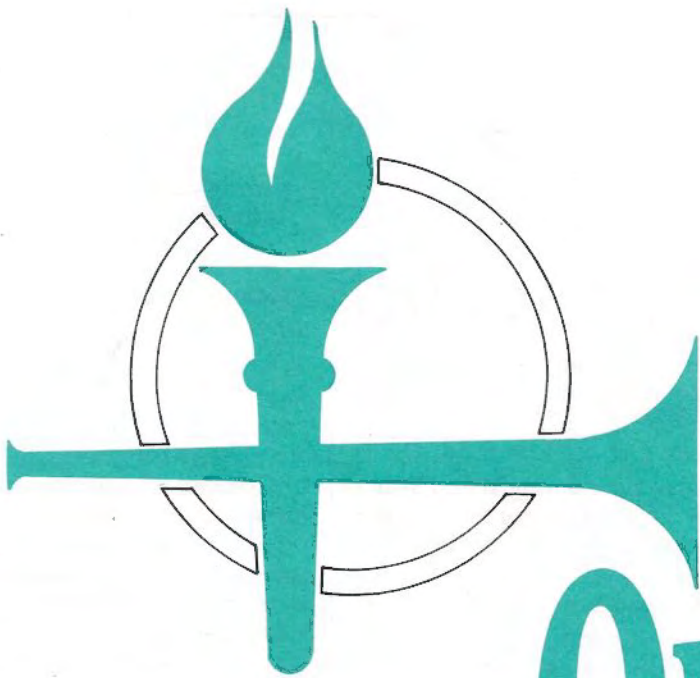




Outlook

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

Tract Evangelism

State of the Church

**Feeding Sheep
or Amusing Goats**

FEBRUARY 1989

SPREADING THE WORD

Faith Prayer, Tract distributes 35 million 4-page booklets yearly

John Brondsema is quietly sowing the seeds of salvation, but the 68-year-old man almost never sees the fruits of his labor.

Brondsema designs, writes and packages Christian tracts, little 4-page booklets that offer salvation and comfort through the mail and on the street — Jesus Speaks, Jesus Saves.

This isn't Billy Graham style evangelism where the saved are spiritually counseled and referred to churches. It's a shot in the dark where maybe one in 100 seeds finds roots.

It's the work of the Faith Prayer and Tract League, the culmination of 46 years of Brondsema's leadership and business acumen, a predilection he calls simple "common sense."

Although he retired last March, Brondsema still keeps his hand in the business at 2627 Elmridge Ave., NW, in Walker, inherited from his father in 1946. He still comes in almost every day to package tracts and give advice, when it's solicited, to Calvin Heckman, the League's new director.

Under Brondsema's guidance, the non-profit organization has grown from "a couple of cartons of beat-up tracts and 1,500 back-orders" into a clearing house for more than 35 million tracts a year, one of the largest such distributors in the country.

In addition, Brondsema has cultivated foreign outlets across the world that print tracts in at least a dozen different languages and distribute them in their own countries.

Brondsema's father and grandfather, both ministers, "didn't know they were going to start something big," when they began printing tracts in their home in 1922, he said.

Paper shortages during World War II and his father's concern for his ministry almost killed the League in the 1940s.

But Brondsema took it over after he returned from World War II and streamlined the operation, trimming the tracts and gradually expanding the business from his attic to his basement to the 9,000-square-foot cinder block building in Walker.

Today, largely because of his hands-on management style ("If there was a floor to sweep, I swept it"), the League has grown to be a well-oiled machine for getting the Word out.

Brondsema, and now Heckman, write the tracts, design them, farm out the art work and do the bookwork.

The business began as an answer to a constant, deeply felt need in the Christian Reformed Church — Brondsema's denomination from the cradle — to evangelize in a way that would conform to the reserved and proper style of Dutch immigrants.

"When we read the Bible, it says you've got to witness," Brondsema said.

But witnessing is something the CRC has never been altogether comfortable with, at least not in the style of some of today's pushy preachers.

"We don't really tap people on the shoulder and say, 'Are you saved?'" Brondsema said.

Instead, the League started by his father and grandfather, set out to supply the doctrinally sound, well-written material that others could distribute on street corners, through the mail, in churches.

Although almost everyone involved with the League is Christian Reformed and \$30,000 in financial support comes from the CRC every year, the League's patrons are largely Baptists, members of the Assemblies

By Ed Golder
(The Grand Rapids Press)

of God and other protestant evangelical and charismatic congregations.

One Chicago man sends \$25 a month, orders the same tract every time and peddles them on the street.

A bakery sends out a "Happy Birthday" tract that talks about spiritual birth with every birthday cake it makes.

A businessman sends them out with each invoice and a grocery store owner puts them at the end of his counter for customer consumption.

Brondsema writes his tracts with this audience in mind.

"The tracts I've written over the years have been short and catchy," he says. "I feel it's my job to speak to the unbeliever."

Thus, the heady and Bible-quoting leaflets his father might have used don't do in an age of fast-food-like media consumption.

"The function of a tract is merely to prick somebody's heart," he said. "Just like a television ad."

The messages are simple; some for committed Christians who need comforting, some for the unsaved who need to learn about sin and salvation.

A number of the salvation tracts are what the League calls "sleepers."

One about the Mackinac Bridge, with a picture of the bridge on the cover and facts about its height and span inside, starts by describing great bridges and goes on to tell about Jesus as the greatest bridge for spanning the gulf between God and humanity.

That's not Brondsema's preferred style. "I don't like to sneak up on people," he said, "I prefer tracts that say, 'Jesus speaks.'"

Most of the 300 types of tracts the League distributes are mailed out by businessmen and distributed by churches.

Some are handed out on street corners.

For Brondsema, the tract business has always been a "non-threatening" method of evangelism.

A bookish man not much given to sermonizing, a science teacher for 25 years at Westside Christian, Brondsema felt along with his father and grandfather a need to quietly tell people about Jesus.

Although he'll never know how much overall good was accomplished by his ministry, Brondsema said, he gets letters every day telling individual stories.

"We're just amazed at how many people write us," he said, "people who say, 'I was ready to commit suicide and you saved me.'"

And despite some who believe that a rounded theological knowledge is needed for salvation, he's seen stories to the contrary, people who became committed Christians by accepting a few short tidbits about Jesus, sin and salvation.

There are other types of tracts, the kind that can be left for a sick person to find at the bedside when they wake up alone in the hospital at 4 in the morning.

"We print anything that will help anybody," he said.

In a world prone to criticism, Brondsema is continually amazed by the positive response his business has provoked.

"Without asking for letters, we get maybe one a day that just warms the cockles of our hearts," he said.

