zinjanthropus*, Johanson's "Lucy," Dart's "Taung Child," — these latter three now classified in the genus *Australopithecus*, ie. "southern apes")

or they have proven to be very much human (Neanderthal Man, Cro-Magnon Man). A third category is "extremely fragmentary and disputable" (eg. L. Leakey's *Homo habilis*).

Most paleontologists today agree that the Neanderthals were fully human. At the most they may represent a vanished race of man. The Australopithecines, on the other hand, the favorite "missing link" of recent years, are very like modern chimpanzees, with an average cranial capacity of 500 c.c. or less (about one third that of man and in the range of gorilla). These apes' remains have regularly made the cover of *National Geographic* in recent years. Why? It is claimed by some that certain skeletal fragments suggest that they walked relatively upright, and that certain aspects of the dentition are more similar to humans than to apes. It has been also claimed as "hard evidence" for man's evolution that the shape of the bones in the nasal region of some of these fossils exhibit a "paranthropine" (man-like) pattern.

All of these claims have been persuasively disputed in the scientific literature. Richard Leakey has published evidence that indicates that "the australopithecines were long-armed, short-legged knuckle-walkers, similar to extant African apes (*Nature*, V. 231, p. 241 (1971); *Science News*, V. 100, p. 357 (1971))." In a CAT-scan study of the dentition of the Taung skull, two scientists conclude "the dental development patterns revealed here by CT are clearly comparable to those of a 3-4 year old great ape (*Nature*, V. 329, p. 627 (1987))." Another study examined the variability of nasal bone structure in modern great ape skulls and found that a significant percentage of chimpanzees, gorillas, and orangutans also exhibited the "paranthropine" pattern considered so important in some of the *Australopithecus* fossils (*Nature*, V. 328, pp. 333-335 (1987)).

Besides all this, as creationist author Dr. Gary E. Parker points out, the question should be asked how crucial to the definition of man are his teeth and his upright posture? The living rare pygmy chimpanzee, *Pan paniscus*, also spends a fair amount of time walking upright. Gish notes that the living high-altitude Ethiopian baboon, *Theropithecus galada*, possesses dental features considered "man-like" in fossils.

In short, the gap between man and ape is as big as it ever was, though ill-founded speculation abounds. As the jacket cover to evolutionist author John Reader's 1981 book *Missing Links* explains: "...seeing how little evidence exists — the entire significant hominid [fossil] collection would barely cover a billiard table — it is easy to understand why most of these theories are controversial."

To top it off, paleoanthropologists are notoriously subjective in their analysis of the fossils. Saltational evolutionist Steven M. Stanley writes: "Even today, the most common interpretation of human evolution places us at the end of a single lineage tracing back to a slender australopithecine — a somewhat apelike humanoid.... This view has prevailed to the point that it has become difficult to extract objective observations from many writings on the subject. Fossils have often been described in terms of how they seem to fit a pre-conceived gradualistic scheme rather than in terms of their fundamental attributes (*The New Evolutionary Timetable*, p. 138 [1981])." Later in the same book he writes: "...the old idea *Australopithecus africanus* being gradually transformed into *Homo erectus* [ie. Peking Man, Java Man] by way of '*Homo*' *habilis* is now difficult to defend (p. 149)." Roger Lewin, an individual who has co-authored two best-selling books with fellow evolutionist Richard Leakey, and who is currently editor of research news for the prestigious scientific journal *Science*, has recently (1987) written a book entitled *Bones of Contention: Controversies in the Search for Human Origins*. In this book he documents the subjectivity, the emotional involvement, the subconscious community influences, etc., which in case after case (Taung, *Ramapithecus*, *Zinjanthropus*, the "1470" skull, Lucy, etc.) have led to a breakdown in the quality of the science.

In the past few years biochemists have challenged the paleoanthropologists' speculations with widely differing views of their own. These biochemists have concluded from genetic similarities and a number of assumptions (especially concerning the rate of random mutations) that all of humanity can trace their lineages back to a single woman, appropriately called "Eve," who, according to their calculations lived some 200,000 years

ago. The great majority of evolutionists cannot accept such a recent date as this and would be much happier with Eve who lived more than 2 million years ago. This is an order of magnitude difference! According to *Newsweek* "Eve has provoked a scientific controversy bitter even by the standards of anthropologists, who have few rivals at scholarly sniping (Jan. 11, 1988; p. 46)." The article quotes a Fred Smith of the University of Tennessee as saying: "What bothers many of us paleontologists is the perception that this new data from DNA is so precise and scientific and that we paleontologists are just a bunch of bumbling old fools. But if you listen to the geneticists, you realize they're as divided about their genetic data as we are about the bones. We may be bumbling fools, but we're not any more bumbling than they are. (p. 47)."

Even the long-held and widely believed assumption that the African great apes are man's "closest living relatives" has now been questioned.

Some cladistic taxonomists are asserting that that distinction belongs rather to the Asian ape, the orangutan. There is virtually not one single thing that evolutionists can agree on as a solid fact concerning man's supposed evolution from the apes.

The multiplied theories amount to much ado about nearly nothing, bringing to mind Mark Twain's remark: "There is something fascinating about science. One gets such wholesale returns of conjecture out of such trifling investments of fact." Twain was a skeptic, but at least he was a thoroughgoing one. Would that more evangelical college and seminary professors who profess belief in Total Depravity were as skeptical towards that very human pursuit known as science!

With regards to man's hypothetical evolutionary origins the past century has witnessed one after another "assured fact" of science self-destruct. Whatever may be the reason for the recent widespread abandonment among evangelical intellectuals of the

historicity of the Genesis account of man's origins, one thing seems certain: the reason is *not* to be found in recent scientific discoveries.

1. See James Montgomery Boice's pamphlet "Does Inerrancy Matter?" ICBF Foundation Series 1 (1979).

2. As an example of just one of the difficulties of the punctuated equilibria conception of evolution I will quote from Michael Denton's book *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* (1986; p. 194); "To suggest that the hundreds, thousands or possibly even millions of transitional species which must have existed in the interval between vastly dissimilar types were all unsuccessful species occupying isolated area and having very small population numbers is verging on the incredible!"

David A. Kloosterman an analytical chemist and Calvin College graduate.
3610 Konkle St., Kalamazoo, MI 49001.

AN ATTEMPT TO CORRECT DISASTROUS DECISIONS

The Dutton C.R. Church asks Clasis Thornapple Valley to request a revision of the decisions of the 1988 Synod which ignored and thereby, in effect, approved the continuing questioning and denial of our Biblical and confessed doctrine of Creation at Calvin College.

The Synod Of 1972 (*Acts*, p. 69) addressing this issue, warned "against the use of any method of biblical interpretation which excludes or calls into question either the event-character or the revelational meaning of biblical history thus compromising the full authority of Scripture as the Word of God."

The Synod of 1982 (*Acts* p. 107) reiterated this warning, declaring that

"adherence to the confessions, as required by the Form of Subscription, includes those utterances of the confession that affirm the historical factuality of the events recorded in Genesis 1-3, and that departures from these doctrines must be dealt with in terms of the requirements of that form."

The published book of Dr. Howard Van Till, *The Fourth Day*, explicitly and repeatedly does the very thing that these synod warnings say must not be done. Its questioning or denials of events in the Bible's account of creation are unmistakable in many places in the book. We are early informed, for example, regarding "information about events, or information

about the material world expressed in the pre-scientific language of the day," that, "taking the Bible seriously does not require us to treat such matters as the product of divine revelation" (p. 13). The book informs us that these Bible stories "are much more like parables than like journalistic reports of events." As such "illustrative stories," "They were never intended to answer questions about precisely what happened," (p. 83). "The seven-day chronology that we find in Genesis 1 has no connection with the actual chronology of the Creator's continuous dynamic action in the cosmos." It is "a literary device, a framework...the packaging in which the message is wrapped...not the

events of creative action reported with photographic realism but rather imaginative illustrations of the way in which God and the Creation are related" (pp. 84, 85). Page 91 alludes to "the unwarranted assumption that Genesis 1 is meant to be a journalistic recounting of God's original creative activity, a log of God's specific acts in constructing the cosmos and the creatures that inhabit it." (Notice that this is not a "questioning," but a flat denial of the "event-character" of the Bible's account.)

