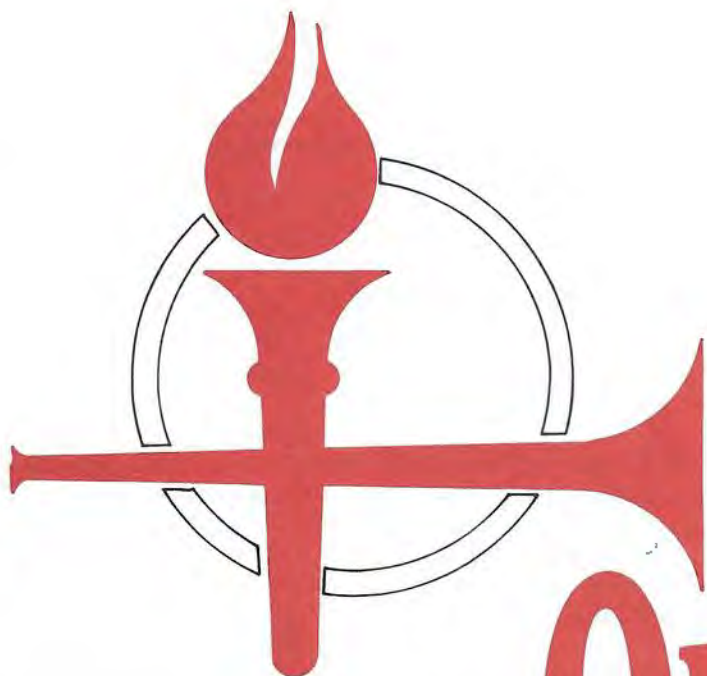




Outlook

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

The Drought

**Reformed:
Neither Hierarchical
Nor Independent**

The Future

OCTOBER 1988

BASIC BIBLE TEACHINGS VII THE FUTURE

1. Introduction: The thrilling, difficult and neglected subject.

Nowhere does the immeasurable difference that our Lord and His gospel create between believer and unbeliever come out more clearly than when we look ahead at the future. See the difference between a Christian and non-Christian funeral. Regrettably, the Bible teaching about the future is far too generally neglected, except at funerals. We easily become so immersed in the present that we don't think of the future. Then threatening developments worry us, and cults exploit that worry with cocksure perversions of Bible prophecy. Especially of the future, we now "know" only "in part" (1 Cor. 13:9, like children trying to imagine things beyond their reach). That tempts us to neglect this important area of Bible teaching. Let's try to give it a brief overview.

2. From Death to Eternal Life.

"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23), Paul wrote. And Peter at the beginning of his first letter wrote of how "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

The fact is revealed in the dramatic story of the raising of Lazarus in John 11, after the Lord had told Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in

Me shall never die" (vv. 25, 26). This He came, especially by His death and resurrection, to bring about. "Through death," He would "destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:14, 15).

Death is indeed something to fear. It is not merely the end, as people may think. No one spoke more clearly about that than Christ, who spoke repeatedly of "hell," where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:43-48). (The word used, "Gehenna," recalled the valley of Hinnom, the place of hideous pagan sacrifices that seems to have become the city dump.) And the Lord used the words ("Eternal") in speaking of eternal life as He did of eternal damnation that follows the death of the lost. Both are *eternal*. Christ delivers us from "so great a death" to grant us eternal life.

The Apostle Paul did not want the Philippian believers to worry about him, the prisoner threatened with death, because for him "to live is Christ, and to die is gain...to depart and be with Christ, which is far better" (Phil. 1:21-23). As he saw the ravages of a career of hardship and persecution on his body, which was like a tent wearing out, he was not depressed, for he knew that it would soon be replaced by something far better, "a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Then "mortality may be swallowed up by life" (2 Cor. 5:1-10), and "we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," so that "Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:52-54).

Accordingly, Paul could encourage the Thessalonians in his first

General References:

1 Thess. 4:13-15:11;
2 Cor. 5:1-10; 2 Pet. 3.

letter (4:13), that they should not worry about believers who had died "lest you sorrow as others who have not hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus." When He comes in triumph, "the dead in Christ shall rise first," to be reunited with those who are still here, as they together meet their returning Lord to spend eternity with Him.

3. The Judgment Day.

Echoing many such Bible promises, the Christian church confesses that the Lord "shall come to judge the living and the dead." He said (John 5:28), "The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." As Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 5:10, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Some have fancied that there must be a number of judgments with a great deal of time in between, but the Bible doesn't seem to leave room for that. The Lord speaks of these in the same "hour," and 2 Thess. 1:7, 10 promise deliverance to persecuted believers WHEN the Lord returns to condemn those who reject His Gospel. Other questions also arise about that judgment. If we are saved only by faith in Christ and not "by our works," how can we be judged by our works? To answer that, we only need to notice that our actions or works show whether or not we really believe in Him (Matt. 7:20-23). We notice that there are degrees of punishment for the unbelieving wick-

ed, depending on what people did and how much they knew (Luke 12:46-48; Matt. 11:20-24). Similarly, there are degrees of rewards for those who are saved by faith in Christ to serve Him (Luke 19:13-19; Matt. 25:14 ff.; 1 Cor. 3:1-15), depending on their degrees of faithfulness.

4. Our Lord's Eternal Kingdom.

The Bible teaches us to anticipate and live our lives with a view to Christ's return, giving us a glimpse of the festal welcome "into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:11). The Lord mentioned "signs" that will point ahead to that coming event (Matt. 24:3-14). There will be false teachers, wars, famines, epidemics, earthquakes, persecutions and lawlessness, as the gospel is preached to all the nations.

Many evangelical Christians have come to expect a *Millennium* (thousand year) period of blessing under Christ's rule before the judgment, often with special privilege for the Jews (God's earthly people, in contrast with His church). The Millennial thinking appeals especially to Revelation 20 which mentions (1) the devil being bound so as not to deceive nations as he had done, and (2) the martyred saints living and reigning with Christ. We ought to observe that our Lord also spoke of His having bound Satan so that He could be releasing his prisoners (Matt. 12:29) and that reigning saints of John's vision had died and were evidently in heaven, not in Jerusalem. As to the Jews having a special, privileged future, note that the gospel had broken down the wall between Jew and Gentile in the Church (Eph. 2:14; Gal. 3:28; Rom. 1:17, 26), "and SO," as believers in Christ, all were to be saved.

We must not think of Christ's coming only in connection with our personal futures, but as part of our Lord's saving work in restoring the whole fallen creation, "because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." "We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pet. 3:13). The book of Revelation, and especially its con-

"HOW SHOULD THE TOPICS OF CREATION AND EVOLUTION BE TAUGHT IN THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL?"

Hear Dr. Howard Van Till of Calvin College and Dr. Norman De Jong of Trinity Christian College, Chicago area, present their differing views and ask them your questions on this all important issue.

Public Forum at Calvin College Fine Arts Auditorium

8:00 p.m. - Thursday, October 27, 1988

SPONSORED BY GRANDVILLE AREA CHAPTER, Concerned Members of the Christian Reformed Church



Outlook

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

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cluding chapters, are full of the visions of that great restoration and triumph of our returning Lord. The passing troubles of the present fall into insignificance compared with that event. They are "not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Thus we are to be encouraged in the faith, confession, life and struggles of the Gospel by "looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God

and Savior Jesus Christ" (Tit. 2:14). PDJ

Questions:

1. How does the gospel of Christ transform the believer's death? (Phil. 1:19-25, John 11:21-26.)
2. What does the Bible teach about hell? (Mark 9:43-48.)
3. In God's judgment, are there different degrees of punishment and reward? (Luke 12:46-48; 1 Cor. 3:11-15.)