He also gets mail from the lonely, the imprisoned, people who just need friendship.

Now, with Heckman at the helm, Brondsema is in the business of making himself obsolete.

"Any executive's job is to make sure the business can go on without him," he said.

Recently returned from a trip to Europe, he works in his greenhouse at home and usually comes in for three or four hours a day.

But he is happy with his life's work and with what he's accomplished.

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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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HOW WE SHOULD PRAY IN TRIALS

John Blankespoor

"Jane Smith had an appendectomy last Wednesday. Pray for a speedy recovery. Bob Brown is scheduled for by-pass surgery next Tuesday. Pray for successful surgery." Such announcements are common in church bulletins. Members of the congregation are properly kept informed about their fellow members, and expected to pray for them. But, if the members of the congregation pray only for what is mentioned in the bulletin announcements, there's something missing in their prayers. These announcements speak only of physical healing and welfare. Although we Christians may pray for physical well-being, in the will of God *"who gives us richly all things to enjoy"* (1 Tim. 6:17; 4:4), we must pray for more than that.

We are in danger of having what has been called "a fire-truck religion." When a fire breaks out in our homes, we call the fire department. We desperately need those men with their equipment, but, when they have put the fire out they leave, their work finished, and we soon forget about them. We are in danger of a religion that regards God like the firemen. When all is well we can get along quite well without Him. Only when sickness or trouble come do we call to Him for recovery and relief! *God will not be so "used."* He wants to be *always worshipped.*

How does the Lord want us to pray in adverse circumstances? With physical health, we should also pray for our

spiritual welfare—that our trials may be "sanctified." Pray that He may enable us to remember that "all things work together for good for those who love the Lord" and that we may become more heavenly minded. By faith in Christ we are saved to become, body and soul, a new creation in Christ. Although we can distinguish between the physical and the spiritual, we can't separate them. We can't, in spirit serve the Lord, and physically live for ourselves. Elijah prayed that it would not rain (a physical event) and that Israel would repent (a spiritual result). Paul kept his physical thorn in the flesh, learning spiritual lessons through it. The Israelites in the wilderness were fed with manna (Deut. 8:3) and given water out of the rock to teach them to depend on the Lord. The Lord Jesus heals many sick in order that the people would recognize Him as the Son of God come as Savior from sin (Mark 2:10-12).

Charles Spurgeon wrote, "God trains His soldiers not in tents of ease and luxury, but by turning them out and using them in forced marches and hard service. He makes them ford through rivers and streams and climb mountains and walk many a weary mile with heavy knapsacks on their backs."

Our afflictions are from the Lord. The Heidelberg Catechism confesses this beautifully in Lord's Day 10 about God's providence: "Providence is the almighty and ever present power of God, by which he upholds us with his

hand, heaven and earth and all creatures and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty, all things in fact, come to us not by chance but from His fatherly hand."

Our Lord said, "I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He trims clean so that it will be even more fruitful.... This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" (John 15:1,2,8). A certain owner of a nursery tells of being in a great hothouse where luscious clusters of grapes were hanging on every side. The owner said, "When my new gardener came he said he would have nothing to do with these vines unless he could cut them clean down to the stalk; and he did, and we had no grapes for two years, but this is the result." The pruning process may illustrate the purpose and result of trouble in the Christian life. Pruning seems to be destroying the vine. The gardener appears to be cutting it all away. But, he looks into the future and knows that the final outcome will be the enrichment of its life and greater abundance of fruit. When the heavenly gardener is busy pruning or trimming the vine in our lives, we should therefore also pray, by all means, for grace and spiritual strength to bring forth more fruit.

CONSIDERING OUR COURSE

A Conference of Consistories

The masthead of every issue of this paper has long listed activities on behalf of the Reformed faith to which it is committed both within Reformed churches and beyond them "as far as possible" in "all Christian action and institutions of Reformed character." One of the activities that clearly fits into such a list of our special interests is that of the consistorial conferences that in recent years have been held in the Chicago area. This year's conference on November 2 and 3 brought delegates from some 17 churches to the spacious accommodations of Village Woods, a Christian conference and retirement center south of Crete, Illinois.

The sessions, in which Elder James Swets served as chairman, Rev. Warren Lammers as vice-chairman and Rev. John Sittema as recording clerk, produced several decisions to help guide the consulting consistories. These were encouraged, through the activity of a standing committee on educational materials, to begin providing publications needed for catechism, Sunday schools and other Bible studies, that are faithful to the Scriptures and the creeds, self-consistent

and educationally sound. A special effort is also to be made to provide (church order) training materials for consistories and their members concerning their duties and proper functioning in the various church assemblies. Some attention was given to funding these efforts and suggestions were made about preserving copies of earlier editions of the *Psalter Hymnal*.

Because of the 1988 Synod decisions which permit views that contradict the Scripture and the creeds, the conference advised consistories to continue teaching the Biblical truths outlined in the creeds, and to oppose those offensive decisions as far as possible by correspondence, overtures and protests. It advised consistories to guide members to give contributions "only in obedience to the Word of God." It advised them to work with other consistories and school boards to demand obedience to the Word of God in the treatment of the creation-evolution issue.

Students and graduates of seminaries other than Calvin, the denomination's official school, at present face discriminatory rules which require them to be licensed to lead church services by the Calvin Board of Trustees

and to attend Calvin seminary for an additional year of study in order to become candidates for the ministry in our churches. Addressing this unfair rule, the conference reaffirmed a 1987 resolution that "examination and licensure of candidates properly belongs to the local churches and their assemblies, not to a board or committee or agency of Synod." It recommended that member churches of the conference "take a stand against present synodical rules concerning the licensure of seminary students, and the authority to declare candidacy and to ordain candidates." It also decided to provide some financial help to Mid-America graduates compelled to face the present unfair requirement and to solicit gifts for that purpose.

"Where Do We Go from Here?"