After a quotation from John Calvin's *Institutes*, not regarding creation, but affirming God's continuing providence for His creation, Calvin's statement is misrepresented to support the claim that "according to biblical theism, the word *creation* stands not for merely an instantaneous act or event but for an eternal, covenantal relationship. Even an event as important as an initial act of exnihilation—if that is a valid concept—stands as but one grain of sand on the endless seashore of the Creator's eternal relationship with his Creation" (p. 226). Calvin's *Commentary on Genesis 1:1* far from endorsing such an interpretation of "creation" as an eternal relationship, states that God "teaches by the word 'created,' that what before did not exist was now made.... Therefore his meaning is, that the world was made out of nothing. Hence the folly of those is refuted who imagine that unformed matter existed from eternity.... This indeed was formerly a common fable among heathens...but for Christian men to labour...in maintaining this gross error is absurd and intolerable. Let this, then, be maintained in the first place, that the world is not eternal, but was created by God." Thus this book questions not merely details of the creation account, but questions whether the notion of "exnihilation" ("creation out of nothing") is "a valid concept" at all, suggesting instead what Calvin called the "absurd and intolerable" pagan notion that the universe may be eternal.

Furthermore, the book states that the author has been teaching these views to more than 2000 students during the last ten years (p. 75).

After the Board's year-long investigation and approval of the teaching of such views the 1988 Synod (according to the June 27 *Banner*) was confronted "with 40 overtures and communications asking it to review

the board's decision." That synod "turned down a proposal that Calvin physics professor Howard Van Till and geology professors Clarence Menninga and Davis Young be prohibited from teaching in a way that might lead to questions about 'the event character of the history in the early chapters of Genesis.'" Instead, the synod appointed a 3-year study committee, not in any way to curtail the continued teaching of the views that called forth objections, but merely to study "the relationship between special and general revelation."

What this means is that the synod, the largest governing body of the churches, in the face of over 40 objections, has officially condoned within our institutions, what previous synods in 1972 and 1982 had forbidden, the questioning and denials of our Biblical, confessed teaching of God's Creation. Thus the denomination has, in a concrete case, officially approved the ongoing denial of the first revealed doctrine of the Bible and our Christian creeds, "In the beginning God created the Heaven and the earth," and "I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth."

In the face of this actual discard of a first essential of the Gospel of Christ, the confession of God the Creator, we propose that the classis appeal to the synod of 1989 to revise the decisions in order to officially recommit our churches to the confession which has been compromised, and to take whatever steps are needed to ensure that the teaching of our churches' school will stop denying what our churches must confess.

Grounds:

1. The 1988 decisions by refusing to restrain the questioning and denials of the event character of the Genesis account have in fact approved the continuation of such teaching.
2. The synod's affirmation that the "Church confesses its complete subjection to the Word of God and to the Reformed creeds" and that the Calvin faculty has expressed its loyalty to these and "the event character of Genesis 1- 11" are effectively cancelled by the synod's own refusal to maintain these positions in the case which was before it.
3. The appropriate way to seek correction of faulty decisions appears to be that which is stipulated in Article 31 of the Church Order. Done in Consistory Ang. 7, 1988.

NOTES:

Article 31 reads, "A request for revision for a decision shall be submitted to the assembly which made the decision. Such a request shall be honored only if sufficient and new grounds for reconsideration are presented." The September 20 Classis, sustained by a 13 to 11 vote, quickly dismissed the matter; ruling that "no new ground" was advanced to reconsider the issue. How could there be "no new ground" when the main grounds advanced were the self-contradictory decisions of the 1988 synod? Is there "nothing new" when one of our church assemblies contradicts itself in dealing with the same matter? This classis action opens the way to submit the matter to the coming synod. (Editor).

HEAR: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Dr. Lester De Koster
Nov. 10, 7:30 p.m.
Dutton C.R. Church
Thornapple Valley Concerned CRC
Members annual meeting.

In the old yet current debate over creation vs. evolution there is one area which needs special attention, namely, the concept of world pictures.

A world picture is the way we conceive of the world operating, in light of what we know and believe, in regard to what is there, how it works, and how it got to be there. This world picture is easily influenced by what we read and hear, and the more we read and hear about the world out there, from both Christian and non-Christian perspectives, the more careful we have to be in sorting out those influences, and making sure that we make the right choices.

It is important that we start with God, because He is the only Person who really knows the entire situation. And we know about God only because He has revealed Himself in the Bible. The Bible is God's Word to us and tells us who He is, who we are, and what our relationship is and ought to be to Him, to our fellow men, and to other creatures.

Only through sovereign grace does God give us true faith in Him, and through the working of the Holy Spirit we can have the beginning of a proper understanding of the origin of the world and its inhabitants.

By careful and obedient listening to God's Word in the Bible we get our world view - the perspective in which we see all of life. It is this Bible-based world view that must also be the basis for how we see the world operating today. Our world view must determine how we select theories and opinions about the world, and how we put together our world picture. Our world picture must, therefore, be founded on the Bible and on the world view which it portrays to us. Then we can deal with all the data that are gathered by scientists. And then we can properly evaluate the theories and hypotheses that come to our attention.

It is important to recognize that we cannot make a neat separation between the Bible giving us a general world view on the one hand, and natural science, on the other hand,

giving us a separate world picture that would give us the hard facts. Our world view and our world picture are not unrelated.

Science is not nearly as objective as we would like it to be, because scientists are not as objective as we would like them to be. Nobody can be objective in doing science. Everyone comes with preconceived notions and strong convictions, and with ideas that have been planted in his mind through reading and studying. Unbiblical ideas must, therefore, be carefully eliminated from the way we see the world in its structure, operation and origin.

It is the Bible that must give us the basic concepts about origins. And we know that, though the information is limited, it is correct and true. When we have such a biblically-oriented framework, we can gather all kinds of data and fit them into that biblical framework. When we are true to the natural world and obediently listen to God's Word in the Bible, then we will find that there can be no conflict between the two. Facts from natural science will always fit our world picture if our world view is biblically correct and not contaminated with secular thought. With the accumulation of additional data, our world picture may change somewhat, but our biblical world view should never change.

For Christians today it is important to realize that the secular world picture is not compatible with the biblical world view. Compromise is being sought by many. But the mechanistic world picture fits well only with a secular world view and cannot truly be harmonized with the basic biblical concepts.

Secular scientists may be well informed, but that does not mean that therefore their world picture is scientifically informed. They have made the data fit their presuppositions to the best of their ability. And for that we must give them credit. But their world picture is skewed, because their world view is not based on biblical principles.

But those Christians who are scientists and yet do not accept the secular

world picture, too can be well informed. And they made the data fit their presuppositions and basic commitments as well. That way they, too, derive a world picture, but it conflicts with that of the secular scientists. Who is scientific in this situation? Only those who most carefully and honestly deal with all the data available.

But is that secular world picture actually scientific? While most secular scientists adhere to the secular world picture, and call this "the scientific view," it must be recognized that the majority is not necessarily right, nor does this make their view scientific.

And when we compare the so-called "scientifically-informed" world picture with the ultimate truth of the Bible, we see that there is indeed a conflict between the basic biblical concept that God has supernaturally called the world into being and, on the other hand, the basic assumption of the secularist that the world could and did develop by natural means, according to the laws and principles by which we today understand the world and its parts to operate. These two concepts in the current debate over creation and evolution - of the supernatural acts of God and of the natural behavior of matter being the ultimate origin of the world - cannot be reconciled.

We must take careful note of this incompatibility, and we must remember it clearly as the debate continues. The distinction between the Creator God and His creaturely handiwork must be maintained at all cost. No amount of knowledge gained from natural science can tell us of the supernatural activities of our almighty God. Only God can tell us about those matters. Whatever He left untold will remain unknown forever. We should have perfect peace with that, also as scientists.

Dr. Aaldert Mennega is Professor of Biology at Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa 51250.

THE CHRISTIAN RECONSTRUCTION/ THEONOMY MOVEMENT

Part 3-Conclusion

David K. Watson

Evaluation

It is very difficult to evaluate a movement which is constantly in flux, both ideologically and organizationally. There is a great deal of intellectual ferment within the theonomist camp and books and articles are being published at a rapid rate. Ideas are generated constantly and are being sent out like trial balloons. Each new work is a refinement on the last. To criticize an earlier work by a theo-nomic author is to run the risk of misrepresenting his present position.

These factors have helped to contribute to the reluctance on the part of many leaders and scholars within the Reformed community to closely examine or contend with the issue of theonomy. Certainly, some have been inhibited by their own traditionalism. Theonomy is outside of the consensus of Reformed thinking today, and therefore, few are inclined to seriously assess such a radical departure from the norm.

Undoubtedly, a primary fear of potential critics is that they will evoke a torrent of criticism. Many theonomists are, if anything, prolific letter-writers, quick to jump to their own defense or that of their leaders if they feel that they have been in any way maligned. Practically any one who has engaged in public treatment of the movement has been inundated by mail. Coupled with this, from time to time, have been threats of civil and ecclesiastical law suits.