4. If we are saved only by grace, how can we be judged by works? (2 Cor. 5:10.)

5. What are the "signs" of Christ's return? (Matt. 24:3-14.)

6. Is there a special, privileged future for the Jews? (Rom. 11:25-29.)

7. What is the Millennium? (Rev. 20; Matt. 12:24)

8. How does our expecting Christ's return revolutionize our view of today's life and world? (2 Peter 3.)

A LIGHT UPON MY PATH

"Your Word is a lamp to my feet
and a light upon my path"
Ps. 119:105).

• • • • •

The month of October is often associated with the Reformation that occurred in western Europe in the 17th century.

The Reformation gave to the church basically three important things. First was the truth of the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice. Closely connected with this was the truth of salvation by faith alone in this Christ—not by works nor by faith and works, but only by faith in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And last but not least, the Reformation gave back to the church the precious Word of God, which teaches this salvation only by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

At the beginning of the Reformation time, some people paid \$500.00 for a hand-written copy of the Bible and others might rent one for a few hours at a time. How different from today! Bibles can be purchased almost anywhere in our countries for a reasonable price, in many different sizes of print. Many of our homes have at least a half dozen Bibles in them. But at the same time there is a

great dearth of knowledge of the Word and often very limited use of it! Many people in the 17th century and later became faithful to the Word and the confessions of it, at times in the face of strong opposition. Many suffered persecution because they confessed the truths of the Word. And many even sealed their faith with their own blood.

Throughout the ages, from the beginning of time to the present, the devil has opposed the Word, attacked and distorted it and denied its reliability and its authenticity.

The battle of the Bible continues in almost every denomination today. But the true children of the church have always clung tenaciously to the truth of the Bible and the confession of its infallibility and inerrancy.

A real Reformation requires that we properly use the Word. This means good preaching from the pulpit which members of the church have a right to expect from their pastor. It also means that church members must individually and personally use the Word. In many of our homes when we were young the entire family ate the three meals of the day together, and at each meal the Word was faithfully read. That was a good custom. But times have changed, and many families with children, especial-

John Blankespoor

ly with teenagers, find it difficult to have even one meal together per day. The result is that the custom of regular family reading of the Word is disappearing. In many families and circles, there has come as a "substitute," personal devotions, individual Bible reading and prayer. This in itself is encouraging and should be strongly recommended. Personally I am of the opinion that every Christian should have his own Bible, beginning with children.

In Bible times people didn't have their own Bibles. Fact is, especially in early Old Testament times, many people could not read or write. Moses was possibly the first Israelite to learn to read and write. That may have been one of the purposes of the Lord in providing that Moses go to school in Egypt. Later he had to write the first five books of the Bible, by Divine inspiration, of course. The masses of the common people for centuries had only oral tradition, the "Word" being handed down from parents to children, orally. Even so, the Scriptures do speak of the attitude God's people had towards the Word. The author of Ps. 119 may have had in some kind of hand-written form the first books of the Bible. At any rate he says in the Psalm that he has hidden the Word of God in

his heart, and here in vs. 105 that the Word is "a light upon his path."

• • • • •

The words of this verse remind me of pictures of miners who work in pitch darkness beneath the surface of the earth. They have lamps attached to their caps or helmets. These lamps shine in front of those carrying them, and show where they have to go.

Imagine yourself in total darkness, able to see absolutely nothing. And in a strange place, you would not know where to go. Imagine that along your way there were sharp drop-offs, precipices, hair-pin curves, rises and falls and tunnels that led in a wrong direction.

We live in that kind of spiritually dark world. All people do by nature. It is totally dark, so that man does not know the way to light and life. Men may be intellectual giants or geniuses in the exploding world of science. Others may be kings, presidents or other political leaders, but none of them can lead us out of the darkness into the light and bring us to God. This, the apostle Paul had in mind when he asked "Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age?" The implied answer is that no one has the answer.

Only Jesus Christ is the light of the world. Jesus Himself emphasized this many times during His earthly sojourn with us. Already in the O.T. the prophet Isaiah spoke of this when he said that men in darkness have seen a great light (Isa. 9:2).

Light gives life, even in the natural world. Where there is darkness there usually is no life but death. But where there is light, there is life. God in the beginning created light. And with the spiritual life that light gives, come joy, peace, love and all the other gifts of the Spirit. All this is implied when it is said that Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, is the Light of the world.

This light, Jesus Christ, is found in God's Word. Jesus is the heart and center of that Word, from Genesis to Revelation.

Only the Word can be our guide, as we are led in it by the Spirit who

inspired it. Not mysticism, not feelings or special revelations or experiences or psychic powers. Not what I personally think, or what somebody else's opinions may be. God's Word alone is our light upon the path of life. Only that infallible and inerrant Word can be our guide. That's one of the first principles of the Reformation. Someone might ask Isn't prayer also important? Of course it is. But it is not *first*. Often when mention is made of the need of the guidance of the Lord, or where there is special need of the guidance and presence of the Spirit, people speak only of prayer. And the Word is seldom mentioned. However, we must first listen to God speaking to us in His Word, and then in response, we can go to Him in prayer. It is the Word that first directs us. We are not led in some mystical way without the Word. His Word is "a lamp for our feet and a light upon our pathway."

Through the Word, the Holy Spirit works. The Word has been called the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). The Spirit always works through the Word. This cannot be over-emphasized. The Word teaches us and directs us in every situation and need. Although the Bible is not like a dictionary or encyclopedia to which we can turn as an index with a certain page for an easy answer, the principles of the Word apply to every situation and need in this dark world. It has been that guide in all of the ages before us; it is the same amid all the scientific knowledge and confusion of today. In our dark world, Jesus Christ is the only Light, as He speaks to us in His Word, applied by His Spirit.

That Word guides us in every situation and decision. It shows us how we should live, what kinds of homes we should have, how we should educate our children, of what kind of church we should be members, what our priorities should be and many more things we need to know for Christian living. It gives us comfort and encouragement in sorrow. God promises in Christ Jesus, that His mercies will never fail.

• • • • •

What the psalmist says is personal. He speaks here about his own attitude towards the Word, and His

use of it. He lived with it as his companion. We must not only read the Word regularly, but *feel* the need of reading it daily, have it with us at all times in our homes, take it with us when we go on vacation, to the hospital, or anywhere else. Many of us have heard older church members or parents recite the Dutch psalms which they learned when they were young. Their souls were fed by that Word, as it comforted and led them in life's evening.

Using the Word as our light makes us familiar with our Bible and its books. We will not be like one elder who desperately tried to find the book of Hezekiah in the Old Testament. We learn to know what is found where, what a particular Psalm teaches and where other truths are found.

If we have the spirit of the psalmist we live with our Bibles. I've heard (not often) of retired people, who having little to do in the winter, would memorize some psalms. How good it is that not only our children, but also older members, memorize the Scriptures. People like the psalmist may recall what the pastor preached on last Sunday and sometimes discuss it with spouses or friends. As they grow older, the Word with its promises become more precious to them.

An old father, when he died, had nothing to leave for his children in material possessions. But what the children did cherish was his old, almost worn-out Bible. It was full of markings, underscorings and marginal notes.