A week later on Nov. 10 Dr. Lester De Koster, former *Banner* editor and Calvin College professor, addressed a meeting sponsored by the Thornapple Valley Concerned Members in the Dutton church. Facing the question, "Where Do We Go from Here?," he observed that he was addressing people who, unlike some who don't

want to think about such matters or are satisfied with the current course of our churches, are disturbed by that course. He suggested that in trying to deal with that disturbing course we need to begin with ourselves. We must more carefully consider what we are *for*, as well as what we have to *oppose*. Our present undeniable church problems did not arise recently, but are a development over many years, to which we should have been alert long ago. We will, as the Lord said (Mt. 7:3ff.), have to deal with "the beam" in our own eye if we are to remove the sliver in the eye of another. A long-time lack of authentic Bible preaching, teaching and writing has left masses of our members gullible enough to mistake every foolish blunder of our leaders for the "progress" they claim it to be. They say (like Calvin's Board of Trustees last February) that we don't have to take Genesis as it is; we are only saved by faith in Christ. We may therefore dismiss Genesis as "packaging" or "poetry," despite everything that Paul said to the contrary. In our church government Christ rules by His Word using elders elected by the congregation to form complete local churches, having all the "marks" of authentic churches. "Original" church authority is only in the local elders and remains there, (rather than in larger assemblies). Our churches have permitted themselves to be robbed of this fundamental principle by an establishment that rules "out of order" whatever it doesn't like. Boards were developed to do what the churches should do and now they work without even giving the churches an account of what they are doing. The churches may not be subjected to the whims of these boards in deciding whom they should call to be their ministers. Unelected seminary faculty advisors are imposed on synod committees whether they are wanted or not. Concerned Christians should long ago have been demanding an accounting for what they give in church offerings and refusing to give if there is no account. (There is something badly wrong when we can find out what happens to our tax money, but not what happens to our church "quotas.") We need to know and understand this Biblically Reformed church polity and insist on restoring it in the practice of the churches in which the Lord has

placed us. This, in summary, was the speaker's recommendation to people who are concerned about our future course. Prominent in the ensuing questions were those about whether the time had not come to secede. Are we not reaching the point when we must say, "This is enough?" Hesitating to recommend that, although conceding that that course is sometimes justified, the speaker suggested seeking a church which does share ones convictions. God calls us to be faithful, in the confidence that He will build His Church.

Concluding Observations

It is gratifying to see fresh signs of life and interest in the several efforts to promote the Reformed Faith and life in our time. Beside our Reformed Fellowship which has embodied such an effort for well over a third of a century, there are now an increasingly aggressive independent Reformed Seminary, Mid-America at Orange City, Iowa, the Consistory Conferences, an organization of Concerned with plans for further development, the aggressive *Christian Renewal*, and most recently an incipient "alliance" of churches. What should be observed, however, is that among these developments, the only official effort of people called to lead the churches, the ELDERS and their CONSISTORIES, is that of the consistory Conferences. While the many other kinds of promotional and educational efforts are commendable, they are always limited in what they can do where action is especially needed, in the leadership of churches.

Some years ago in a conference of the National Presbyterian and Reformed Fellowship in Atlanta, Georgia, the Presbyterian problem was under discussion. While several organizations had sprung up to try to deal with various aspects of it, they were all more or less frustrated because none of them officially represented the churches and their governing bodies. The unique advantage of the consistory conferences among us is that they are consultations of such church authorities trying to determine what the Lord calls them to do about our church crisis.

In those conferences the consistories are learning to work together and to encourage one another in find-

ing and following a common course. From many of our churches complaints seem to be multiplying against the way the churches are being misled by a growing centralized bureaucracy and the way efforts for correction are routinely and even cynically dismissed. Those churches should join the consultations with consistories that share that frustration and are trying to do something about it. (That is far better than wasting time in more useless complaints, or even complaining about what others are trying to do to remedy it—One senses on all sides a justifiable impatience of church members with leaders who complain but seem just as determined to do nothing else about it! What driver ever got anywhere by doing nothing but ride the brake pedal?)

Some are saying that we must be content with trying to faithfully preach and teach the gospel and stop worrying and talking about what happens to the church. But that gospel will not permit us to keep on supporting a church that increasingly contradicts everything that it commands us to preach and teach. The Lord warned us against that foolish and hypocritical course. "No man can serve two masters" (Matt. 6:24). His Word demands more than believing and calling to faith in the gospel. He "builds" those saved by faith in the gospel into His Church (Mt. 16:18, Eph. 7:19-22). His Word orders us to "be not unequally yoked with unbelievers," but to separate from them (2 Cor. 6:14ff.). A growing number of impatient church members, despairing of finding any reform within our churches, are looking elsewhere for an honest and faithful church fellowship. Our churches who love the Lord and His Word will have to do much more than we have done, to not only maintain and restore faithful preaching and teaching of the gospel. We will also have to pray and work to recover a genuine and honest church fellowship that enthusiastically embodies and promotes that gospel. Especially our elders and consistories need to jointly work for that, if our churches and those of our children and grandchildren are to have a future. Will they either be totally lost or have to look elsewhere for the faith and fellowship that we would not work and fight to restore and preserve?

PDJ

Jelle Tuininga

THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THE CRC

My being asked to address this subject shows (1) that we are aware of a problem in the churches which needs our attention. Dr. Robert Godfrey (of Westminster Seminary West) told our recent Elders' Conference that all would agree that there is today a growing diversity in our denomination. Whereas we used to be largely of one mind and practice, today we are a divided church. I have brothers and sisters in other communions with whom I feel a closer kinship than I have with some in my own church. Although some diversity can be healthy, such basic differences as now exist are a serious problem. (2) That we recognize what is not well in our churches is encouraging, for it is a first step toward seeking correction. Dr. Godfrey observed that some people say, "Things just can't be that bad. I don't believe that these things are taking place." That refusal to recognize them is the surest way to make what we fear happen, for vigilance is the price of orthodoxy in churches.

Perhaps our main present problems are really apathy and secularism, for these are roots of our other problems. Amos said, "Woe to those who are complacent in Zion....but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph" (6:1a,6b). When one gives a warning, he is told, as Amos was, to go somewhere else, for all is well in our "Pentagon" (7, 12, 13).

With our apathy goes secularism. The spirit of our age has influenced us more than we want to admit. Plain

worldliness characterizes our families in the way we bring up our children, our churches in the way we neglect the sabbath, and our personal lives in our entertainment. Many of us no longer want to be different from unbelieving neighbors. Although we go to church on Sunday, during the week we live much like they do.

Dr. Godfrey remembered piety as one of the hallmarks of CRC people in the past. Piety showed itself in devotions at meal time, and in observance of the sabbath. But he saw that disappearing today. Many other problems stem from the loss of the simple piety—of living close to the Lord which characterized parents and grandparents. We are (doing exactly what the Lord's apostle warned us not to do—Romans 12:2) "being conformed to this world instead of being transformed by the renewal of our minds." We cannot just blame our leaders; we must share the blame ourselves.

One of our basic problems is our loss of understanding and resulting lack of appreciation of our Reformed heritage. Too many no longer believe the Reformed faith is worth fighting for, as we are attracted to all kinds of other emphases and practices. One CR minister, Rev. Norman B. Haan once put it this way:

"We are experiencing a restlessness also within the Christian Reformed Church. People are leaving the denomination. Some Christian Reformed congregations are ex-

perimenting with new modes of worship. Several pastors seem to be changing their emphasis. Various organizations of non-Reformed commitment are widely advertized and supported by Christian Reformed people. Even charismatic groups and individuals are found within this fellowship....