Positive Aspects

Theonomy has much to commend it. It has challenged the Reformed community to take the Old Testament Mosaic law seriously. All too often, we have glibly said, "All scripture ... is profitable" (2 Tim. 3:16), without reading the books of the Law for practical insights into righteous living for today.

Theonomy seeks to propagate a Reformed world-and-life view. It recognizes that the Lordship of Jesus Christ must be proclaimed over every area of life - including politics, eco-

nomics, and education. Joe Morecraft, theonomic pastor of the Chalcedon church in Atlanta, was the official, but ultimately unsuccessful, Republican candidate for a seat in the U.S. Congress in 1986.

Theonomy has also correctly identified many of the social ills of modern society. It realizes that they are deeply ingrained in our secular, humanistic culture (and within our own selves) and that an equally radical remedy must be administered. Many theonomists have put their time and money into actively supporting Christian education, opposing abortion, and challenging government intrusion into church affairs.

Finally, many theonomists have challenged the Reformed churches to re-evaluate their liturgical traditions. Should we partake of the Lord's Supper in our worship services more often? The issue of paedocommunion forces us to re-examine whether our covenant children should be encouraged to make a profession of faith at an earlier age. Blessings can come through these challenges.

Negative Aspects

Although there is a great deal which is attractive about theonomy to those who wish to be thoroughly Reformed, both in their theological and cultural outlooks, there are many attendant dangers. Foremost is the danger of drawing a straight line of continuity of application between Old Testament laws and New Testament situations. The theonomic emphasis on the "abiding validity of the law in exhaustive detail" is liable to abuse by adherents who are less attuned to both the continuity and discontinuity between the two covenants.

Extracting general principles from the detailed Mosaic case laws is tricky business. Determining which level of generality is applicable to our modern culture demands adept hermeneutical skills. Many people have jumped on the theonomy bandwagon, believing that it offers simple solutions for socie-

tal problems. Closer scrutiny reveals that there is no biblical quick fix.

On a practical level, the greatest danger of theonomy is the censorious mind-set which often accompanies it. It is difficult to determine whether the movement produces adherents who are highly critical of others or just attracts them. Whatever the case, time and again, people perceived as opponents of theonomy have been denounced with the most uncompromising labels attached to them. Christian brothers should not be treated so poorly.

Sometimes the opponents of theonomy have been at fault by over-generalizing. The inflammatory rhetoric of certain theonomists has been attributed to the whole lot of them. A better approach is one that recognizes the diversity within the movement and assesses people on an individual basis. An irenic or bridge-building approach may go a long way in modifying some theonomic extremism. Vern Poythress, a professor at Westminster Seminary, presents a good model to follow in his forthcoming book, tentatively entitled, *Understanding the Law of Moses*.

Reformed Tradition

We must be on guard against mere traditionalism in our practice. The Word of God, not the word of man, is our ultimate criterion. Theonomy must be examined in the light of Scripture. Several theological critiques of theonomy have been written, but none are readily accessible at the present. Another forthcoming book, tentatively entitled, *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique of the Movement*, will hopefully help to fill that vacuum. Edited by William Barker and ordained CRC minister, Robert Godfrey, it will contain contributions from Westminster faculty members from both the Philadelphia and California campuses.

Tradition can be instructive while we anticipate these publications. Historically, Reformed scholars have operated with a tripartite division of

the law in mind, dividing it into its moral, civil or judicial, and ceremonial aspects. Only the moral law, summarized in the Ten Commandments, has been considered binding on the New Testament believer. Theonomy, while recognizing that the ceremonial law has been fulfilled in Christ, contends that the division between the moral law and the explanatory judicial case laws is unbiblical. Theonomy presumes that the judicial laws are binding unless explicitly abrogated in the New Testament.

Calvin certainly operated with the three-fold division in mind. About the judicial laws, Calvin wrote, "The allegation, that insult is offered to the law of God enacted by Moses, where it is abrogated, and other new laws are preferred to it, is most absurd ... The Lord did not deliver it by the hand of Moses to be promulgated in all countries, and then be everywhere enforced" (*Institutes*, IV. xx. 16).

Elsewhere he remarked, "There are some who deny that a commonwealth is rightly framed which neglects the law of Moses, and is ruled by the common law of nations. How perilous and seditious these views are ... for me it is enough to demonstrate that they are stupid and false" (IV. xx. 14).

Ursinus, one of the authors of the

Heidelberg Catechism, stated that, "The judicial laws have been so abrogated by the coming of Christ, that they no longer bind any to obedience, and they have not the appearance and force of laws in respect to the present time" (*Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 492).

The Westminster divines wrote in their Confession of Faith that, "To them also, as a body politick, he gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any other now further than the general equity thereof may require" (XIX. 4).

Kuyper wrote in a series of articles in *The Standard* in May-June, 1874, that when "our fathers called upon the state to suppress idolatry (Belgic Confession, Art. 36), they made a mistake to be protested. Government cannot enter the spiritual contest between truth and error." Later he remarked that "the carrying on of the theocratic idea in the history of the Western Church has been a great error. The situation in which the theocratic laws were given no longer exists."

Van Til, whose presuppositional apologetics most theonomists claim as their own, had this to say in a letter written on May 11, 1972 to Gregg Singer which is kept in the West-

minster Seminary archives: "I am frankly a little concerned about the political views of Mr. Rushdoony and Mr. North and particularly if I am correctly informed about some of the views Gary North has with respect to the application of Old Testament principles to our day. My only point is that I would hope and expect that they would not claim that such views are inherent in principles which I hold."

Conclusion

This brief survey of the origins and recent developments of the theonomy movement, along with this even more inadequate evaluation, should serve to whet the appetite of the curious reader. Theonomic literature can be ordered at many Christian bookstores and trial subscriptions to many of their newsletters are free. Some promising critiques of theonomy are forthcoming. Above all, search the Scriptures to see if these things are so (Acts 17:11).

Mr. David K. Watson has a BA from Wheaton College, an MACS from Calvin College (where he made a special study of this movement) and an MAR from Westminster Theological Seminary. His address is 3 Manoa Rd., Havertown, PA 18083.

J. Oosterbroek

OUR CATECHISM: 425 YEARS YOUNG

In an old edition of the authorized Dutch Bible [Statenbijbel] there is a picture of Adam and Eve in paradise. Adam is busy teaching his sons Cain and Abel from a little book. Bold letters on the cover of the book read: *Heidelberg Catechism*. Is that not a bit far-fetched? Above all, is that not impossible? Adam, the first man, with a book from the 16th century?

Nevertheless, if you think about what the artist was trying to say, an important point is being made: The artist meant that the instruction we receive from that little book is necessary for all children of Adam. That instruction

is necessary in order to live in comfort and one day to die saved. It is unnecessary for a man to know more; but you can not do with less.

That artist meant the same thing that in the days of the Reformation and the Afscheiding of 1834 was powerfully proclaimed and reaffirmed: Remember that this book of doctrine is necessary and remains relevant! Whoever devalues this instruction shames himself, impoverishes the church and thereby causes the spiritual life to diminish. Above all, the next generation may not know what it means to be a poor sin

ner living out of the treasures of salvation as one justified by the blood of Christ.

Our catechism is still relevant even though it is a document that came into existence 425 years ago. In this connection someone has spoken of "the eternal youth of Heidelberg."

In the days of the Reformation many catechisms came into existence. It was clear that there was a need to see to it that the Gospel, as it was rediscovered at the Reformation, be learned by old and young. Nevertheless, the Heidelberg remained as the most popular of all and continues to be preserved in its eternal youth.

Historic Reformed Track

As a rule, in churches which desire to remain true to the heritage of the Reformation, the Heidelberg is preached in the second service. In many vacant congregations catechism sermons are read or the guest minister is asked to preach on a particular Lord's Day. How can this ongoing relevance be explained?

In various textbooks on preaching which have appeared in reformed territory over the years strong cases have been made for the vindication of catechism preaching in the congregation. In so doing one is moving on the historic track of the Reformation.

When the catechism appeared in 1563, it quickly became known as *The Netherlands* by means of Petrus Datheen's translation which he had printed in his Psalter for the churches. Already by 1566, the Rev. Pieter Gabriël of Amsterdam was preaching out of the Heidelberg every Sunday. At various particular and national synods in the 16th century it was officially decided to use this catechism in the second service. At the Synod of Dordrecht 1618/1619 it was determined as follows: "On Sundays, ordinarily in the second service, ministers everywhere will briefly explain the summary of Christian doctrine contained in the catechism presently adopted by the Dutch churches, in such a way that it might be completed annually, in accordance with how the catechism itself is divided."