What the light on the helmet is for the miner, God's Word must be for us in this dark world. The light of the Word must always show us the way ahead. Then the end is not a dark grave. The Word shines beyond the grave, for Jesus Christ has conquered death for His people and promises greater glory, and He's coming again.

May we with our children practise what they and we have learned:

I have a wonderful treasure
The gift of God without measure.
And so we travel together,
My Bible and I.

MINISTERS' CONFERENCES

CR Ministers' Institute

In the past sponsored by the area classes by turns, this annual June ministers' meeting has more recently become the project of the Calvin Seminary Alumni Association.

This year daily programs began with various styles of worship, "a Praise (more or less Charismatic?) Service," "a Healing Service" and "a Taize" (a French monastery-style) Service. Two able women recording singers took a prominent role in the first two meetings, and the "healing" amounted to people with problems joining little "huddles" on the platform for counsel and prayer.

Because the featured daily speaker, Dr. Howard Hageman, former president of the Reformed Church's eastern seminary, was ill, his place was taken by Dr. I. John Hesselink from that church's Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Mich. He discussed the problems of God's sovereignty in relationship to the evil in the world, citing various current opinions about them. The speaker suggested that regarding the currently unpopular doctrine of God's providence, people are more willing than formerly to challenge God, asking "Why?" and that there are no "simple answers" to their questions. The Biblical bases for God's Providence are very strong in Joseph's reply to his brothers, (Gen. 50: 20), the Exodus, Habakkuk, the role of Cyrus, and especially the death of Christ—a miscarriage of justice for our salvation. God's rule does not eliminate secondary causes, and we face mystery. The rabbi who wrote *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People* suggested that we forgive God when we find Him imperfect, compassionate but helpless against the evolutionary process. God took a

risk in making man free. Although He persuades, He does not compel. Although expressing warm appreciation for the Heidelberg Catechism formulation on Providence, the speaker called attention to a modern trend to teach that God shares our burden and suffers with us—that He does not control everything, but is more like a wise parent who uses only persuasive power. There is a trend to consider the old (Augustinian) views as too monarchical. The speaker referred to the Dutch Hendrikus Berkhof, who holds that God submits Himself to the freedom of man, before which He is defenseless, as creation limits His power. Although this redefined power of God does not solve problems, the speaker suggested that it "sheds new light" on them, and that our traditional view of God's power needs a complete overhaul! God's power "is made perfect in weakness!" His power continues to be non-violent love, which will ultimately triumph over evil and death, in His "Sovereign Suffering."

Although there may be value in knowing such current opinions, following them into inconclusive ecumenical dialog is really exchanging the Christian faith for the same old paganism from which the Gospel once delivered us. The Almighty God of the Bible, and (therefore) of our creeds, who created heaven and earth and who "works all things according to the counsel of His will" (Ephesians 1:11)—our Lord who will "break" the rebellious nations "with a rod of iron" and "dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel" (Ps. 2; Acts 4:24-30; Rev. 2:27) is no more to be identified with the "suffering," helpless god of this ecumenical theology than he was with the powerless Baals whom God's

prophets taught Israel to ridicule rather than worship (1 Kings 18:27; Psalm 115). There is really nothing very mystifying about the course of this present sophisticated ecumenical theology. The Apostle Paul outlined it for us long ago in Romans 1: "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four footed beasts and creeping things." (Don't forget their evolutionist dogmas!) The consequences are necessarily demoralizing for their churches, destroying not merely their morale, but, (soon) their morals as well, as "God gave them up" (vv. 24, 26, 28) to every kind of vice that characterizes our "liberated" society.

The Institute program also highlighted an address by Calvin Seminary's church polity professor, Dr. Henry De Moor, entitled, "Will Our Congregationalism Kill Us?" He observed that a marriage does not usually disintegrate over night, but divorce is usually preceded by estrangement, finding in that an analogy to what he saw happening in our denomination. In his view, the democratic temper of our society is degrading church officers from being servants of Christ to becoming mere servants of the people, as we forget "our denominational covenant." Denominations are not individuals among many "flocks," but called to represent "all of humanity as recipients of God's grace," in the "Holy Catholic Church" which we confess. The diversity in the church, in his view, must blend as the diverse voices must blend into one choir. He cited Acts 15 as showing how the church must face the problem of differences. What moved that assembly he

saw as not powerful arguments, but the evident acts of God. The resulting joy of the gentile Christians contrasts sharply with our "lobbying tactics," many overtures and trying to bind delegates. Thus, he charges that we are denying our "denominational covenant," in particular, by refusing to pay quotas, and congregationalism is killing us. A denomination is, in his view, not a federation of local churches but, by Christ's grace, one holy catholic and apostolic communion.

A response to his address was assigned to Rev. Leonard Vander Zee of Grand Rapids' Eastern Ave. Church, who argued that his church with its illegal associate women-elders could not be charged with congregationalism, for, despite provocation, it had not left the fellowship. The real question was how restrictive a denomination should properly be, for "church order and synod regulations can't be used to compel unity." We need to make the circle as wide as we can within the bounds of confession. De Moor's interpretation of the Acts 15 meeting was "too vertical." That assembly recognized the "new thing" which the Holy Spirit was doing, and compromised with a few rules, which soon "faded away like all good synodical rules should." In his view, the major fault in our churches has been with the restrictive assemblies. The women in office issue is not a matter of the Bible or creed. Taking our place as part of the Holy Catholic Church "will explode our boundaries."

A somewhat similar response was offered by Rev. George Vander Weit, who compared the unrest in our churches with the noisy frogs in a swamp who turned out to be far fewer than the farmer expected when he drained it. He suggested that we must be ready to change our denominational covenant along the lines of Acts 15. That assembly *did not listen to Bible texts*, but to what God's Spirit was *doing*. Thus we must overcome our traditional reluctance to admit lodge members who claim to be Christians to our fellowship, telling them that they have to "be circumcised" of their lodge membership, and we must stop denying offices to women. We have to allow what the Holy Spirit is doing

instead of charging that this is somehow the devil's movement among us. Thus we must work for unity.

The following general discussion raised questions about what differences concern Bible and creeds, about whether our denominational connection is properly called a "covenant," about whether we are becoming lawless or hierarchical, about whether refusal to pay quotas for what is seen as contrary to the Bible and Creed is a fault or a duty, and whether the present confusion calls for developing little "churches within the church."

The whole discussion suggests a few observations:

(1) Comparing marriage with the "denominational covenant" is grossly misleading. God established marriage, but He never established a hierarchical church structure. His Word warned against every tendency to develop the kind of Roman-style hierarchy which our denominational establishment is again diligently devising (Matt. 20:25-28; 1 Peter 5:1-4; 3 John 9-12).

(2) Conspicuous in this discussion, as in most of the controversies that increasingly divide us, is the studied evasion of the Bible or efforts to explain away its clear teachings that forbid what is being proposed.

(3) In the appeal to the confession of "a Holy Catholic Church," we see a determined refusal to face the Bible's warning against the false teachings which are creating division, and its commands to have no fellowship with them.

(4) When appeal is made to the Holy Spirit, to justify ignoring the Bible and creed, we forget that the Bible warns us: "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4). The only way we have been given to distinguish the genuine work of the Holy Spirit from that of His imitator, the devil (2 Cor. 11:13-15) is the Bible which the Holy Spirit inspired. To put that aside in an ecumenical compromise inevitably develops an apostate church. From such a fellowship the Bible teaches us to separate (Acts 18:4-6; 19:8-10; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:10).