As I look at the spirit moving in some parts of the Christian Reformed denomination, I see an overemphasis on those things summed up in the bumper sticker, 'Smile, God loves you.' This is an emphasis upon the love of God, the human Jesus, the goodness of man with his potentials, 'I'm OK, you're OK,' transactional analysis, right technique and method, the spiritual contrasted with the physical. In other words, such people take out the nice, lovely things about Christianity and present this as *the whole gospel*. They accentuate the positive and avoid the negative, including the law of God. In doing this, they are imitating many fundamentalist groups. But that is a distortion of the gospel. That this approach has much appeal no one can deny. It seems to draw people from the neighborhood. But Christianity does not begin with a shallow appeal. It begins with the truth which involves the whole counsel of God."

(Norman B. Haan, in *Renewal*)

His better-known relative, Rev. B. J. Haan, former president of Dordt College, put it this way:

"It is my confirmed conviction that

the growing and deepening apostasy in our day can be most effectively withstood, counteracted, overcome, and defeated by our reformed principles. How and why so many reared in the reformed faith have opted for other, less meaningfully effective evangelical systems and methods is hard to understand. There may be something more superficially glamorous, more sensational about other systems. But the problems of our society are far too complex for the spectacular, ready-made, easy to apply remedies, solutions, and methods of our evangelical friends. Despite this fact, however, there has been a growing disenchantment with, ignorance of, and departure from the much needed reformed principles which constitute our roots. We have been in large part selling our birthright for a mess of pottage. That situation must be turned around. Rather than allow our roots to vanish, we need to capitalize on these roots for the sake of our children and society at large."

(B. J. Haan in Dordt VOICE)

This mentality has affected our schools as well as our churches. Some who have come into our churches from the outside are far more appreciative of the Reformed faith than some of us who have grown up with it. Dr. Godfrey is an example. In one of his articles he tells us that when he first worshipped in one of our churches, he was struck by the volume and enthusiasm of the singing, particularly the singing of the Psalms. And he was struck by what he called the covenant character of the church — sitting together as families. There were people of all ages worshipping God. He mentioned the common commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord of all of life!

"It was a community that stood at odds with a lot of American evangelical communities by showing a balance and fullness that I did not see in other places. These people had given themselves to building Christian schools and Christian colleges. They were not just concerned about saving souls, but had a broader sense of ministry to the whole person that impressed me. I was struck too by the piety that I saw as I heard people singing the Psalms, the very Word of God. I saw people keeping the sabbath day holy as a source of spiritual renewal. And I saw what I came to know as

the antithesis between Christian living and the living of this world, manifested in the church that I attended.

I felt the Biblical character of this true Christian living, of its understanding of God and His service. I could see that this community had been formed by careful listening to God's Word... It helped me to see not only the depth but also the breadth of the system of Scripture, and I began to treasure the systematic theology of the Reformed faith, the system of doctrine I found in the Scriptures. . . . I believed then and I believe now that that message is best contained and comprehensively summarized in the Reformed confessions of faith. . . . That is where the Christian Reformed Church stood, and that is what it taught me. That is where I came to stand, and I thank God for that heritage.

We as a denomination have been uniquely blessed by having heard in depth and in fullness the Word of God."

Isn't that a wonderful testimony to the riches of the Reformed faith? And I could mention several others who have experienced the same thing. But meanwhile some among us are almost ashamed of being Reformed and think that the sooner we become "generally evangelical" the better. Apathy and compromise jeopardize our churches today. The fight is out of us; we no longer have the desire or the tenacity to hold fast to what we have (Rev. 2:25, 3:11). We have lost our first love, and if we don't recover that, we are in danger of losing the faith altogether (Rev. 2:4, 5). Glenn Archer once put it: "Protestant leadership in the U.S. (and Canada) is suffering from a loss of nerve. The sinews of its conviction have been cut. It is no longer capable of believing resolutely in its own heritage."

Thus relativism has invaded the church. It is exemplified by what the Rev. Alex Lawson said about the decision of Ist United Church in Lethbridge to leave the denomination: "First United has the conviction that they have the true religion. They are right and others are wrong." And you may not say that. That is discriminatory. That means there is such a thing as right and wrong, also when it comes to faith and practice in the church. But that isn't so. Who really knows

what the truth is? It's the old question of Pilate: What is truth? Your opinion is as good as mine. It's all a matter of opinion, notwithstanding the claim of Jesus that He is the Truth, and that we shall know the truth which shall set us free.

We must become more specific. Two major concerns troubling the CRC today are the issues of women in office and the teaching of evolution. The two are not unrelated. Dr. H. Kuitert in the Netherlands said that if synod could by-pass the clear teaching of Paul on the matter of women's ordination (he said Paul very clearly forbade this), then he could do the same with Moses when he spoke about Adam and Eve. And he was right. Paul bases his argumentation upon the creation and fall of Adam and Eve. If that stands in the way of women's ordination, then we must get rid of Adam and Eve. And that's exactly what some of our Calvin professors want to do, notwithstanding statements to the contrary. If Genesis is not actual and factual history, but only a parable or illustration of something else, the historical Adam is in deep trouble, as Sierd Woudstra has put it. And things are not going to remain at this point, as we can learn from developments both in the Dutch Reformed Churches and in the United Church of Canada. The entire New Testament presupposes the historicity of Adam and Eve, so that if you throw the latter out, the New Testament will have to go as well as the Old. That is precisely what has happened in the above-named communions, and it will happen to us too. In 1960 the United Church still believed that homosexual conduct "violates the will of God as an offense against the proper expression of sexuality in monogamous marriage," adding that "homosexual activity is a sin against the self." But 28 years later their communion table and the pulpit are open to practicing homosexuals. What happened? Did the Bible change? Of course not, the church changed. Modern society determines what the Bible says in 1988. Ruth Evans, a leader in the United Church, states it clearly: "I don't believe we can base our attitudes or policies on one or two Bible passages." Another clergyman stated that the Bible was outdated, and we simply can't base all our decisions on such a culturally-conditioned book.

The stand of the Dutch Gereformeerde Kerken is essentially the same. Are we going to learn from these examples? Or, are we going to keep saying that it can't happen to us? Don't forget, in 1975 synod said that unless there were compelling biblical reasons to change, our stand on women in office would remain as it always was. No such compelling reasons came to light, but synod of 84 decided to change our stand anyway. Then we said that the ruling offices were closed to women because of the headship principle. But that too was only a temporary decision. It will change when the time is ready for it.