This regulation can be found in Art. 8 of the Church Order of Dort and continues to be observed down to the present day in churches of reformed persuasion.

Weapon

What did our fathers have in mind with their powerful pleas for catechism preaching? It concerned mainly three things: 1) preserving sound doctrine against heresy, 2) passing the truth down to the youth, and 3) building up the congregation in the faith through ongoing instruction. Let me give an example. Bastinguis, a student of Ursinus and Olevianus who received his doctorate in Heidelberg in 1575, said it all in his declaration concerning the catechism: The catechism is a weapon against "monsters and beasts" but at the same time it is instruction "for the shepherds as well as the sheep," because it leads into the

"sanctuary of Scripture" and brings the people to the fountain "where all the streams of ecclesiastical writings originate." At this fountain we are made into "disciples of the Holy Spirit in the unity of the faith."

Our reformed heritage would be unimaginable without the catechism. It has shaped and comforted countless generations.

Not the Last Word

Is the catechism now only a more-than-400-year-old monument for which we have respect, or is it more?

To be perfectly clear I must mention that the catechism, in and of itself, has no divine authority. Preaching from the catechism must, after all, also be the preaching of the Word. Only the Bible has divine authority.

Anyone who knows the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, however, will discover that the Heidelberg, right down to its formulations, stands right next to Scripture. There is often the danger of confessionalism. Confessionalism is an overestimation of a confession to the extent that it is as if with a reformed confession the last word has been said and that Scripture has in fact come to its own in the confession. Then we are in fact laying the catechism over the Bible.

Certainly our catechism is drawn from the well of the Word, but the well is not thereby depleted. The catechism is a summary, a careful arrangement of the Scriptural data, with the purpose of making the Bible clearer and more easily understood. The over 700 proof-texts under the answers of the Heidelberg say enough in that respect. Anyone who is preparing himself for the handling of a portion of the catechism can familiarize himself with that Lord's Day by these proof-texts.

It is well for a preacher who knows himself bound to God's Word and to the reformed faith to reflect on the Heidelberg and to preach it every week in his congregation. That practice protects the preacher from one-sidedness because he feels compelled to deal with things from the Word of God which in the first instance might not suit him. He is constrained to proclaim the whole counsel of God for the redemption of sinners. Weekly catechism preaching is also important for the congregation. She needs to hear the whole counsel of God in a

balanced way and must be protected from the danger of wanting to hear only what she likes to hear.

Weekly catechism preaching works to shape and build-up the congregation in the faith. The catechism has an eternal youth. I think of the powerful beginning of Lord's Day 1: The preaching of our only comfort in life and death. I consider unsurpassed answer 60 to the question: "How are you righteous before God?" Here stands a man, a sinner, before the eternal and holy God. Here says a man who he is, but still more who God is for him. Everything hinges on the powerful "nevertheless" of faith.

Ethical Terrain

In 1930 Prof. G. Wisse gave a public lecture on "Catechism Preaching for Our Times." Wisse maintained in his speech that the sense of catechism preaching is that the congregation is enriched in the riches of the knowledge of God. He also pointed out that in all times the best part of the congregation cherishes catechism preaching above all. This certainly has something to do with the practical orientation of the document and that is certainly also why it is so useful for spiritual direction in preaching. In the catechism, the things of the Lord are brought into view.

Doctrine is life, not intellectual gymnastics. Doctrine is the unfolding of God's work of salvation. Catechism preaching distinguishes itself precisely by its confession of God's sovereignty, the lostness of man, God's free grace, and absolute dependence upon the Holy Spirit. In our day the vertical relationship to God is often made subservient to the horizontal. The treatment of the catechism protects both minister and congregation from going off track in this regard as well.

Catechism preaching also has a message for today's questions and ethical problems. With the treatment of the law in the last portion of the catechism a preacher who knows what he is doing can give direction from the Word of God with regard to many questions that resound on the ethical terrain today.

For example, without resorting to acrobatic tricks he can very easily draw a line to today's arms race question from answers 95 and 105 which say we may not willfully expose ourselves to any danger and we may not put

our trust in anything besides the Lord.

Kernel and Marrow

The last Lord's Day of the catechism points us to the fact that the deadly enemies of God's people are not seated in any particular political power, as if they are allied with names such as Washington, Moscow or Peking, but consist precisely of the world, the devil and our own flesh. In the confrontation with Jehovah's Witnesses Lord's Day 8 helps us with the correct perspective on the divine Trinity.

Today the influence of fundamentalists and charismatics in the church is sometimes quite strong as their errors concerning baptism, the church and the Holy Spirit spread through congregations, even those in reformed territory. Answers such as 53, 54, 74, and 114 help us see what the biblical reformed vision is regarding the Spirit, infant baptism and perfection.

No one need groan under catechism preaching where the heart of God's people is touched by the ongoing relevance of its questions.

At a 1982 office bearers' conference in Amersfoort, The Netherlands, the Rev. J. H. Velema said, "Tell me what you think about catechism preaching and I will tell you where you are with respect to the church." Prof. G. Wisse noted in the previously mentioned lec-

ture, "That is why those who are maturely convinced of the reformed faith, as well as those who have been well introduced to it, deeply treasure catechism preaching as the kernel and marrow of a biblically consistent religion."

The catechism always stands at the center of a full life and demands my whole heart. It is the strength of the catechism that you there meet a believer who knows, and knows what he believes. That makes the content so relevant, so significant, so authentic. A person is affected by it in his whole being. Here are no doctrines which are bits of dry dogma, tough and hard, indigestibly displayed. Here God's grace is a living reality. Here Christ is not only a name but the foundation, the power and the outlook for life.

Dont' Give It Up!

The handwriting is on the wall if one gives up catechism preaching. In a number of reformed churches this has happened. Sad to say, such churches can no longer function as a bulwark for the reformed faith. Sad to say, the reformed character of such churches is more in name than in reality. Under the influences of secularization, decreasing knowledge of the biblical spirituality, and the existence of modern theological opinions one becomes further and further estranged

from the reformed heritage. The rejection of weekly catechism preaching is a betrayal of that heritage.

If one already has difficulty with the authority of the Holy Scriptures, if one calls into question the authority of the Word, sad to say, that will also be the case with the authority of the reformed confessions and catechism preaching. With this the reformed character of the church is at stake.

Does this mean that weekly catechism preaching provides a guarantee that the life of faith is good only in congregations where these sermons are still delivered? Catechism preaching does not in itself provide such a guarantee. But with the application of the Spirit such preaching is a blessing to many.

Salvation is God's work from A to Z—in the acquisition as well as in the application of salvation. It is grace in order as grace to remain grace. That is the ongoing relevance of preaching from the Heidelberg.

The Rev. J. Oosterbroek is a CGKN minister in Harderwijk, The Netherlands. This article from the REFORMATORISCH DAGBLAD was edited and translated by Prof. H. David Schuringa, a CRC minister, teaching Practical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Escondido, California.

Glenn P. Palmer

WHO AM I?

I am a Danite who lives in the town of Zorah. My wife and I were childless, but the angel of the LORD came to my wife and told her that she would conceive and have a son. She was forbidden to drink wine or other fermented drink or to eat anything unclean, or to have any razor ever come on her son's head.

I prayed that the man of God would again come, so that I might know how to bring up the child. The awesome angel of the LORD returned and gave further instructions. And when he left he went up in the flame of the burnt sacrifice I was offering to the LORD.

Later when my son was grown despite my better judgment, I got a

Philistine wife for him. My son was Samson, but who am I?

• • • • •

I am from a town on the Sea of Galilee.

After Christ healed me, I followed Him devoutly and cared for His needs. I was at His crucifixion and I watched Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea bury Him.

I brought spices on Sunday morning to anoint His body. Seeing that Jesus was not there, I ran back to tell the apostles that somebody had taken his body. Then I went back to the tomb and this time I saw two angels. Then I saw Jesus, but did not recognize Him,

thinking that he was perhaps the gardener. When I finally realized that it was Jesus, the risen Lord, I tried to touch Him, but He told me not to hold on to him. Who am I?

Judges 13: 1-14:4
Matt. 27: 55-61, Mark 15:40-16:11,
John 20:1-18.

Lt. Cdr. Glenn P. Palmer's contributions have been interrupted because of his absence on duty in the Persian Gulf. There his ship was hit by a mine, but the Lord protected them. His new address is 135 Jones St., Middletown, RI 02840 Ph. (401) 847- 8189.