Someone observed that the ministers' institute was begun as an

effort to strengthen the Reformed convictions and dedication of our ministers. It would be hard to imagine a more radical reversal of direction than that which it has evidently undergone. About the only item on the program that seemed to elicit common appreciation was Rev. Jacob Eppinga's witty evening entertainment, "To Ordination Through Emeritation."

Banner of Truth Ministers' Conference

Two weeks before the usual ministers' meeting in Calvin College's large auditorium, there occurred in the seminary chapel the tenth Banner of Truth Ministers' Conference. The temper and spirit of this smaller meeting offered a sharp contrast in many ways to that of the CR conference, but it conformed much more closely to the original intent of the larger conference. Two of its speakers who had been seminary professors and then gone back to pastoral charges, spoke of the thrill of preaching the Gospel as "the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes" it (Romans 1:16) and of then also seeing its transforming effects in the life of the church, amid our degenerating society.

A speaker featured on each day's program was O. Palmer Robertson, who has taught at Westminster and Covenant Seminaries and is now pastor of a Presbyterian church at Hyattsville, MD. He introduced us to the life and career of Samson who lived in the demoralized time of Israel's accommodation to Philistine rule. Finding little appreciation and no help in his own cowering people, he had to "go it alone," and despite the weaknesses and inconsistencies of his own character and record, had, like David to "strengthen himself in God," to become one of God's instruments of deliverance, and a forerunner and an anticipation of the coming Savior God.

A second address outlined the book and career of Ezekiel, dramatizing (1) the departure of God's glory from His unfaithful people as He permitted the pagan Babylonians to sweep them away, (2) the witness of the surrounding pagan nations to that departure (so like the mockery of today's secular world),

and (3) the return of that glory in the vision of a renewed temple, renewed hearts, and renewed lives, to encourage and hearten believers with the hope of that glory.

A final (Robertson) address took us back to the first chapters of Genesis. Current dismissals of this beginning revelation of God's Word affect our whole view of life. Hebrews 11:3 underscores the fact that the world's origin can't be proved by scientific study. It was called into being by the Word of God, not a product of preexistent matter. How long did it take? Careful study of the passage shows that although nothing can disprove that the Genesis "days" were 24-hours, closer study of the text and events of each day suggest further questions, and that we must not stretch the testimony of this Scripture to say more than it does. Although many questions remain and have long been acknowledged by orthodox Christian scholars, we must flatly oppose evolution. We must insist that man was made in God's image and likeness (Gen. 1:25-28) in order to rule. The notion that man is a mere animal has taken over government education and public policy. God's Word introduces Christ as the Creator and to try to reduce Him to a mere impersonal "word" or "logic" is laughable. He is the Prophet, Priest and King, by Whom and for Whom all was Created and He is the Owner which all creation must and will glorify.

A speaker new to this program, although not among us, was Dr. W. Robert Godfrey, (our CRC) Church History professor of Westminster Seminary West. He offered quite different but equally stirring addresses, reviewing the careers of Martin Luther and J. Gresham Machen. Luther, Calvin's predecessor, deserves more appreciation than he is sometimes given among Reformed. We were reminded of his fabulous productivity in very difficult and discouraging circumstances. His commentaries on the Psalms reflect his own experiences in that mortal struggle. Forced to stand virtually alone, he was driven to take his stand on the Word of God against the rulers of his time. The study of the Psalms, Romans, Galatians and Hebrews charted the course he had to take in the Reformation of the faith and church of the time. Although we may cite differences regarding his views at some points, we need a sympathetic appreciation of the role and way in which the Lord led and used him to lead the church in Reformation according to His Word.

J. Gresham Machen died over 50 years ago, and it is profitable in this time of loss of appreciation for the formerly dominant Calvinism which he championed, to recall his career. After his early studies and struggles amid Liberal scholarship, he came to see how two conflicting religions were in conflict in the church of his time. His 1901 book, *The Origin of Paul's Religion*, highlighted the

source of the Christian Faith not in mere personal experience, but in God's Word-Revelation—a message as urgently needed now as it was a century ago. His later *Christianity and Liberalism* is as much an expose of our time as it was of his own. Although willing to identify himself as a Fundamentalist, he wanted no reduction of the "whole counsel of God" to just a few slogans, and he wanted to see that counsel applied to the culture of our time. His roguish sense of humor and his unflinching commitment to God's truth were sometimes made occasions for misrepresentations of his character. (The theological deceivers in the church did not then and do not now take kindly to any exposure of their sophisticated deceptions, even if it is done with all possible courtesy.) Unflinching commitment to God's truth led to the founding of a new seminary, then to a mission board to maintain the gospel on the mission field, instead of supporting its betrayers. The last step provoked hasty discipline against Machen and his colleagues by those supporting that betrayal. Although God has always saved His church, He has done that not by the compromise, but only by the sturdy defense and maintenance of His truth. We must rejoice in Machen's faithful defense of the Gospel. We today share the high calling to pray, work, proclaim and fight for the same Gospel. May many among today's sadly confused ministry recover the lost sense of its calling and its high adventure. PDI

BIBLICALLY REFORMED CHURCHES: NEITHER HIERARCHICAL NOR INDEPENDENT

A Reformed Church Must Oppose Hierarchy

For many years this periodical has from time to time highlighted a movement to develop over the churches a centralized bureaucracy of "administrators," originally to "help," but eventually to control their activities. The biggest and most threatening such effort at present appears to be that of the committee

continuing to develop the "Vision-21" project, which the synod of 1987, despite a volume of objections, in principle, endorsed. The purpose of this project is ostensibly to make the denomination's agencies more efficient. Many larger denominations have developed that kind of structure, and long before that the Roman Catholic Church has

pioneered it, for the same reason of efficient control.

A principle objection to developing such a centralized control structure is that the Bible constantly warns against the temptation to develop it. Our Lord in Matthew 20:20-28 (cf. Mark 9:34, 35; Matt. 23:8) sternly warned His followers against such grabbing for power over one another, and Peter forewarned

against such grabbing for power over one another, and Peter forewarned church elders against the same temptation to pervert their leadership into domination (1 Pet. 5:1-4). John in his Third letter (9-11) warned against the destructive arrogance of a church bureaucrat named Diotrephes. Although the Apostle Paul could claim the authority given Him by Christ (2 Cor. 10:8), he plainly showed that that authority was to be regarded as under and in the service of the Lord's gospel with which he had been entrusted. He wrote, "if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed." When Peter behaved in a way that compromised the gospel, Paul "withstood him to his face" in a public rebuke (Gal. 1:8, 9; 2:11-14). By precept and example, the Lord's Apostles, far from committing the church to unconditional following of church leadership, opposed hostile church authorities, saying "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). When local church leaders began to oppose the gospel, Paul, far from teaching the believers to submit to them, led the believers out of their fellowship (Acts 18:4-7; 19:9). Thus God's Word orders us to separate from fellowship with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1).

At the conclusion of our latest denominational synod, according to reports, delegates were given the final admonition to "Trust your leaders!" It would be hard to imagine a piece of advice more totally opposite to that of God's Word and therefore more anti-Reformed. Such a blind following of leaders is nothing but idolatry of a kind to which traditionally conservative Christians may be particularly susceptible. Think of the veteran Joshua's farewell to his people and their leaders (Josh. 24:14, 15). Far from assuring them of his unqualified support, he urged them to be faithful to the Lord and warned them against every temptation to compromise with surrounding idolatries. He warned them that if they compromised with the old ones, or with the newer, more faddish and "progressive" forms of idolatry, neither he nor his family would accompany them. If faithfulness to the

Lord and His Word forces us to break away from the majority, every Christian is committed by the Lord to such a break. The usurpation of Christ's authority by the Roman Church drove our forefathers out of it. Our own establishment's development of the same kind of anti-Christian tyranny must drive us out of it.