The late Prof. R. B. Kuiper used to say: "Withstand beginnings (principles)." The minister of First United in Lethbridge said that the homosexual issue was "the straw that broke the camel's back," but that actually the trend had begun many years ago with women's ordination and the decision in favor of abortion on demand. "Where were you then?" he asked of some of his fellow protagonists? That was the time when it should have been stopped. The key issue for them and for us is the authority of the Bible, and its perspicuity (clarity). The other matters are only symptoms. If we're not concerned now, when will we become concerned? When we get homosexuals on the pulpit? If Paul was mistaken about women, why not about homosexuality? The Dutch churches are consistent, but we refuse to make the connection. We are good at rationalization. But the truth is we don't have the courage of our convictions, if at least we do have convictions. Listen to the late Dr. Peter Eldersveld. What he says applies directly to the evolution question:

Some modern thinker comes up with a new interpretation, a new insight, or a whole new system of thought, which we know at once is in conflict with the Word of God and our historic Christian faith, but we don't dare to say so. And we justify our silence by saying: now let's be fair, open-minded and scholarly about this thing; maybe we can learn something from it; maybe this man has got something we can use. And anyway, we don't want to be accused of bigotry; we don't want people to think that we have no room for new ideas in our religion; or that we can't keep up with the more liberal and progressive trends

in theology today. So let's not be too quick to condemn what might become a popular school of thought; let's not be dogmatic and reactionary. And by all means let's keep the channels of communication open; let's engage in dialogue with each other: that's a good way to witness too, isn't it? And who knows, we might even be able to convert someone to our point of view.

That's the way we talk, but the truth is that we don't have the courage of our convictions — if, indeed, we actually do have the convictions. We don't dare to call heresy by its right name. And even when we do begin at long last to say something against it, we say it very apologetically; we make as many concessions as we can — for the sake of argument, of course; and we are always gracious enough to allow for the possibility that we might be wrong, even though we know clearly what the Word of God teaches, and that it plainly condemns this new heresy....

WHAT IS THE REMEDY (SOLUTION)?

It is first of all getting rid of our apathy and complacency, of the attitude which says "It can't happen to us." That means we must be informed of what is taking place, and be willing to do something about it. In order to be informed, we are going to have to read papers like *Chr. Renewal* and *Outlook*. You won't be informed by just reading *The Banner*, though I think you ought to read it also to know what's going on in the church. Once we know what's going on, we have to be willing to do something about it. And here I want to quote from a book by Dr. K. Runia, published in 1968, entitled: *Reformation Today*. He says this under a section entitled "The Voice of Protest":

The Voice of Protest

It is also our duty to raise our voice in protest against all that is contrary to Scripture in our Church, on both the local and the supra-local level. It is certainly not enough to work faithfully in our own local church and leave the rest to God....The church is a community or, as Paul said, a 'body' and we share the responsibility for what is going on in our denomination. When there is unbiblical teaching in our church, in magazines or in

books or in Sunday school material; when from the pulpits or the seminaries we hear things which are contrary to Scripture and to the subordinate standards; then we may not be silent, but have to raise our voice in protest....

Surely it is time for us to realize that *silence means co-responsibility*. If we allow wrong things to happen and wrong situations to continue, without raising our voice in protest, God will surely hold us co-responsible. To protest is certainly not easy. Often we are a small minority. It may even be that in a local church or session we stand alone.

Moreover, we have to go right against current and often popular ideas and trends. And yet we have no excuse for silence....

We should also do it in the spirit of love. But, we have to speak up! For the sake of the truth! For the sake of Him who bought us with His precious blood and who declared of Himself: I am the truth!

Runia said it well, and what he says is applicable to every member of the church. We may not excuse ourselves by saying, "What can I do" or by saying, "I'm just an ordinary member." God has often saved his church through the effort of ordinary members. (It's the "ordinary members" by and large who are protesting what is taking place in the United Church of Canada today.) We are all responsible.

I am disturbed by seeing those who are concerned and who try to do something about the situation called the "trouble-makers." One often hears the comment, "I sympathize with your concerns, but..." — and then follow a number of reasons why what you're doing is not right and they not only do not want to join in your protest, but they want you to stop what you're doing also. A good example is the proposed "Christian Reformed Alliance." Some councils wish to organize such an alliance for the express purpose of standing together against wrong trends, and thus preserving our unity as a church. But this action is deemed divisive and unReformed. Meanwhile, Calvin professors can teach evolution and go on a crusade to promote women in office, but little is said or done about that. Apparently that is not divisive or unReformed. Let's put the blame where it belongs — on those who undermine the covenant we made when

we signed the Form of Subscription. Our creeds, after all, are our formulae of unity, and adherence to them alone will preserve our unity.

A. M. Fraser once said: "The greatest danger of the age in which we live does not come from unsound men, but from men who are sound themselves but, who, for the sake of the impression made upon the world by an undivided Church (outwardly speaking, that is, J.T.), are willing to cooperate with heterodoxy, and thus give it countenance." The late J. Gresham Machen complained about that very thing. It was not the liberals

who caused the demise of the Presbyterian Church, but those who claimed to be in sympathy with Machen but would not join him in the fight.

I conclude with a quotation from the late Dr. Peter Eldersveld:

"It isn't a pleasant task. Nobody enjoys controversy within the churches, fighting the good fight of faith against those who are supposed to share it with us. But as long as the Church has been in this world it has been compelled to battle the enemies within its gates. And as long as it continues, it will have to

do that. For we know that the forces of untruth will not be content with attacking the Church from without; they will always try to get inside where they can be much more effective."

May God grant us a revival of true spirituality and biblical orthodoxy in the CRC.

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A TIME TO PART

Cecil Tuininga

"There is a time for everything" says the writer of Ecclesiastes." Although his list does not include "a time to part," that may be included under his brief summary, for the underlying thought is that *all things* are in our Father's sovereign hand and we cannot change the times or seasons as He orders them.

This teaching takes nothing away from our responsibility. We are not to excuse any inactivity on our part because all things are ultimately governed by God. We are as His children called in this world to be workers in His Kingdom in every way we can. That holds true for our place in society as well as in the fellowship of believers. We have a calling on both fronts and may not shirk our duties in either.

Considering God's revealed will for our lives, I believe we have come to a time to part from fellow members in the Christian Reformed Church. We have come to that stage of developments in the CRC at which we must face the question whether to remain as a member does not involve one in being an abettor of liberalism. As members are we not part and parcel of a body that makes decisions through its broader assembly, that is, synod, that is binding for all of us? Can we escape the conclusion that, when our synod makes decisions that are contrary to God's Word, we as members are corporately responsible? I assume we all agree on this, but does it then follow that we must part ways? Does that not depend on whether we allow such decisions to stand without

any attempt on our part to have them changed?