THE "ORIGINAL" AUTHORITY OF CONSISTORIES

Jelle Tuininga

Dr. H. De Moor (professor of church polity) disputes the thesis that a consistory belongs to the *essence* of the church, while major assemblies belong to the welfare (*wezen* and *wel-wezen* in Dutch - "being" and "well-being") of the church. That, to my mind, constitutes one of his basic errors. When one looks at the New Testament he would be hard pressed to come up with anything that even faintly resembles our (bureaucratic) ecclesiastical setup today. The overwhelming emphasis in the N.T. is upon the local congregation (think of Paul's letters to local churches, and of the seven letters of Christ to the churches in Asia Minor). The Rev. I. De Wolff (in his *De Plaats van het Kerkverband in Schrift en Historie*) goes so far as to say, "Not a trace is to be found in the N.T. of an external organization of local congregations in synodical connection (*verband*). There was indeed contact between the various congregations, but it was contact based upon an "inward" bond, the bond of having one faith and one God, governed by the one Holy Spirit. Only later, says De Wolff, did churches come together in a more organized way, but this "was born out of practical difficulties," not out of biblical necessity. And wherever the church brought itself to Reformation, there the starting point was the "independence (*zelfstandigheid*) of the local church." And he goes on to state a very basic, underlying principle of

Reformed church polity: "The federation is there for the sake of the local churches, and the latter are not there for the sake of the federation." That is what De Moor and too many others seem to forget today. "The oneness of the church, then," De Wolff goes on to say, "does not consist in this, that the local churches are bound together by means of an external organizational bond, but in the fact that she has grown and branched out in many places and in many lands." "The Holy Spirit, who lives in His Church, creates the impulse toward coming and working together." The Scriptures, says De Wolff, do use the word "ecclesia" at times to refer to the entire church (Matt. 16:18; 18:17; Eph. 1:21; Col. 1:18, etc.), "but by far the most times the N.T. speaks about the Church in her local delimitation" (orig. ital.).

Another enlightening booklet (which should be translated into English and digested by all seminarians and office-bearers today) is *Schriftbeginselen Van Kerkrecht* (in-zake meerdere vergadering) by the late Dr. S. Greijdanus. He makes many of the same points as does De Wolff. He is not opposed to some form of federation between local churches - they can even be "desirable and profitable." "But then always in this way, that the independence (*zelfstandigheid*) of the local churches remains untouched." Even on the basis of Acts 15, says Greijdanus, all

we can conclude is that God did not *forbid* this kind of gathering, but He certainly didn't *prescribe* it either. "The connection (*verband*) of the churches rests on the side of the churches only in mutual agreement, voluntary coming together, mutual consensus." "The oneness of the church is there regardless, even if all external bond of togetherness is lacking. And that oneness can manifest itself even if there is no visible interlacing organization or connection to see." Regarding the authority of major assemblies, Greijdanus takes sharp issue with Dr. H.G. Klein, who identified the authority of the classis over the consistory with that of the consistory over the congregation (much as De Moor does, and an idea which was (partly) smuggled into our Church Order in the 1965 revision, sad to say):

That is now entirely unjust. The authority of the consistory over the congregation is of a completely different character than that of a classical gathering over the consistory. A consistory has a jurisdiction over its congregation which it received directly from God, albeit bound to God's Word of course; a major ecclesiastical assembly - classis, particular, provincial or national synod - lacks all proper, received-from-God authority over the consistories and the congregations, and has jurisdiction over these only in so far as said churches or consistories

have, by mutual agreement, given to or conceded to these major assemblies. That is thus a jurisdiction which rests upon the mutual agreement of the churches and is limited by that mutual agreement, and in this respect carries only a human character. But the authority of the office-bearer and consistory over their congregation rests not on mutual agreement between congregation and consistory or office-bearer, but on divine institution and thus carries a divine character. It is true that that which has been determined or prescribed by a major assembly according to God's Word must be observed, but then because it is in agreement with God's Word, hence because God's Word prescribes or commands it, but not because that major assembly ordains it. That major assembly has no proper divine authority.

That is a clear, concise description of Reformed church polity as set forth in the Scriptures. In similar vein Monsma says:

From the principle here enunciated it follows that major assemblies have no more authority than that which the churches have attributed to them by mutual agreement.... In fact, Reformed church polity knows of only one type and degree of authority: that vested in the local congregation or its ruling body, the consistory.

The authority of major assemblies, says Monsma, is derived, limited, smaller in measure, ministering and conditional. He says there is a difference between the authority of the consistory and that of major assemblies as to origin, as to necessity, as to essence, as to duration and as to purpose. The consistory's authority is original in nature (received directly from Christ), essential for the church, and permanent in duration. That of major assemblies is delegated, not essential, and of limited (temporary) duration. It is sad that De Moor wants to do away with these *fundamental* distinctions, as did his predecessor. No wonder Monsma's *Commentary* is not esteemed very highly in Calvin Seminary. This kind of teaching at the seminary does not bode well for the future of our churches. It is highly dangerous instead.

To return a moment to Acts 15: We are freighting this gathering with far too much cargo if we try to make this

the first "major assembly." We might also say: the flag doesn't cover the cargo. Consider: a) it was still the apostolic age when direct revelation was given by God to the apostles; b) Paul went up to this meeting by revelation of God (Gal. 2:2); we no longer do that today; c) Paul and Barnabas and Peter and others knew very well what the will of God was in this dispute. There was no uncertainty about that. God had made His will abundantly clear on this score (think of Peter and Cornelius). The other party did not want to submit to God's Word, and that caused the controversy. But there was never any doubt about the outcome as far as God's will was concerned; d) no assembly today can claim the unequivocal "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit" that this gathering claimed. We can learn from this, says De Wolff, that gatherings of a number of churches are not forbidden by God, but at the same time we must say that for Paul and the other apostles this meeting was entirely superfluous. For this and other reasons, says Greijdanus, one can hardly speak of this gathering as a synod in the current understanding of this word. What it can teach us, according to Greijdanus, is that the decision-making process must not take place without the involvement of the congregation.

From the above it seems very clear that Monsma and Van Dellen were absolutely right (Heyns, Kromminga and our history notwithstanding) in saying that "no major assembly, according to Reformed Church Polity and the Church Order (pre 1965, J.T.), has the right to depose a minor assembly." This would be "a violation of the integrity and of the rights of the particular church concerned." One would think that the debacle of 1944 in the Netherlands alone would be enough to convince one of that.

Finally, De Moor finds it "incredible" to suggest that the authority of those present at major assemblies comes not from their being elders and/or deacons (or ministers), but from the fact that they are *delegated*. Here let me just quote from a retired minister with considerable competence in matters of Church Order and Polity, P.M. Jonker (taken from *The Banner* of Sept. 13, 80):

The authority with which an elder or minister speaks at classis or synod, and casts his vote, is not derived from his office, but from his

being delegated, and through credentials duly authorized, to represent a certain church or group of churches. A fellow-elder of the church at A has the same office and is invested with the same authority in that church as the one who is delegated to classis. Yet he is not allowed to participate in the affairs of classis or synod because he is not delegated.

Again, this proves that the authority of the delegates to the major assemblies does not rest in their office, but exclusively in their being *delegated*. It is in view of this that Article 27 of the Church Order states that the authority of the consistory is original (there the office-bearers function as such) and that the authority of the major assembly is *delegated*.

The formulation of Art. 34, which speaks of elders and ministers and office-bearers, is, says Jonker, an unfortunate one, to say the least. It was not found in the pre-1965 Church Order. But what is meant is "to ensure that the minor assemblies will delegate those who are the most competent and the most experienced," which are usually the elders and the ministers. De Moor should study Church Order a bit more.

In short,

The Reformed system . . . maintains that each local congregation is a complete church, a complete manifestation of the body of Christ. In that sense and insofar each church or congregation is independent in essence (*zelfstandig*). Local churches can even exist without denominational federation, but a denomination cannot exist without local churches. The real unit is therefore the individual church. And the local churches do not exist for the sake of the denomination, but denominations exist for the sake of the local and individual churches (Monsma in *Commentary*).

This needs stressing today. Consistory members would do well to get this volume (now out of print). It could prevent a lot of wrong thinking and action in our churches. And it could help us to get back to a looser and more biblical form of federation. All hierarchy and bureaucracy stand condemned by Scripture and ought to be an abomination to every Reformed believer.

WOULD GOD MISLEAD US WITH "SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE?"

We recently received the following letter for possible placement in the *Outlook*.

