



The Outlook

Devoted to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith

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La Question de l'Année: Where, O Man, Is Your Trust?

"Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God" (Ps. 20:7).

"The tower of Shechem must have been a massive structure to hold a thousand people. But it was a worthless refuge for those who trusted in idols. By contrast, 'the name of the Lord is a strong tower...'" (Tabletalk, Sept. 11, 2001).

Throughout history, events of cataclysmic proportions routinely serve as markers and points of reference for the generation that endured the catastrophe, and even for its posterity. For ancient Israel, their emancipation from bondage in Egypt was just such an event, as evidenced by the preamble to the Decalogue, and the many other subsequent references. Later, their

captivity to Assyria and Babylon respectively eclipsed Egypt as an epoch making event, but served the same purpose.

The World Wars of the last century overshadowed all previous modern wars, and became the historical markers for Europeans. For Americans, Pearl Harbor, Vietnam, and a series of high profile assassi-

nations in the 60's became even more prominent historical markers.

It is to be expected that September 11, 2001 will be the new historical marker for this generation of Americans. High School history textbooks slated for publication next year are quickly being revised in order to incorporate the events of September 11. The impeachment



Volume 52, No. 1 (ISSN 8750-5754) (USPS 633-980) "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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trial of Bill Clinton, the Unibomber, and Timothy McVeigh may now only be footnotes or receive peripheral attention in recent American history. Already, our language is being conditioned to say: “before September 11,” “since September 11,” “after the September 11 attacks,” or “because of September 11.”

Indeed, words are inadequate to describe the horror of that frightful Tuesday morning. How shocking a sight it was. We watched helplessly as the second plane plowed into the south tower, and as both towers and adjacent buildings were peeled apart, engulfed by a thick cloud of dust, and swallowed by the earth. From a distance, we heard the cries and felt the anguish and agony of those trapped inside who had to decide between being incinerated by 2000° of heat, or plunging 100 stories to their inescapable death. Between 8:45 a.m. and 10:28 a.m., the landscape of New York City, and the outlook of all Americans had changed irreparably. The financial heart of the world was brought to its knees, and under the debris laid some 3500 victims.

In addition, the most powerful military headquarters the world has ever known was under siege, and had partially collapsed; the leader of the free world, accompanied by fighter jets, was rushed to one Air Force base after another for security purposes; the white house and all federal buildings in Washington were evacuated. In the days that followed, the stock market saw \$1.6 trillion of its value go up in figurative smoke; the nation, indeed the world, had suffered incalculable, and in some cases irretrievable losses. What was perhaps most

vexing of all was that behind the attacks were only razor blades, and some careful, if malicious, planning by a few religious fanatics.

Surely to a nation that has the world’s strongest economy and the most powerful arsenal; and to a generation that has barely any remembrance of tragedy; that combination of events has to raise pertinent and persistent questions. But the questions that emerged were not only for the world; they were also

Such horrors were supposed to occur elsewhere. We were only supposed to cover them as newsworthy events, or dramatize them in motion pictures, but not live them on our soil.

for the Church. In light of those events, Christians have some questions to ask of the world. Chief among them is this: “Where, America, is your trust? What is your only comfort in life and in death? What is your chief and highest end?”

That heinous and cowardly attack told the world nothing new about the predisposition and propensity of terrorists to generate terror. They can’t help themselves; it’s their nature, and we know it. Nor did the magnitude of the loss of life and property in itself constitute the enormity of the tragedy. Other nations have suffered worse calamities and casualties from floods, famine, war, diseases, or earthquakes.