A most common argument recently being used in effort to silence opposition to centralized denominational control is the one that calls all such opposition "independentistic" or "congregational." The Ministers' Institute address on "Will Our Congregationalism Kill Us?" by Dr. Henry De Moor, who teaches Church Polity at our denominational seminary advanced that argument (See the report on that conference in this *Outlook*). He had developed that argument also in other writings (June, 1988 *RES Theological Forum*, pp. 31) and most extensively in his 1986 doctoral thesis for the Kampen seminary of the Dutch Reformed Church (GKN). This 350-page document entitled *Equipping the Saints*, tends to dismiss the notion that the authority of the local church consistory is original while that of other assemblies is delegated by it as (1) a concession to American democratic politics and (2) an invention of Abraham Kuyper. Clearly, De Moor's argument favors a centralized hierarchy, and it gives support to the present development of such a structure.

Despite the valuable historical research of this thesis, (1) it fails to ground its judgment on the Bible's teaching, and it consequently also (2) does not do justice to the motives that originated our Reformed Church polity. We have already seen how the Bible nowhere encourages developing a centralized church organization, but warns against moving in that direction. The Reformed principle of the original authority the Lord entrusted to the local church offices is not a Kuyperian invention or product of American secular democracy. (Notice the way these two explanations really contradict each other. Kuyper was hardly a Yankee democrat!) This principle (of local elder authority) is simply the pattern that our early Reformed fathers, struggling to escape from the anti-Christian tyranny of the Roman

bureaucracy, found in the Scriptures and tried to work out as they struggled against great obstacles to develop a Biblical form of church cooperation. Restoring and preserving the jurisdiction and individuality of each church was so much the concern of those early Reformed churches that they tried to safeguard those rights in the very *first article* of the Church Order adopted by the *first regular Synod* (Emden, 1571): "No Church shall dominate over other Churches, no Minister of the Word, Elder or Deacon shall dominate the one over the other, but every one shall guard himself against all suspicions and enticements to dominate" (Monsma and Van Dellen's *Church Order Commentary* [1941], p. 341; cf. De Moor's thesis, p. 267). Could anything more clearly show how far we have slipped from our Biblical, confessional (and even historical) moorings than the fact that this original principle of Reformed Church Order is now being misrepresented as a comparatively late, secular heresy?

A Reformed Church Must Seek Church Unity.

The early history of the Reformed Churches, who affirmed as a first principle their rejection of any church hierarchy, also highlights a danger to which they were exposed, in their reaction against the abuse of church power, of fragmenting into separated, independent churches. Monsma and Van Dellen's account points out how difficult it was to persuade especially those churches who had been persecuted by church authorities, to cooperate in holding any kind of synod for joint action.

The Word of God tells us that we must endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). Our Lord prayed that His people might be one (John 17:11, 21 ff.) in a unity of faith in His Word (but not with unbelievers who like to exploit the name "Christian"). Although churches which have had to break away from unfaithful denominations may have to become independent as a temporary policy, independency is no cure-all for the abuse of church power, but is exposed to its own variety of abuses. One of the most common of them is the misuse of power and influence

by the individual minister. I was once consulted by a troubled group of members of an independent church, seeking a way out of a controversy which was tearing their church apart. I outlined the way our churches attempt to forestall or correct such problems through consulting with church visitors and classes. Regrettably, they did not have any such devices and what their church had had of a constitution had been arbitrarily altered by the minister!

A recent widely publicized church incident in Britain has, in the words of the editor of the Scotch Free Church's *Monthly Record*, (March, 1988, p. 61), "sent shock waves through Reformed churches all over the world." Rev. Errol Hulse, highly respected and influential Reformed Baptist pastor whose books and editorials in *Reformation Today* are widely read and esteemed, was summarily dismissed by his independent congregation on the initiative of its elders, although no charge of heresy or misbehavior was involved. Editor MacLeod's comment seems appropriate: "What kind of polity—what kind of Christianity—is it that can deal out such summary cruelty to a minister of the gospel? We ventured the opinion some years ago that an Independent minister has no more security than a pub pianist. Not in our wildest nightmares did we anticipate such a terrible confirmation." "It is particularly sad to notice the role played by the elders. No man did more than Erroll Hulse to reinstate eldership in English congregationalism and it is a cruel irony that he should fall victim to an abuse of what he himself fought for.... Things have now come to the point where elders are functioning not merely as the pastor's equal but as boards of directors with summary powers of dismissal. Surely the original vision was that they would be colleagues, not employers? Better by far the power of a church-meeting than the power of an oligarchy." Editor MacLeod suggests the need for "some apparatus whereby the kind of problems which emerged... can be referred to the wider church" (as they would be under Reformed or Presbyterian polity), instead of leaving the victim of local injustice with nowhere to turn.

Dr. J. I. Packer, in his little 1958 book, *Fundamentalism and the Word*

of God, pointed out that "the problem of authority is the most fundamental problem that the Christian Church ever faces." "There are three distinct authorities to which final appeal might be made—Holy Scripture, Church tradition or Christian reason;" that is to say, Scripture as interpreted by itself; Scripture as interpreted (and in some measure amplified) by official ecclesiastical sources; and Scripture as evaluated in terms of extra-biblical principles by individual Christian men." He sees these three views of authority as those held by the Confessional Protestants or Reformed, the Roman Catholics and the modern Liberal Protestants, respectively, and points out that one has to choose between these three—one can no more combine these views to build one church on them than one can build on three totally diverse foundations. "Sham unity is not worth working for, and real unity, that fellowship of love in the truth which Christ prayed that his disciples might enjoy will come only as those sections of the wall which rest on unsound foundations are dismantled and rebuilt" (pp. 42-46).

In our rising church crisis, Dr. De Moor (and others in our church bureaucracy for whose view he seems to be an articulate spokesman) would drive us toward accepting centralized control by warning against the opposite threat of independentism and fragmentation. We ought to notice that these are not two alternatives between which we must choose. As Packer pointed out, the Reformed Church's guiding principle is and has to be the authority of Holy Scripture. It is only as that authority of the Bible is lost from sight that the church is caught in a dilemma between control from the top down or from the bottom up.* Our problem is that under the influence of Higher Critical abuse of the Bible by our church leadership everything the Bible says has become debatable and recent synod majorities have fiercely resisted every proposal to end controversies with a "Thus saith the Lord" which appeals to the Bible. A former president of Calvin's Board told us some years ago the startling fact that for 15 years the Biblical doctrine of the church had not even been taught in the field

of Systematic Theology in training our ministers. When our churches in their church polity discard the light of God's Word, we should not be surprised if we continue to stumble in hopeless confusion as we try to deal with multiplying problems. The only effective remedy for that kind of ecclesiastical mess (which we share with many others) is the old one of Reformation by a return to hearing and obeying God's Word. In past centuries the Lord gave reformation and renewal to His church by that route. If we stubbornly refuse to turn that way, the Lord sternly warned us that our troubles will increase. He said, "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men" (Matt. 5:13). PDJ

**It is interesting to observe in the last pages of Dr. De Moor's thesis (p. 350), that he thinks that one can avoid this dilemma between from the top down or bottom up rule by appealing to the authority of Christ. That raises the question how one can determine what Christ commands. Since the appeal is not to the Bible (which has become completely ambiguous to today's critical "scholars"), our dilemma between (like Roman Catholics) obeying a church hierarchy or (as Liberals) each doing as he or she pleases, remains. In neither of these cases can we have a truly authoritative gospel—or church.*

Rev. Nelson D. Kloosterman

will be the speaker at the annual Reformation Day lecture of the Fellowship of Reformed Churches.