Dear Rev. De Jong:

According to the *National Geographic*, May, 1988 issue (Page 618), on February 23, 1987, astronomers first observed an exploding star (supernova) in the Large Magellanic Cloud viewable in the southern skies. This star is 170,000 light years from earth. Thus, assuming the universe was created 6000 years ago, what the astronomers saw was part of a light-path from the star to earth which God created at the same time He created the star and placed it 170,000 light years away. Light actually emitted by the star itself will not reach earth until another 164,000 years have elapsed. The same is true for all heavenly bodies at a distance greater than 6,000 light years from earth. Light from each one observed to date is not from the body itself but is part of a stream of light from the body to earth, which God created at the same time that He created the body itself. God must be chuckling at all the astronomers excitedly peering through their telescopes at these created light-paths and wracking their brains to develop theories explaining what they see.

Any God-fearing person might wonder: Would God convey a message via this created light-path indicating that a star had exploded when such was not actually the case? Can astronomers believe that what they see actually happens or is God, for reasons known only to Himself, deluding them?

Believers today are faced with a problem akin to that faced by Chris-

tians in Columbus' day who firmly believed that the Bible plainly showed that the earth was square. When Columbus and later Magellan returned from their voyages without having fallen off the earth, they had a choice of standing firm in their beliefs or studying the Word with newly opened eyes.

Yours in Christian love,
Bert Enserink
9214 Ives
Bellflower, CA 90706

While letters often appear in our pages with little or no comment, this letter states so briefly and clearly some of the questions that trouble us and perhaps many others in the current controversies about evolution that some further consideration of them at this point seems appropriate.

The Explosion?

The letter takes occasion from the news about last year's supernova explosion to suggest a question about whether that actually occurred. "Would God convey a message via this created light path indicating a star had exploded when such was not actually the case? Can astronomers believe that what they see actually happens or is God...deluding them?"

I do not see any question arising as the letter raises it about the occurrence of the explosion. Our readers may recall the article in our August 1987 *Outlook* calling attention to the supernova and the way in which it was upsetting a lot of long accepted theories and compelling extensive revisions. Should anyone question or be surprised that a star explodes? Didn't Psalm 102: 25, 26 long ago teach us to expect such changes in a

universe that "will grow old like a garment" and "perish?" The problems arise not about whether this occurred, but about the explanation of this event and the way this is even being cited as a proof of the evolution theory. How could the fact of an explosion prove evolution? What explosion ever created anything? Explosions that we know destroy rather than create. In all our experience it is a truism (as the "Sound of Music" put it) that "Nothing comes from nothing. Nothing ever could!" It has to be an indication of the desperation of evolutionary theorists (determined at all costs to show how everything must have been produced without a Producer) that they finally resort to trying to explain the infinitely complex organization and order in the universe as the product of random explosion. Even some of their own colleagues are beginning to criticize such explanations as statistically preposterous (Recall Dr. John Oller's article in our July-August *Outlook* on "Darwin's Worst Nightmare.")

The Timing?

Our correspondent's more important questions are not about the reality of the exploding star but about the timing of that occurrence which, according to astronomical theory, we should assume took place 170,000 years ago. How can such an old explosion be reconciled with a possibly much younger universe? Perhaps we should first ask how an astronomer knows that this event which was first seen last year took place 170,000 years ago. The attempted answers to that question quickly become extremely complicated. They bring us into the

astronomers' assumptions and conjectures which try to measure the unimaginable distances involved in "light-years" — each one being the distance which a beam of light, traveling where we can observe it at 186,000 miles per second, covers in a year.

The best systematic survey of the field of astronomy from a Christian perspective that I have been able to find continues to be Paul M. Steidl's *The Earth, the Stars and the Bible* (reviewed in our May 1987 issue). (Even evolutionist writer Dr. Howard Van Till in his recent *Science Held Hostage* pp. 62-64, in another discussion, has to concede Steidl's scientific integrity.) Steidl's book devotes one of its last chapters to "Problems of Time," dealing among others with the same questions as Mr. Enserink's letter. His discussion points to the many unanswered questions in these areas, including questions about such apparent "constants" as the speed of light and the effect of gravity. We remember that Einstein early in this century suggested that light does not always travel in straight lines but is "bent" by gravity. We even confront an ongoing argument about the existence or non-existence of "black holes" — areas in which gravity is conjectured to be so intense that even light cannot escape from it! (John G. Taylor's notorious book on the subject goes so far as to suggest that we ought to be tapping the "holes" as unlimited sources of power, conveniently skipping over the little question of how that conjectured power could be conveyed across light years of distance to where we need it!)

Regarding the longer distances in space and time, a great deal of reigning theory is based on the "red shift" observed in the light emanating from distant objects. Spectrograms of those objects compared with others show a shift toward the red or the blue. This color shift is thought to show whether the object is receding from us or coming closer to us, somewhat in the way the sound of a passing train's whistle changes to a lower pitch after it passes us. In astronomy a blue shift is thought to indicate that the light's source is approaching and a red shift that it is receding, the amount of that shift showing its speed.

The January 1988 *Sky and Telescope* highlights in 5 pages a growing controversy among astronomers as new evidence threatens this basic assump-

tion about red shifts. Halton C. Arp has had a long and distinguished career during which he compiled a valuable and widely used *Atlas of Peculiar Galaxies*. His prolonged research showed more and more apparent connections between distant galaxies and powerful radio sources. "This would have been completely acceptable if these associated objects had showed the same red shifts, but they did not." According to astronomical theory these different red shifts proved that these objects were at enormous distances from each other, yet Arp and his associates' growing mass of evidence showed that they were connected. That evidence forced the observer to ask whether the red shift theory might be mistaken. Rather than let this research shake astronomers' confidence in the basic assumptions that had long governed this field, scientists fiercely resisted the persistent Arp and associates, who found themselves denied access to the journals and the telescopes essential to further research, in a way not unlike the way Galileo was threatened and persecuted by the medieval church. In the *Sky and Telescope* article about the controversy, Geoffrey Burbridge, a world re-nowned astrophysicist and head of the Kitt Peak National Observatory in Arizona, expresses his outrage at the injustice which drove Arp from this country to Germany. Arp's 200-page 1987 book, *Quasars, Red-shifts, and Controversies*, heavily illustrated with evidence, tells the story of his prolonged research and the extraordinary efforts to stop it (published by Interstellar Media, 2153 Russell St., Berkeley, CA 94705 for \$19.95). The September, 1988, *Sky and Telescope* reports how the "Red-shift Debate Rages On."

The story of this present redshift argument is a striking example of what Herman Bavinck observed in the November 1901 *Methodist Review* (May 1988 *Outlook*, p. 9). While "Theology is accused, and justly so, of have usurped, in early times all the sciences....no science has ever done this more entirely than physical science in the present day....it forces its method upon all the sciences, and considers the mechanical interpretation the only one that is warranted to the claim of being scientific." The adherents of evolution, "skeptical according to their principle," are "hardened dogmatists in practice and

oftentimes worse fanatics than the adherents of a religious belief. While they do not acknowledge objective truth, they are more certain of the truth of their own teaching than many an orthodox believer."

While Paul Steidl's survey of astronomy calls attention along the way to the multitude of unanswered questions, he observes that the assumption that the universe is very old "is not based upon astronomical evidence initially but upon the theory of evolution which many Christians, correctly we feel, believe not to be true. If the theory of evolution is disregarded, there is far less reason to begin with the assumption that the universe is old. The evidence can be examined more objectively" (p. 4). Toward the end of his survey he comments, "I have given numerous examples of evidence which demonstrate that the universe is not as old as we are commonly led to believe." "Remember, we are combating a philosophy, not a body of objective facts proving evolution. 'For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.' We are fighting the interpretation of the facts, and the world's interpretation is based upon a rejection of God" (p. 219).

Steidl was making the same point that H. Bavinck did 90 years ago in the article already mentioned, when he foresaw the intensifying conflict between two contradictory world views. "For man has undertaken the gigantic effort of interpreting the whole world, and all things that are therein, in their origin, essence and end, what is called purely and strictly scientifically, that is, without God.... only and alone from an immanent self-development" (in this evolutionary theory). While he saw many following this trend only part-way and trying to find compromise positions (as we do today), he foresaw these compromises quickly falling apart as such people had to choose and surrendered point after point to the all-demanding anti-Christian system of those who, "beginning and continuing without God, are also determined to end without" Him.

U.S. Senator Jesse Helms aptly summarized the present situation (in an essay, "A Nation Adrift," in the 1986 publication *The Rebirth of America*, pp. 81, 82). "Today the doctrine of

evolution is in disarray. Although the man on the street may not know it yet, the theory of evolution is being dismantled through modern discoveries." "Even the head of the French Academy of Science candidly admits, 'Evolution is a fairy tale for adults.'" "To settle for evolution or 'the big bang' theory without God begs a thousand scientific questions. Where did the original energy and matter come from? What caused the explosion? How could impersonal forces acting randomly construct a universe whose planets rotate with such precision that we set our clocks by them? It is preposterous to believe that 'nothing times nobody equals everything!'....Author Aldous Huxley once responded to the question of why evolution was so readily accepted. He admitted 'the reason we accepted Darwinism even without proof is because we didn't want a God to interfere with our sexual mores.' There you have it. The real reason modern man does not want to believe in God is he wants no interference from the Creator."