Frankly, the only surprise here was that such a tragedy could happen to America, to New York, to the WTC towers, that quintessence of American capitalism, and to the Pentagon, that symbol of unprecedented military might. Immediately following the attacks, the world was spellbound, almost in disbelief and denial. It was inconceivable that the mighty USA could be caught so unguarded, so vulnerable, and so weak. Presumably, such horrors were supposed to occur elsewhere. We were only supposed to cover them as newsworthy events, or dramatize them in motion pictures, but not live them on our soil. “We are Americans!” How could this be? People immediately sought a scapegoat: perhaps the failure of the Intelligence community was the culprit, or lax immigration laws, or inefficient airport securities, or the failure of the previous administration to expunge terrorism.

The dismay quickly led to a search for heroes, something to make us feel that we were not totally defeated somehow, and that we had won the day after all: perhaps the firefighters are the heroes, perhaps the police officers, perhaps the brave passengers of flight 93, or perhaps the mayor of New York City. Perhaps we can say we became better because of it: note the patriotism, the civility in Congress, the feeling of unity and community that pervades the nation, the unification of various factions and faiths. Stunned America needed something to hold on to for solace.

A few days later, our Commander in Chief told the nation: “we’re not going to let terrorists hold this nation

hostage.” Unfortunately, they had already done more than that; Humpty Dumpty could not be put back together. 911 was not just the date, it was also an emergency symbol for a nation in crisis. The “invisible enemy” had paralyzed the nation, shocked the world, sent our Commander in Chief into hiding, further enfeebled our economy, and there was nothing Alan Greenspan—despite his generous and aggressive rate cuts—could do about it. All the securities we once knew had been transformed into a veritable climax of insurmountable vulnerabilities. Where, O man, is your trust? That, is the question we must begin the New Year with.

King David was a formidable warrior. He had seen the ostensible might of man, and worthlessness of

that might. The Bible is full of examples of men who had put their trust either in themselves, their gods, their wealth, or their military stratagems, only to crumble before the Lord, and dashed to pieces by His might. The greatest empires of the past had bowed the knees to Yahweh and His power. Twenty first century America will not be different. The people of my generation had come to believe in themselves as Lord, redeemer, and provider. Now people are realizing that indeed: “no king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite its great strength, it cannot save...” (Ps. 33:16-17).

As we enter this New Year, let us challenge Americans and the world

of our day to put its trust not in man, not in Washington, not in science, not in Wall Street, and not in themselves, but in the Lord. The world has already admitted that there is no longer a safe haven in America. Let us then challenge them to seek refuge in the only haven given to man — God (Ps. 46:1ff). Let us challenge the world to seek the things that are above, to amass and store up treasures where planes do not crash and towers are impervious to terrorist attacks. Call on America to rebuild on the Rock, and not on self.

Rev. Patrick Edouard is the pastor of the Covenant Reformed Church of Toronto, Etobicoke, Ontario, Canada.

Brian Vos

“Not A Square Inch” The Lordship of Christ in the Classroom.

A war is being waged. This war is the oldest war in the history of the world. It began with the fall of Adam and Eve into sin. In the curse upon the serpent, the Lord Himself drew the line which would separate forever the opposing forces. He said to the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed” (Gen. 3:15).

From that moment on, the devil has been prowling around “like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). This is not a war that is fought with swords or guns, for this struggle is not against flesh

and blood, “but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). This war is all-consuming. As the great Reformed apologist, Cornelius Van Til has pointed out, “There is not a square inch of ground in heaven or on earth or under the earth in which there is peace between Christ and Satan.”¹

There are no draft-dodgers or conscientious objectors in this war, all are involved: every man, woman, and child. Not only are all participants in this war, but the war is

waged on all fronts, in every area of life, including the realm of education.