This meeting will be at 8 p.m., Friday,

October 28, 1988, at the Christian Reformation Church, 1001 33rd St., Grand Rapids, MI 49508.

All are invited to this meeting, and to the fellowship hour after.

David K. Watson

THE CHRISTIAN RECONSTRUCTION/ THEONOMY MOVEMENT (PART 2)

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

In the summer of 1977, after Greg Bahnsen had been teaching at Reformed Seminary for a year-and-a-half, a resolution was presented on the floor of the General Assembly requesting that a study committee be appointed to examine the issue of theonomy. The General Assembly chose to refer the matter to a standing committee. The next year the committee reported back. It recommended that toleration for a multiplicity of views concerning "the application of the judicial law for today" be encouraged within the denomination.

At that same juncture (1978), because of the controversy surrounding theonomy which was brewing on campus among the faculty and students, the seminary board, for expediency's sake, offered Bahnsen a year's paid leave, at which time his contract expired. The board did not cite his views as a grounds for its decision.

That fall, G. Aiken Taylor, then editor of *The Presbyterian Journal*, unleashed a series of articles attacking postmillennialism and theonomy. Bahnsen wrote a lengthy defense, a portion of which was printed in the *Journal*. The series and its rebuttal provoked a lot of mail, primarily from theonomists critical of what they perceived to be Taylor's misrepresentation of their position.

As theonomic graduates of Reformed Seminary sought ordination in the PCA, several of them encountered opposition at the presbytery level because of their views. For some, their ordination was held up for a lengthy amount of time. Quite a number of judicial cases brought before the ecclesiastical courts of the PCA have been in-

itiated by theonomists who have appealed the actions of their presbyteries.

Vallecito

In the mean time, the work of Rushdoony's Chalcedon Foundation was expanding. Rushdoony relocated from southern California to northern California, near the rural town of Vallecito. The Foundation added new staff members and contributors to its publications. Among the young scholars who became closely associated with Reconstructionist literature at this time were David Chilton and James Jordan. Both of them became theonomists primarily through reading Rushdoony's works and they both attended Reformed Seminary while Bahnsen was teaching there.

Just when, from all outward appearances, Chalcedon was progressing smoothly and its influence was growing, a division occurred within its ranks. In September, 1981, an announcement in the *Chalcedon Report* stated that North and Jordan had been dropped from the staff (Chilton had already had a parting of the ways with Rushdoony). No explanation was provided at the time, but subsequent indicators point to both personal and philosophical reasons.

Tyler

Prior to the schism, North, who had become Rushdoony's son-in-law, had moved to Tyler, Texas. Tyler thus became the home of his Institute for Christian Economics (ICE). He employed Jordan, and eventually Chilton, as staff members. In addition, the PCA church in Tyler was pastored by a theonomist, Ray Sutton. Sutton was a graduate of Dallas Seminary who had converted

from dispensationalism to theonomy, a radical change which characterizes a sizable number of theonomists.

The Texas Presbytery of the PCA "began to keep out theonomists," Sutton claimed, and it also "threatened to suspend the session" of the Tyler church because it had "organized its own Divinity school as a teaching ministry of the local church." Rather than get into a "protracted battle which would cause too much damage," the church left the PCA.¹

The secessionist church's Geneva Divinity School joined the ICE in publishing many different newsletters covering a wide variety of topics. The church also formed an Association of Reformation Churches with a few like-minded churches and pastors on its rolls.

The Tyler church sought to "appreciably alter the thrust of the Christian Reconstruction movement."² While Rushdoony emphasized Christian education as the primary means of bringing about Reconstruction, the scholars at Geneva stressed "the importance of the local sacramental body of the Church." Therefore, they were "very much involved in ecclesiastical renewal, canon law, the liturgical movement, the paedocommunion issue, the reestablishment of tithing, and the like."³

In December, 1987, the Tyler church changed its name to Good Shepherd Episcopal Church and joined the American Episcopal Church, a group which has broken off from the mainline Episcopalian denomination.

Atlanta

A few years after the Tyler secession, another theonomic church in

the PCA became the focus of controversy. The Chalcedon church of Atlanta, Georgia, had prospered under its pastor, Joseph Morecraft. Its physical plant grew and it published its own monthly magazine, *The Counsel of Chalcedon*. In the fall of 1982, though, a group withdrew, "charging that the church was going beyond the Westminster Confession in requiring its officers to hold both to theonomy and to postmillennialism."⁴

The withdrawing group's complaint was not upheld by the North Georgia Presbytery, but Morecraft's church viewed the decision as a hollow victory, sensing that theonomy would never be popular in the PCA. It looked into affiliation with the OPC, but decided against it because the OPC had not itself resolved whether it would tolerate an emphasis on theonomy in the church.

It also considered alignment with the Tyler association, but Morecraft studied the issue of paedocommunion and concluded that it was unbiblical. Therefore, the Chalcedon church decided to secede from the PCA and form the "embryonic" Covenant Presbytery. Along with a number of daughter churches and other churches which have sought affiliation, the Covenant Presbytery has developed into a full-fledged denomination, the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the U.S. It even has a close affiliation with a new seminary, Whitefield, in Lakeland, Florida.

PCA Today

There are several dozen theonomic pastors in the PCA today and many others who are sympathetic to the movement. A number of them serve as contributing editors to Morecraft's publication, *The Counsel of Chalcedon*. Certain presbyteries, like Westminster in the Appalachian region, have greater concentrations of theonomists, while others, like the Gulf Coast Presbytery, have vigorously sought to exclude them. When able, many theonomists have sought positions on the judicial committees of the denomination.

OPC Developments

When Bahnsen left Jackson, he became an OPC home missions pastor in Placentia, California. There he

continues to preach and to write extensively, occasionally venturing out to lecture.

The OPC also has a dozen or so additional theonomic pastors. Theonomy has been discussed briefly at General Assembly, but it has not been formally studied at the denominational level. In 1983, the Northern California Presbytery sponsored a conference on theonomy, but little was solved by it.

Journey Magazine, edited by OPC pastor Richard Knodel of Lynchburg, Virginia, devoted an entire issue to theonomy (November-December, 1986) and has been very sympathetic to the movement. David Chilton, who has had a falling out with North, is presently serving as the stated supply of an OPC chapel in California. He has not yet been accepted by his presbytery because of reservations about his view of the sacraments. The OPC foreign mission board is also supplying personnel for a Reconstructionist work in Surinam.

Reformed Church in the U.S.

This small denomination from the German Reformed tradition first began to hear about theonomy ten years ago through Norman Jones, then editor of its monthly magazine, *The Reformed Herald*, who placed excerpts from works by Rushdoony, North, and Bahnsen. Bahnsen was asked to address the denomination's ministers' conference in 1978 at Dordt College.