Is God Misleading Us?

We finally have to face in our correspondent's letter, the more basic question many others also ask, "Is God misleading us with scientific evidence?" The assumption in the question is that all of this alleged "scientific evidence" is the revelation of God. (That is exactly what many of our would-be Christian evolutionists are trying to make of it—a Divine revelation that takes precedence over God's revelation in Scripture.) But we need to notice that most of this evolutionists' alleged "scientific evidence" is nothing of the kind. It is not divine revelation, but the anti-Christian INTERPRETATION that unbelievers over the years have been trying to impose upon the universe; it is not God's revelation, but their effort to suppress God's revelation of Himself in His creation (Romans 1:20ff.).

What is going on in this case is another variation of the habit of fallen man against which James warned us: "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed." One tries to dodge his own responsibility by blam-

ing God for what he does or wants to do—in somewhat the way Aaron tried to excuse his carving the golden calf—"I threw the gold in the fire and this came out!" (Ex. 32:4, 24)—God did not reveal the evolutionary theory, but unbelieving men concocted it, and now many Christians, tired of trying to resist majority opinion and wanting to join the crowd, try to make it credible by calling it Divine revelation!

The Heavens Reveal Our Ignorance

Part of the problem exemplified in this letter is our thinking that we know and wanting to know too much—more than any man knows or can know. Does the scientist "know" that this event occurred 170,000 years ago and the Christian "know" that the universe is only 6,000 years old? A virtue of the most knowledgeable and convincing writers that I have been able to find in these matters is their frank acknowledgement of our vast ignorance—One often has occasion to recall D. H. Kromminga's epigram, "It's better not to know quite so much than a lot of things that ain't so!" A main point of almost all the Bible's references to astronomy is that they remind us of how little we know or can know about this overwhelming creation (cf. Psalm 8, Isaiah 40, Job 38:31ff., for examples). And Paul warned the Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:6) "not (to go, or to think) beyond what has been written." In admitting our ignorance, responsible writers are faithful to such Biblical reminders. Herman Bavinck's treatment of these matters is remarkable for its admission of many unanswered questions. Howard Van Til's *Fourth Day* faults Paul Steidl's admission of an unanswered question (p. 239). Ever since my exposure to these questions began sixty years ago as a teen-ager in very liberal public schools I have noticed that some orthodox writers, in their commendable zeal to defend the Christian faith, have felt that they must have some kind of answer for every question they faced—and sometimes their attempted answers could be as foolish as the questions! Others, who often seemed therefore to be more convincing, frankly admitted unanswerable questions. Didn't Paul say "We know in part" (1 Cor. 13:9, 12)?

Does this often necessary admission of ignorance, especially in matters such as these, mean, therefore, as

many today take it to mean, that we can be sure of nothing, must leave every question unanswered and be "open" to every opinion—"lost" with the rest of the crowd in a totally relativistic society? Must we join today's relativists?

— And God's Unsearchable Wisdom, Glory and Power

It means nothing of the kind. Paul's "We know in part" in no way restricted his triumphant, "I know's." Because he preached only, "Thus saith the Lord!" he could declare to every people, the Living God who made the heavens and the earth (Acts 14:15; 17:24) and "the whole counsel" of this God (20:27). His faithful followers have always had to hold the same position. Herman Bavinck, who, because he called attention to our unanswered questions about details of creation, has been erroneously claimed as an evolutionist, identified the evolutionary system as the substitute for God in the devil-inspired effort of apostate men to develop their own alternative explanation of the universe, and he exposed the total bankruptcy of that theory in contrast with the glory of God's revelation (May 1988 *Outlook*). J. G. Vos offered one of the best treatments of these matters in an address to our Reformed Fellowship over 20 years ago (reprinted in April and May 1987 *Outlooks*). Although he had once himself accepted Usher's calculation of a 6000 year old universe, he became convinced on the basis of the Bible, that this figure could not stand, but he saw no room, on the same basis, for the billions of years demanded by evolutionists; and warned that we must keep in mind that the basic issue is not the timing, but God's creation of man and the universe.

Stating the matter in clearest and simplest terms, "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible" (Heb. 11:3). This Biblical affirmation is a flat contradiction of the evolutionary theory which tries to explain the origin of everything merely from the material universe itself. Whom will we believe, God or unbelieving man?

In this world we "know in part" and we often learn from unbelieving experts—Didn't our Lord once say that,

"The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light" (Lk. 16:8)? But the information concerns *God's world and work*. He certainly does not give us more dependable revelation through the theories unbelievers have formulated to justify their rejection of Him than He gives us through His Word! To make those unbelieving "scientists" the judges of everything that "happened," (as Howard Van Till's book and its supporters demand) is a quick and sure way to lose the Christian gospel, which consists of revealed facts, not myths (Luke 1:1-4, 2; Peter 1:16; 1 John 1:1-3). Those who surrender decision about "what happened" to unbelieving scientists may, of course, long keep and repeat some of what they call the Bible's poetic "myths" and our old liturgies and creeds (as a former liberal chaplain colleague did) as symbols of unity—but consider it foolish to really believe them. That is the route by which many churches in our time have lost the Christian faith. Our 1988 synod's condoning of it shows how far our churches have already gone down that road.

God's Word always compels us to choose whom we will believe, Him or His rejectors. "No man can serve two masters." God's Word begins with His creation and His exclusive claim to all of it. In it He addresses us through His Son by whom and for whom all things were created and are held together (Col. 1:16-18) and who came to save the fallen creation and men through faith in Him. The Lord at His coming will reveal many surprises to us who now, like children, know only "in part," but those surprises will not contradict the vast revelation He has already given in His Word about His creation and direction of all things to fulfil His purposes. They will rather enhance our wonder at the revealed mysteries which far surpass our present ability to imagine. We will have to learn to confess Him and His revelation here and now in a hostile world if we are to anticipate a part in the chorus of His triumphant people whose theme will then be, "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; For you created all things, and by your will they exist and were created" (Rev. 4:11)! PDJ

Dear Subscriber:

We were recently made aware of the fact that many of our friends who have been reading *The Outlook* for years are under the impression that the subscription price of the magazine includes their membership dues for the Reformed Fellowship.

In order to clear up this misunderstanding, we are enclosing the following detailed information:

Subscriptions:	U.S. - 1 year - \$10.00	2 years - \$17.00
	Canada & Foreign - 1 year - \$14.00	2 years - \$25.00

Membership Dues: \$15.00 per year. These dues are in addition to the subscription fees. They should be paid at the same time you renew your subscription to *THE OUTLOOK*.

We are thankful for your support that will make it possible to increase our area influence.

Sincerely, The Board

**STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP
MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION**
(Act of October 23, 1986, Title 39, United States Code)
Filing Date: September 14, 1988
THE OUTLOOK
(formerly *Torch and Trumpet*)
Published monthly at 4855 Starr St., S.E.
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506

The name of the publisher is Reformed Fellowship. The name of the Editor and Managing Editor is Rev. Peter DeJong, 4985 Sequoia, S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49508. The owner is the Reformed Fellowship, Inc. 4855 Starr, S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49506. Known bondholders, mortgages or other security holders owning one percent or more of the total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities are: none.

Total number of copies printed (net Press run) preceding 12 months 4600, last issue, 4275. Sales through carriers, dealers, etc.: none. Mail subscription average 3775, last issue 4100. Free distribution by mail averages 200, last issue, 200. Copies distributed to news agents; none. Office left over average 300, last issue 300. Total number distributed average 4600, last issue 4275.

I certify that the statements made by me are correct and complete.

MARY KAISER, Business Mgr.

NOW AVAILABLE
Tapes of Annual Meeting \$3.50 each
Afternoon—Rev. R. Lankheet "Preparing for the Class of 2006."
Evening—Dr. T. Plantinga "A Fresh Look at General Revelation."

CHURCH GROWTH

Jelle Tuininga

We've heard a lot about "church growth" in recent years. A seminary in California promotes what is called "the church-growth school." Our Home Mission Board is also into this "church growth" business lately. "400,000 by 2000" is the catchy slogan. By the year 2000 the CRC is supposed to have 400,000 members.