On this also I assume we are all agreed. But then another question is in order: Have we not come to the end of the road of appealing synod's decision to allow qualified women to be ordained in the office of deacon? That decision is clearly contrary to Scripture. It has been appealed many times, to no avail. Nothing new can be brought against it; so it stands and is being put into practice in many of our congregations. That decision was made and will remain in effect because leaders in the CRC have adopted a new way of interpreting God's Word. It is this new method of interpreting God's Word that is annulling it. We can, if we follow this new method of interpretation, confi-

dently say that much of what the apostle Paul wrote is not for us today. Hence it also follows that what he wrote about the place women should take in the church does not hold for us today. It is this attack against God's Word that divides us.

Unfortunately, those in the leadership in the CRC are being guided by this new method of Scripture interpretation. This naturally will bring with it that in the CRC all the offices will be opened to women. The drive for that is on and instructors in both Calvin College and Seminary speak openly in favor of this.

This new hermeneutic also makes it easy to allow for the teaching of theistic evolution. That a denomination that goes by the name Christian Reformed appoints a committee to study whether theistic evolution can be harmonized with the teachings of Scripture as confessed and explained in the Reformed creeds is a mystery! It is an indication of how very far we have drifted along with the thinking of those who come to Scripture with many questions because they no longer believe in an inerrant Bible. And since, as one writer put it, God's Truth has come to us filtered by man's sinful mind, we can never be sure of its exact message. And beside that, since nature is also proclaiming a message we should be listening to that message also. The scientists are doing that for us and it is therefore necessary to have their findings evaluated. Perhaps they will find some things, or have already found some things, that will change our view of what God's Word really tells us. And so another committee is to study the very obvious.

Are these matters serious enough to call for a parting of ways? To answer that we should ask another: How seriously must things be amiss before we are called to part? At what stage of apostasy must concerned members refuse to stay any longer? We are faced with some very serious deviations. We have the new hermeneutic that disannuls Scripture; we have because of it a decision to allow women in the office of deacon, and we have theistic evolution taught and defended in both Calvin College and Seminary. These are three very serious deviations and the results in our schools and churches are only too evident. The resultant erosion among us of the great Reformed heritage handed down to us is only too apparent all

along the front of our church life. It is that fearful erosion that we cannot stop but allow to go on if we stay as members of the CRC. We have waited much too long already.

It is at this point that we meet with many objections. Some go like this: Look at all the little groups that have been formed; are we going to add to them? Can we count on more joining us, or will we be a little group of grey beards sitting by ourselves? What of our children; what can we provide for them? What of all the friends I will have to leave behind? And if we part ways don't we lose our chance to be of some influence for good in the CRC? And, also, though we know things are not what they should be, are they serious enough for such drastic action? And don't you think that there are many members in our churches who, should they be shown what is really going on, can be united to turn things around in the CRC?

And so the objections to action go on. What answer can we give to them? Are they not valid objections? Unfortunately, they are not! We must face the facts, cost what it will. We are steadily being carried along the path of apostasy in the CRC and if we are not ready to take action now, we never will be. And if we are not ready to part ways with open rebellion against God's Word today, we never will be. I fear we are doing what Dr. F. A. Schaeffer described in his book, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (page 79). Because of our fears to leave, we are saying, "Wait a while longer. Wait for this, wait for that. Always wait, never act." We, too, tend to move back the battle line. If synod decides to put women in office, I am out! Synod has made that decision, but is that really so bad? If synod should decide to forbid us to preach or teach God's Word, or if it should deny the virgin birth, then... Yes, then. If what we face today is not serious enough, no other development among us will be either. It comes down to whether we have the courage of our convictions or not.

There is a form of institutional idolatry. It goes something like this: Leave the Christian Reformed Church? Never! I love the CRC. That is my spiritual mother, don't you know? She is too precious to me to part ways. Such sentiments one hears over and over. What are we really saying? Are we not putting an institu-

tion above the Word of God? It seems that for some, leaving the church is a greater sin than leaving the Bible, which we do when we stay in.

What does Scripture say to us when we face these kinds of circumstances? It does not leave us in the dark. Look at 2 John 9 and 10, for example. Here we are told that if anyone runs ahead of God's Word, that is, goes beyond and above God's Word, we must have nothing to do with him. We must not give him any kind of support or encouragement. It is very clear that we have here a call to part ways.

In 2 Thess. 3:14, 15 we have another such instruction. Here we are called "not to associate with" those who do not obey the apostle Paul's instructions to the church. If any text applies to us today, this one surely does. Are we ready to follow this Scriptural calling? Romans 16:17 also calls us to "keep away from" those who cause division and who put obstacles in our way. That refers to those especially who bring in false and erroneous teachings. To keep the church pure, such action is commanded. When leaders bring in such errors and refuse to listen to any kind of correction, the discipline of separation is the only other course of action. Scripture demands this of us. The question is whether we are ready to listen to and obey this Scriptural calling. I believe that today we are called to take this action to which God Himself calls us. Dr. Spurgeon put it this way, "As soon as I saw, or thought I saw, that error had become firmly established, I did not deliberate but quit the body at once. Since then my counsel has been, 'Come out from among them.' I have felt that no protest could be equal to that of separation" (from *The Sword and Trowel* 1891). To the above, he added, "One thing is clear to us, we cannot be expected to meet in any union which comprehends those whose teachings on fundamental points is exactly the reverse of that which we hold dear. Cost what it may, to separate ourselves from those who separate themselves from the truth of God is not alone our liberty but our duty."

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FEEDING SHEEP OR AMUSING GOATS

C. H. Spurgeon

An evil is in the professed camp of the Lord, so gross in its impudence, that the most short-sighted can hardly fail to notice it. During the past few years it has developed at an abnormal rate, even for evil. It has worked like leaven until the whole lump ferments. The devil has seldom done a cleverer thing than hinting to the Church that part of their mission is to provide entertainment for the people, with a view to winning them. From speaking out as the Puritans did, the Church has gradually toned down her testimony, then winked at and excused the frivolities of the day. Then she tolerated them in her borders. Now she has adopted them under the plea of reaching the masses.

My first contention is that providing amusement for the people is nowhere spoken of in the Scriptures as a function of the Church. If it is a Christian work why did not Christ speak of it? 'Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.' That is clear enough. So it would have been if he had added, 'and provide amusement for those who do not relish the gospel.' No such words, however, are to be found. It did not seem to occur to him. Then again, 'He gave some apostles, some prophets, some pastors and teachers, for the work of the ministry.' Where do entertainers come in? The Holy Spirit is silent concerning them. Were the prophets persecuted because they amused the people or be-

cause they refused? The concert has no martyr roll.