The next year a couple of Bahnsen's former students sought entry into the denomination. Eventually, several theonomists did enter and a few years down the road, controversy ensued. The denomination appointed a committee to investigate theonomy in 1983. That committee presented its report in 1985, but the action taken did not satisfy the opponents of theonomy. In 1987, they made an effort to have theonomy declared out of accord with the Heidelberg Catechism. They were only marginally successful and the issue will probably be taken up again.

Reformed Churches of New Zealand

Theonomy was introduced into the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, a denomination primarily of Dutch immigrant stock, by

Richard Flinn, another student of Bahnsen's at Reformed Seminary. Flinn returned to his homeland and served as a home missionary. In a short time, he began to contribute articles to the denomination's monthly magazine *Faith in Focus*. In about a year, he became its editor and the magazine started to reflect his theonomic convictions. Soon, an American classmate and fellow theonomist came to serve as a home missionary as well. Later, another American theonomist took over a pastorate in New Zealand.

This denomination has also appointed a committee to study theonomy. Most recently, Flinn has resigned from the denomination.

CRC

Even though Rushdoony contributed articles to *The Torch and Trumpet* over a considerable span of years, that relationship died out as he developed his own forum for spreading his views. His books continued to be reviewed, but they were not as enthusiastically endorsed as they once had been. A few West Coast CRC laymen continued to provide some financial support for his endeavors. E. L. Hebden Taylor, sociology professor for many years at Dordt College, while not entirely endorsing their views, did make a generous use of Rushdoony's and North's analyses. Recent years have witnessed some theonomic influence on the CRC and Gary Moes, editor of *Chalcedon Report*, is a Calvin College alumnus and a member of the CRC.

Charismatics et al.

While the focus of this article has been on theonomy's effect on some of the small Reformed denominations with which the CRC is in ecclesiastical fellowship, it would be the wrong impression to think that Reconstructionism's profoundest influence has been on them. Rather, independent Baptists, Catholics, and especially Charismatics are attracted to what Rushdoony calls, "God's plan for victory." *Chalcedon Report* goes out to over thirty countries around the world and organizations which foster Christian Reconstruction are in place in Australia, England, and the Caribbean. (To be continued)

Footnotes:

¹Quoted in Clarence Stam, "The First Annual Geneva Conference and the Association of Reformation Churches," *Reformed Perspective* (March, 1983), 12.

²Tape ad for the First Annual Geneva Reconstruction Conference, February, 1983.

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

⁴Joel Belz, "Strict Theonomists Set up 'Embryonic' Presbytery," *The Presbyterian Journal* (March 2, 1983), 4.

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Claude D. De Prine III

GOD'S WORD IN THE DROUGHT

God's Word to Israel in Amos 4:6ff. is equally applicable to our nation as it faces its worst drought in many years. Ancient Israel, blessed by God with unique privileges, had deserted their worship of Him. Despite His many warnings, they had "not returned to" Him. Therefore He gave their cities "cleanness of teeth" — famine. He had "withheld rain" from them three months before harvest time, during the growing season. Calvin in his *Commentary* called attention to the people's increasing worries as this lesson was prolonged month after month. The spotty distribution of rain when it was given drove people from dried-out districts to seek water in those areas that had received any, even then to remain unsatisfied. God declared that despite these continuing judgments, the people did not return to Him (vv. 9, 10, 11). Thus they continued to be urged, "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" (v. 12).

Although all sins call for the judgment of God, there are, according to Scripture, some that call for such special judgments on nations. The atheism that says there is no God, or in practice, lives as if there were no God, calls for such judgments. To the practical atheists who said in their heart (Zeph. 1:12) "The Lord will not do good, Nor will he do evil," the Lord threatened, "Therefore their goods shall become a

booty, and their houses a desolation; they shall also build houses, but shall not inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, but not drink the wine thereof." These people were like those of our time. Although they may not deny God's existence, they neither attribute good nor evil to Him. When God sends rain and abundant crops, they do not recognize them as His gifts or give thanks. When He sends drought and crop failure, they attribute them to the "jet stream" or the "greenhouse effect." Such practical atheism is a sin that calls for the Lord's judgment.

The prophet Joel had to predict the Lord's judgments of drought and famine on a people who had given themselves over to drunkenness and riotous living. Consider our nation's spreading and growing problems of "alcoholism" and drug addiction.

Thirdly, the Bible cites deceit, bribery and extortion as offenses that call for and get God's judgments (Amos 5:10-17). God detests the sins of a nation that deals falsely in its business and commerce, to grow rich at the expense of neighbors. The Wall Street and Pentagon scandals are extreme examples that highlight a similar way of thinking and living that increasingly characterizes much of our nation's society and economy.

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is held up throughout the Bible as a classic example of God's

judgment upon sexual vice — brazen fornication and homosexuality. God wiped that out with a rain of fire that gives a glimpse of His ultimate judgment upon such arrogant ungodliness.

God threatened and brought the judgment of exile on His people for profaning His sabbaths (Jer. 17:27). And on their return Nehemiah saw the same sin calling for renewed judgments (Neh. 13:15-18). God had long forewarned them against this sin in the giving of His laws (Lev. 26:31-35) and He had kept His word. Will drought and economic problems drive us from the pursuit of pleasure and recreation on the Lord's Day to return to Him in worship?

One of the prominent reasons for God's destruction of nations has been their shedding of the blood of the innocent and defenseless. God swept Judah into captivity because of that sin, which He "would not pardon" (2 Kings 24:4), and He would not let the Edomites get away with it either (Ezekiel 35:3ff.). How long will He put up with our nation's 15-year legalized slaughter of 20 million unborn babies?

God's judgments are particularly severe upon a people's faithless religious leaders. In Zeph. 3:4-6 He said, "Her prophets are insolent, treacherous people; her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have

done violence to the law." Therefore, "I have cut off nations, their fortresses are devastated; I have made their streets desolate, with none passing by. Their cities are destroyed; there is no one, no inhabitant." Similarly, Jeremiah said in Lam. 4:11, "The Lord has fulfilled His fury; He has poured out His fierce anger. He kindled a fire in Zion, and it has devoured its foundations....Because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, who shed in her midst the blood of the just," May we who proclaim the Word of God

be partly responsible for our nation's present distresses, because of our unfaithfulness to God and His truth and to the souls of those to whom we are called to minister?

God also brings His judgments upon people who abuse, mock and despise the true and faithful messengers of His gospel. In 2 Chron. 36:15ff. such judgments are announced especially because of the people's shameful mistreatment of the very people whom God had sent them for their welfare. When such faithful messengers of God are

rejected, God says, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."

These judgments of God in history reveal Him as the sovereign Creator and Provider, in order to lead people to repentance, and to warn them of the coming final judgment. If they will not listen, His word to them is "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel." Are we listening to what He says to us in the present drought?

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PAINLESS CHRISTIANITY?

In these days of unparalleled prosperity and easy living it is almost unthinkable any more that as Christians we must accept trials, adversity, and attacks on our faith. When things are going so well in a material way why does the Bible repeatedly speak of suffering as a way of life? In Romans 8:17 it speaks about this: if so be that we suffer with him. Also in I Peter 5:10: But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that YE HAVE SUFFERED A WHILE...

Our natural inclination is to evade suffering. We prefer the painless brand of Christianity. How can we escape these divine reminders?

There are several ways that can be listed from recent events in our lives:

1. BE POSITIVE

Surely no one will criticize us for our views if we make all our remarks on a given issue of the supporting variety. If our leaders tell us that we don't have to believe Genesis literally because, after all, it is only a

poem. No historical value, only literary! We avoid conflict and suffering by accepting such statements. Can't we trust our seminary-trained leaders?