Concern for the lost is commendable. The church is called to testify to what it has seen and heard. We are the light of the world and the salt of the earth, said Jesus. But is this the way to go about it? Must we get into the "numbers game?"

When one reads the New Testament, particularly the epistles of Paul and the letters of Christ to the seven churches in Asia Minor, he reads nothing about this kind of thing. One looks in vain for the mandate to grow in numbers. We are told to grow, but that is a different kind of growth: "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (II Pet. 3:18); "But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit" (Jude 20). The sustained emphasis in the letters of Paul and of Christ to the seven churches is upon faithfulness to the gospel (hold fast to the Word) and a way of life that accords with godliness. That's all; no more, no less. The Pastoral epistles, too, are a sustained call to "guard the good deposit" and to "hold to the pattern of sound words."

The apostle placed no pressure on the church to produce converts.

There were no monthly sales reports. They did not think of themselves as salesmen of the world's greatest product, as we are sometimes told to think of ourselves. This business of salesmen of a great product is a catchy idea taken over from our Western business world rather than from the Bible (A. Hoksbergen in *Banner*, Mar. 14, 75).

The church must be faithful to the Lord and to the Word of the Lord. That is all, and that is everything.

The New Testament epistle-writers concentrated not on stirring up Christians to evangelize but rather on developing healthy Christians through spiritual food, rest, and exercise.... Just now the number-one item on the agenda is repentance in the Church accompanied by confession and forsaking of sin, reconciliation and restitution, separation from the world, submission to the Lordship of Christ, and the filling of the Spirit (Vance Haveer in *Christianity Today*).

The late Dr. Eldersveld was right when he said once that "this modern concern about the number of converts can have a disastrous effect upon evangelism." Yes, and a disastrous effect upon the church too. For then numbers and statistics become the primary concern, and everything else must be geared to this end. That means, oftentimes, accommodating the gospel to suit the hearers. We see this happening right in the CRC. John Rozeboom, executive director of Home Missions, wrote recently in *The Banner* that the

CRC must dump a lot of "the baggage" that is incidental and does not contribute" (to church growth). Part of this "baggage" "might be a Christian school."

There you have it: If a Christian school stands in the way of "church growth," then it becomes baggage that must be tossed out. It stands in the way of our goal. Listen to Eldersveld:

Well, it seems there are many people who make the same sort of mistake in religion. They are pretty well mixed up. They don't know the difference between "headlight" and "sunlight" any more. And probably because they have been told that there isn't a great deal of difference. I have always wondered what that rooster did when he saw the sun coming up. It must have been terribly confusing. And it must have been a great relief when he finally discovered the difference between those two lights. The same thing is true with people who are confused about religion. You do them a real favor when you tell them plainly that the Way of Christ is the right Way, and the only Way.

Evidently the first Christians were uncompromisingly loyal to their Lord, who simply and bluntly told them the truth in the midst of their confusion. And so they were known as followers of the Way. This made them very conspicuous in their world, distinctively different. They didn't always win friends and influence people. Many times they

had to stand all alone. They paid a high price for believing in the Way, and for insisting that it was the only way to God, the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

But that name for Christianity didn't last very long. It was soon discarded. I wonder why. Was it too hard to wear? Was it too exclusive? Did it eventually make mission work too difficult, because it put severe limitations on membership in the Church? Was it perhaps offensive and did it antagonize people who might have joined the Church if they had not been told that they would have to give up their old religion altogether? Did it make too many enemies?

Those are good questions for Rozeboom and the Home Missions Board. Questions that cry out for answers, honest answers. To the (seemingly flourishing) church of Sardis, Christ writes: "You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead." To the (seemingly no-growth)

church of Philadelphia, He writes: "I know you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name." The latter was the living church in the eyes of Christ. It seems that some of us would prefer Sardis instead. It's not what we think or what the world thinks that's important, but it's all important how Christ sees us. He is the Head and Judge of the church.

Speaking of "church growth," let us remember that at the present time there are some 200 families (at least 400 souls) who were formerly CRC, and are now organized as O-(Orthodox) CRC. And whatever we might think of them, it cannot be denied that most of them were among our best, most faithful and loyal members, members we can ill afford to lose. They left because of the weakening of the Reformed faith in the CRC. Talk about "church growth" in reverse! And let's remember one thing: If things continue as they are in the CRC, (if we continue to throw out Reformed "baggage") more will leave.

At that rate 400,000 is a long way off!! Indeed, we'll never reach it, and we don't deserve to either.

The company of believers grew in the early church, and not because the church had sophisticated methods and programs. It had no public relations department, no researchers, no experts. All Christians had then through thick and thin was reliance upon the promised presence of and the leading of His Spirit.

Those who want church growth today may have to reset their priorities (G. Spykman in *Today*).

The church's primary task is to build up the people of God as committed, mature, thoroughgoing citizens of the kingdom of heaven in the midst of the kingdoms of this world. When that is being done, I believe the Lord will add to the church such as are being saved (Howard G. Hageman in *Reformed Journal*).

Thomas Spriensma

WHAT IS THE TIME?

We have complained about Prof. Harold Dekker's heresy of a universal love of God and general atonement. We have also objected to the film arts report as being contrary to the Antithesis. We have not been able to stop Report 36-44 with its double-talk from becoming a guideline in the C.R.C. We objected to the ordination of the Rev. Allen Verhey because of his false doctrine, but it was declared that Rev. Verhey was within the guide-lines of the C.R.C. We had objections against the writings and the gravamen of

reprobation from Dr. Harry Boer; and we objected also to the report and the recommendations of the Synod. We did not believe that the Bible permitted women to be deacons. The 1988 Synod approved the teaching of the theory called "theistic evolution" and declared the three professors teaching it to be within the guidelines of the C.R.C.

We might well ask ourselves, "What are the limits of the guidelines of the C.R.C.? The Heidelberg Catechism?

The Canons of Dort? The Belgic Confessions?" Apparently not! "Report 36-44" is used as a "guideline." It is more serious that evolutionism and the denial of literal, historical accuracy of the account of Genesis 1-11 is approved, first by the Board of Trustees of Calvin College and then by the Synod. Creation and redemption are inseparably connected. We cannot deny the one and hold to the other. "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that things which are seen

were not made of things which do appear" (Heb. 11:13).

Is it not now the time for many C.R. churches to proclaim that we believe in an authoritative, inspired, inerrant, and infallible Bible, and therefore *reject* the decisions which are made by the Synod of the C.R.C.? We must denounce and separate ourselves from the decisions that are contrary to Scripture and the confessions. If we do not speak now and act, what will happen to the instruction of our children and grandchildren?

Please look at history. It should teach us something. Thirty years ago in the Gereformeerde Kerken, only Genesis was rejected as being a historical and literally true account. About sixteen years after the first denial of the historicity of Genesis appeared, Prof. Kuitert, speaking for the Gereformeerde Kerk, wrote, "There has never been an Adam and no Eve either; there never existed a Paradise that was created without sin and death." Kuitert wrote in *Trouw* May 13, 1966, "You cannot say that something really happened because it says so in the Bible. For instance in the time of Joshua, Jericho did not exist."

Prof. Koole, in the *Gereformeerde Weekblad*, Sept. 16, 1966 wrote, "The Bible is an ancient, oriental description of history which one should not expect to be absolutely exact." Dr. T. J. Baarda wrote in 1969, "There are some accounts in the gospels that have the legendary touch, as for instance, the story of the cursing and withering of the fig tree, or more so even, that of the resurrection of some dead when Jesus died. Is it not possible that certain apocalyptic words of Jesus have been dramatized in the rumor, the story passed on orally by the people?" And so our mother church has fallen from one denial into the next. The conservatives have compromised, and by now secession seems to be too late. Because they remained in the denomination, their children were fed the lie.

Where the church departs from the Word of God, there is no hope anymore. In Rev. 3:20 Christ addresses the church of Laodicea, "I am going to spew you out of my mouth." To the faithful in that church, Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and sup

with him, and he with me." As long as we are members of a certain church or denomination, we have the responsibility to protest all that is opposed to the Word of God. We may not say, "It is no use." However, if it is true that the foundation of a church is so undermined that there is no hope any more of directing that church back to the truth, then we do not belong there any more. Then we do not need dialogue, but only faith to direct our families back to the principles of the Reformation.

We do not want revolution. We want reformation. Justification by faith alone. "Sola Scriptura" for Scripture is the infallible Word of God, and we may not support those who contradict the divine revelation of God's Word. Let us not be negative, but in the strength of the Holy Spirit, let us be positive. And let us give an honest answer to the question, "What is the time?"

Mr. Thomas Spriensma lives at 1994 Quincy, Grandville, MI 49418.