Again, providing amusement is in direct antagonism to the teaching and life of Christ and all His apostles. What was the attitude of the Church to the world? 'Ye are the salt,' not the sugar candy—something the world will spit out, not swallow. Short and sharp was the utterance, 'Let the dead bury their dead.' He was in awful earnestness!

Had Christ introduced more of the bright and pleasant elements into his mission, he would have been more popular when they went back, because of the searching nature of his teaching. I do not hear him say, 'Run after these people, Peter, and tell them we will have a different style of service tomorrow, something short and attractive with little preaching. We will have a pleasant evening for the people. Tell them they will be sure to enjoy it. Be quick, Peter, we must get the people somehow!' Jesus pitied sinners, sighed and wept over them, but never sought to amuse them. In vain will the Epistles be searched to find any trace of the gospel of amusement. Their message is, 'Come out, keep out, keep clean out!' Anything approaching fooling is conspicuous by its absence. They had boundless confidence in the gospel and employed no other weapon. After Peter and John were locked up for preaching, the Church had a prayer meeting, but they did not pray, 'Lord grant unto thy servants

that by a wise and discriminating use of innocent recreation we may show these people how happy we are.' If they ceased not for preaching Christ, they had not time for arranging entertainments. Scattered by persecution, they went everywhere preaching the gospel. They 'turned the world upside down.' That is the only difference! Lord, clear the Church of all the rot and rubbish the devil has imposed on her and bring us back to apostolic methods.

Lastly, the mission of amusement fails to effect the end desired. It works havoc among young converts. Let the careless and scoffers, who thank God because the Church met them halfway, speak and testify. Let the heavy laden who found peace through the concert not keep silent! Let the drunkard to whom the dramatic entertainment had been God's link in the chain of their conversion, stand up! There are none to answer. The mission of amusement produces no converts. The need of the hour for today's ministry is believing scholarship joined with earnest spirituality, the one springing from the other as fruit from the root. The need is biblical doctrine, so understood and felt, that it sets men on fire.

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THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE, by Noel Weeks. (The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 1988). 309 pps. \$24.95.
Reviewed by William Shishko

In the recent decades of debate over the issue of the INERRANCY of the Scriptures we seem to have overlooked the fact that historic Reformation Christianity has always championed the doctrine of the SUFFICIENCY of the Scriptures for all matters of faith and life. The contention of Dr. Noel Weeks, author of the Banner of Truth Trust's recently published work **THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE**, is that "there has been a shift in the debate" such that the issue at present is more pointedly our Confessional doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. I believe he is correct. His volume is the first - and a very powerful - salvo in this major doctrinal battlefield.

The Banner of Truth Trust is to be heartily commended for introducing Australian native Dr. Weeks to its readership. An Honours graduate of the University of New England (Australia), Dr. Weeks also holds advanced degrees from Westminster Theological Seminary (B.D. and Th.M.), and Brandeis University (Ph.D.). He is presently a Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Sydney, and is a member of the Reformed Churches of Australia. This present contribution proves Dr.

Weeks to be a most articulate representative of Calvinistic orthodoxy.

THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE is divided into two parts, "Basic Issues" (the first 90 pages of the book) and "Points of Contention." "Basic Issues" is masterful. Using the classic text of II Timothy 3:16f. and applying superb insights from Colossians 2 as well as a multitude of other Biblical passages, Weeks establishes the need to recover the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. Readers familiar with the works of the late Dr. Cornelius Van Til will quickly pick out applications of the famous apologist's material, especially as Weeks convincingly shows that our lack of exhaustive knowledge of and in Holy Scripture can never be used as an argument against our having sufficient and totally accurate knowledge of the mind of God.

The chapters on "The History of Revelation" and "Contextualization" are especially important in this first section. Incisively, Weeks comments, "When it is said that changes in culture can change law (i.e. the law of God, WS), then the history of culture is confused with the history of redemption. Man is given a prerogative that belongs to God alone" (p. 39). "The ideas of a culture are not neutral. They are much influenced by the cultures's acceptance of, or rejection of, the truth of God" (p. 78). These affirmations are refreshing, and they teem with application to our present

situation. Weeks powerfully proves his point that the ultimate issue here is the Gospel itself. "Biblically, what is required of the church is not a capitulation to the hardness of men's hearts and their unbelief. Rather, it is the bringing of every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (II Cor. 10:5).

The second part of the book, "Points of Contention" builds on the principles developed and defended in Part One. It deals with such far-ranging issues as "The Creation Account," "Interpreting Prophecy," "Women in Teaching/Ruling Offices in the Church," "Pseudepigraphy," "Rabbinic Exegesis in the New Testament," and "Bible Translation." Here are feasts of insight in every chapter. While the span of treatments is welcome (and - to some degree - necessary) for a volume like this, the reader will realize that much expansion of each topic is needed. Depth is, rightly or wrongly, sacrificed for breadth. Weeks shows that the arguments used to erode orthodox Christianity in these various areas are not new. The consequences of failing to accept the final authority and sufficiency of Scripture are always clear: "If we may choose which part of Scripture we want to follow, we are the real authority, not Scripture" (p. 127).

The popular impact of this excellent volume will be, I fear, blunted by its plodding style and, at points, poor grammatical structure (a surprise for

a Banner of Truth Trust volume). Weeks is extraordinarily pithy as a writer. He is rigorously logical, and rarely loose in his reasoning. More "windows" of specific contemporary application would have helped the book immensely. Nevertheless, as slow as the material is to digest, it is too rich in content to be neglected. Pastors will be challenged to reflect carefully on the issues dealt with in the book. The chapters on "The Scripture and 'Advances' in Psychology" and

"The Political and Social Task of the Church" are particularly valuable.

THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE is not the "last word" on the contemporary relevance of this issue, but it is a brilliant "first word." "To proclaim...that Christ's lordship extends over all areas of human activity we need a Scripture that speaks to all those areas" (pps. 297f.). This book proves and demonstrates that Scripture is, indeed, sufficient. Weeks has taken up the gauntlet thrown down by

those who are at war with the foundations of our faith, and he has offered a response and a return challenge to which lovers of the Reformed faith will all give a hearty "Amen!"

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SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY!

The first article in the November 1988 *Reformed Journal* is a Thanksgiving Day reflection entitled "First Prayer," by Dr. Cornelius Plantinga, Professor of Systematic Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary. What prompts a comment is not its interesting display of verbal pyrotechnics, but this passing observation which it contains: "The NBC Evening News had a story recently about a gifted dance teacher who teaches ballet to retarded adults. There they were on screen — thick bodies creating beauty and beat-up faces radiant with the knowledge of it. I do not know the kind or extent of the teacher's spiritual loyalties, but like Jesus Christ she is a redeemer. She is another flicker of God in an unlikely place. In her dance studio, in the precincts where Mother Teresa looks for lepers and Beyers Naude for jus-

tice, in a cowshed in Bethlehem or on a road to Damascus, God's children are never safe from the ambush of grace."