2. DON'T BE NEGATIVE

We avoid conflict by refraining from contending for the faith. To contend for the faith is to don the armor of God and recognize that we do not fight against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers. When the Christian warrior had the discernment to identify a given teaching, such as evolution, as a threat to the church and its evangelistic outreach, and he rises up to object he is called negative! Is it possible that promoters of atheistic evolution are "angels of light" even though they are in the church? The Bible teaches that Satan comes disguised as an "angel of light."

3. DON'T SOW DISCORD

When we object to the ruling of the clergy on the Calvin Board of Trustees that the 3 profs, who were

Peter Sluis

alleged to be teaching secular humanism, may continue on the faculty, we are labeled as sowing discord. If we bring our complaint, pain results.

4. DON'T SAFEGUARD OUR CHILDREN

If we do, and allege that the college where our children are educated is departing from the faith and becoming secular, we are branded as trouble-makers. Please do not stand in the way of progress!

5. VOTE WITH THE MAJORITY

When 90-95% of the world believes in evolution and ridicules creation, it will cause pain and conflict if we side with the minority. But history has shown that on crucial issues the MINORITY HAS BEEN RIGHT. Think of the two spies in Israel who were outvoted (but long survived the other voters).

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AN "INDEPENDENT" VIEWPOINT

For over three years now I have noted with interest the events which are occurring within the Christian Reformed Church. My interest has not, I'll admit, been one of indifferent unconcern as my connections with that denomination have been, and remain, very close. Not only were my wife and I born and baptized in the CRC, so were our parents and grandparents before us. We made our professions of faith in her, were married in her, and had our four children baptized in her. She catechized us and inculcated in us a love for the Word, for the creeds, and for the confessions. Her liturgical forms spoke beautifully to us at various times in our lives. We received the nourishment of the Word preached as we sat before her pulpits. To this day nearly every member of both our families, and many of our friends, remain within her fold. I still read *The Outlook*, *Christian Renewal*, and even *The Banner*. You can see the reason for my interest and concern!

Yet, I am not Christian Reformed. And this I say without embarrassment. After having been graduated from Mid-America Reformed Seminary with its first class in May of 1985, I received and, after much prayerful struggle, accepted a call to serve as the pastor of Immanuel Fellowship Church in Kalamazoo. My intent had always been to minister in the CRC, but God, in His sovereign grace, led me instead to an independent congregation unaffiliated with any denomination or organization. After having been duly examined by the elders of that

congregation, I was ordained as a Minister of the Word and Sacraments in June of that year.

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I have given the foregoing personal history simply as background for the rest of my comments. The balance of what I wish to say can be divided into two parts. First, I would like to make a few observations concerning the CRC. My intent is to be as objective as possible. Perhaps the view of an "outsider" will enable those "within" to see the issues more clearly. Second, I would like to say just a few things about my experience in an "independent" church.

First, then, some observations about CRC:

1. The issue of women in office, a very "hot" issue when I left the CRC, seems to have become passe'. The strident articles regarding this subject no longer appear in church publications—official or unofficial—at least as far as the office of deacon is concerned. That which was only a short time ago regarded as an unacceptable and unbiblical stand by conservatives within the CRC has apparently become the accepted practice by them within the communion of churches.

2. The church-growth school of thought has apparently grasped the CRC within its tentacles. This would seem to be a clear indication that the denomination as a whole has chosen modern "growthism" at the expense of the faithful proclamation of the Word and total reliance upon the movement of the Holy Spirit. The objective of the church must always be

faithfulness rather than numbers. (See the meditation by HVK in the July issue of the *MARS Messenger*.)

3. The matter of evolution is being handled in a way very similar to that of women in office. When in doubt, appoint another study committee. That way the issue becomes so diffused that the "conservatives" will no longer be able to pointedly call the church back to faithfulness. Indeed, those who hold to evolution are now officially classified as orthodox. The argument against them disappears.

4. Hierarchicalism eventually buys peace at every price. While inveighing against congregationalism, congregationalism becomes the church standard. The "experts" in theology, church order, missiology, etc. are deemed, by their mere expertise, to be wiser than the godly men and women who are unabashedly faithful and confessional. The effect of this hierarchical boardism is seen particularly in annual synodical pronouncements regarding such things as quota payment and rule-following. Consistories apparently exist primarily to carry out the directives of the boards.

Second, a few words about my experience outside denominational boundaries:

1. Our Triune God has not limited Himself to the confines of denominations! We have experienced His continuing work among His faithful children even in an independent congregation.

2. Independency does not necessarily imply lawlessness. We have voluntarily bound ourselves to bylaws consonant with the confes-

sions, that everything might be done "decently and in good order."

3. Independency allows us the freedom to live in accordance with God's Word, the creeds, and the confessions in line with the dictates of our own consciences as they have been enlivened by the light of God's truth. This does not mean that we are perfect. It simply frees us from guilt by association.

4. Independency gives us the freedom to devote our time, our talent, our energy, to the study of Scripture and to its application to

life. Our resources are not consumed in devotion to denominational matters—however important they may be. For instance, we are able to take a very clear stand regarding creation/evolution without making this topic and what to do about it the topic of every conversation.

5. We are, by God's grace, able to selectively designate our tithes to causes we deem to be worthy without the strictures of a quota system.

There are, of course advantages and disadvantages to both denominations and independence. We are con-

vinced that for the present, God has called us to be independent. What He holds for our future, we cannot tell. Perhaps some day He will call us to unite with others within some sort of structure. In the meantime, we are convinced that we are within His will for us.

Finally, each of us must examine his own conscience in the light of Scripture, and, having done so, be obedient to God's call in his own life.

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BERTON SEVENSMA 1916-1988

Reformed Fellowship lost a dear loyal colleague when the Lord took Bert Sevensma from us a few months ago. Not that he was short-changed so far as length of days is concerned. He had reached the biblical "three score and ten" with a little to spare.

Bert lived a full life of Christian service.

He was born on the East Side of Grand Rapids in the old Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church area to spiritually distinguished parents. His grandfather, Dominie S.B. Sevensma, had come to this country from Holland in 1900 to serve that large congregation. His father, Brant Sevensma, was a founder of what is now the prestigious Eerdmans Publishing Company. I remember his father: short, piercing eyes, an elder in Christ's

church in the best sense of the word, one of our finest catechism teachers.

Bert and I were classmates in Baxter St. Christian School and in Grand Rapids Christian High School. After graduating from Calvin College, Bert went on to the University of Michigan to study law. He was a practising attorney the rest of his life.

To list all of Bert's accomplishments and contributions in church and civic offices would take considerable space. He was with us in the work of the Fellowship as a board member from the beginning in 1951. He served more than a few terms as deacon and elder in his church. He was delegated to synod, the broadest assembly of the CRC, where he worked effectively. He spent several years on the Board of Trustees of the Pine Rest Christian

John H. Piersma

Hospital Association, many of them as its secretary. He did not restrict himself to "church and kingdom affairs" (the quotation marks suggest criticism of such usage!). He was a popular, influential Third Ward Commissioner in Grand Rapids for many terms.

To know Bert was a real privilege. He was modest, thoughtful, steadfast. He loved the faith he had been taught by his spiritual forbears, and he stood for it.

He will be missed. To his wife, his children and grandchildren, his wider family and friends we offer our sincerest sympathy.

"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on! Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them" (Rev. 14:13).