I would not dispute that the Lord shows His hand in many unexpected places, even on occasion, raising up a Cyrus who "does not know Him" to deliver His people (Isaiah 44: 28- 45: 5), but when anyone who helps another is said to be "like Jesus Christ...a redeemer...another flicker of God," regardless of his or her "spiritual loyalties," something more confusing and sinister is going on — typifying and encouraging the kind of baptized humanism and universalism that greet one everywhere in our secularized holidays.

When students are inspired by this kind of SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY from the occupant of that "chair" in

their training school, need anyone wonder why they later have trouble showing the examining classes the competent knowledge of the Bible and its doctrines that is necessary for pastoring churches? Or need we be surprised by the number of members that complain that they are forced to look outside of their own churches to find faithful preaching and teaching of God's Word?

Our Lord in similar times, "when he saw the multitudes,...was moved with compassion for them, because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd" and He told His followers how they must pray for and work at meeting that need (Matt. 9:36ff.).

PDJ

WHERE ARE THE ELDERS AND DEACONS?

It's simply infuriating. It is beyond my comprehension how we allowed our beautiful and God-honoring Reformed heritage to be systematically destroyed. I can only account for it by what I see: apathy and complacency among the majority of our Church members; ignorance and cowardice among a majority of our office bearers; and, downright dishonesty and unspirituality among many of the "leaders" in our Church.

How can you let them do this to us? How can it be that we are actually on the brink of embracing an evolutionary understanding of the origin of the universe and setting a precedent for interpreting Scripture by higher critical methods? This is crazy, people! Wake up and do something about it! Are you dead to all spiritual and moral responsibility?

You office-bearers, stand up and start saying "NO!" How can you sleep at night knowing that the future of the Church is committed to your care and

that our students, young people and children, are being taught that we no longer believe in a God who can create the world "by the Word of His Almighty Power." What is being taught is scientific idolatry and a gross blasphemy of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Start opposing your "loyal Calvin College and Seminary-trained Pastor." Tell him to start thinking, and stop defending his precious Alma Mater. Tell him to start to care for the students who are there and to defend them. Tell him to demonstrate his loyalty to them by insisting that the school be consistent with what is preached, taught in the Sunday School and catechism classroom, and hopefully in your Christian Schools. And by the way, tell him that he doesn't run the Church and set policy and opinion by himself. Tell him, if necessary, to stop the harangue that his Alma Mater can do no wrong. We know better. Institutional idolatry is sin.

Remind him that his form of subscription obligates him to oppose those things which are not in accord with the sure testimony of Scripture.

Calvin College wants us all to think that this entire debate is one about the age of the earth and academic freedom. It is not, and they know it. It is a clash between historic Reformed Christianity and hostile theologies, philosophies, and world views. In the end, it's a battle for the Bible, and the Bible as we have understood it historically. So wake up and take courage. It's time to stand up and do what God put you there to do when he called you to be a Pastor, Elder, or Deacon: to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

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WHO AM I?

When the news reached my nurse that my dad, Jonathan, and my granddad, King Saul, had died in battle, she fled. As she hurried to leave, I fell and became lame in both legs. I was only five years old at that time.

I lived with Makir, son of Ammiel, until David asked for me. I came and bowed down before King David. Surprisingly, he told me that I would be treated kindly: I could eat at his table, all the land that belonged to my grandfather would be restored to me,

and Ziba, Saul's servant, was to farm for me. I ate at King David's table "like one of the king's sons."

When King David had to flee Absalom, my servant accused me of waiting in Jerusalem for the house of Israel to hand over the throne to me. But when David returned, I met him with unwashed clothes, uncared for feet, and an untrimmed mustache. I told the king that Ziba's charges were untrue. Tired of the squabbling, King

David divided the property - half to me, and half to him.

The Gibeonites requested that seven of Saul's descendants be killed. But David saved me because of my father Jonathan. Who am I?

II Samuel 4:4, 16:1-4, 19:24-30

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THE CONSERVATIVE SWING OF SOUTHERN BAPTISTS

One of the most significant religious developments in the U.S. may be that appearing in the continuing ten-year swing of its largest Protestant denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, toward control by conservatives. The November 4 *Christianity Today* devoted some 13 pages to "America's Southern Baptists," looking at "Who They Are," "What They Believe" and "Where They Are Going." In the ongoing struggle in which the conservatives have been gaining increasing control, they have tended to see the main issue as the inerrancy of the Bible. The opposing liberals, who would like to be regarded as "moderates," are charging that in their efforts to purge from places of power people who deny an inerrant Bible conservatives are betraying the Baptist principles of freedom and the right of private interpretation and are trying to set up a hierarchy.

That issue was dramatically apparent in a little incident some 44 years ago. On entering the US Navy chaplaincy we were given a 6-week in-

doctrination course at the College of William and Mary, second oldest college in the country, at Williamsburg, Virginia. The first Sunday in that museum-like little village I joined a Southern Baptist colleague in seeking out his church. The sharp-looking young preacher announced to his largely student listeners that his subject was the title of the then-popular song hit, "Don't Fence Me In." This phrase he applied as a motto to the Holy Spirit, saying that the Spirit cannot be fenced in by doctrines. "We used to try to keep heretics out of the church; today we welcome them, because the heresy of one generation is the progress of the next." Thus everyone was welcome. If the Holy Spirit had shown anything to anyone, the minister would not dispute it. This, we were assured, was good Baptist doctrine—the "right of private interpretation!" As we were leaving the service, I couldn't resist expressing to my Texas friend, some disappointment with the minister who seemed to be getting the Lord and the devil mixed up. Almost violently he retorted, "He's no

Southern Baptist. He must have come from the North!"

The real issues in the spiritual battle of the churches have not changed with the passage of years. It is thrilling to see and sometimes hear in Southern Baptist churches a ringing testimony to the Lord's gospel. But their struggle to maintain or recover it is handicapped by a widespread carelessness about careful teaching of the Bible's doctrines and in particular of its teachings about the Lord's order in His Church. To a much greater extent than a half century ago, our churches today suffer from the same loss of Biblical doctrine and church order. (Other churches today sometimes show more appreciation for God's Word than our own do.) Only if we recover an interest in and join the struggle for that, can we expect a bright future. Isaiah wrote, "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn" (8:20). Note that that "light" is both present and future.

PDJ

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