Even in the sphere of education there is no neutral ground. Nothing can be taught apart from some religious orientation, whether it be Christianity, Hinduism, humanism, secularism, new ageism, atheism, or some other -ism. Education is either Christian or non-Christian. The fundamental difference which separates these antithetical systems “must be traced back to its source in two antithetical world views: on the one hand, the world view that takes the living God, Creator,



Revealer, and Redeemer, as its starting point, listening dependently to his revelation in Scripture, creation, and providence; and, on the other hand, the world view that, explicitly or implicitly, denies that the God of the Bible is the source of all reality and the measure of all truth.”²

Non-Christian education is necessarily God-less education, for it denies the personal God who has created all things. Without a Creator-God, all things have been called into being by chance. Without a God of providence, all things continue to be governed and upheld by chance. In this God-less system there is no unity to life, there is no meaning to life, and there is no coherence to life. There are only “brute facts,” which man in his autonomy is left to interpret. God has been excluded from the outset.

In the non-Christian system man stands autonomously at the center of the universe, seeking to interpret all things in relation to himself. Man has boldly proclaimed that “God is dead.” Since God is dead, there can be no revelation from God. His Word, then, amounts to nothing more than an interesting commentary upon the primitive, patriarchal culture of the Hebrews. Man now fills the vacuum created by the death of God, and man speaks authoritatively; he becomes the final reference point in all predication. Man has boldly proclaimed that there is no absolute truth, and all things are relativized. Thus, man alone is worshipped and glorified. The Creator is forgotten and the creature sits upon the throne.

Because non-Christian education is God-less, self-glorifying, and toler-

ant of all things but the God of creation, it stands in absolute antithesis to Christian education. In spite of this absolute antithesis, non-Christian schools can know and teach much that is right and true. They borrow from the capital of the Christian system, without knowing it, and thus teach much that is intelligible. Because of God’s goodness, the public school system has had some benefit to the country. Even public schools have held high the banner of virtues such as honesty

Non-Christian education is necessarily God-less education, for it denies the personal God who has created all things.

and integrity. In this age of intellectual and moral irresponsibility, progress such as this is to be lauded. However, it must be recognized that this progress in public schools is made in spite of the false religion they propagate.

While realizing that God’s goodness has kept the public school system from being consistent in its irrationality, the antithesis must still be emphasized. Thus with Van Til, the call to arms for the Christian school must be heralded:

We should declare our independence once for all. We should forget the house of bondage and not yearn for the fleshpots of Egypt at every turn of the way. We have resources of principle

such as no other commonwealth of education has. More than that. We not only claim our rightful place among the commonwealths of education, but we have a definitely imperialistic program. No mere Monroe Doctrine will suffice. We are out to destroy - albeit with spiritual weapons only and always - all our competitors. We do not recognize them as equals but regard them as usurpers. Carthage must be destroyed.³

The Christian school is diametrically opposed to the public school; hence, Christians must insist not only on the *validity* of Christian schools, but on the *necessity* of Christian schools. Van Til states that “Christian education is not even a fraction of one percent like public education. The different conceptions of God that underlie the two educational theories cover every point on the whole front and cover them before and behind, without and within.”⁴ There is no neutral ground. Christian education stands in direct antithesis to non-Christian education. Christian education promotes the kingdom of Christ; non-Christian education promotes the kingdom of Satan.

Because of the antithesis, it is not enough for Christians to build upon the foundation of public schools, for the foundation of public schools is the negation of God. The heart of Christianity is carved out before it is permitted in the public school. Can Christians then attempt to build upon this lifeless foundation? Absolutely not! The Christian school

begins with the presupposition of God. This is the only beginning point for education that would glorify God rather than man. This is the only beginning point for education that would maintain the Creator-creature distinction.

It is only when God is the presupposition and the final reference point that there can be coherence in the human experience at all. Only with reference to the Creator-God, can a school teach the facts which are interpreted by God. Consider Romans 11:36, “For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.”

Picture yourself sitting in a non-Christian biology class where the teacher is talking about a particular type of tree. Now, that teacher can tell you many things about that tree: its *genus species*, its life-cycle, its type of bark, its type of leaf, etc. But can that teacher tell you that that tree was created by God (“For of Him...are all things”)? No. Can that teacher tell you that that tree is sustained by the power of God (“For...through Him...are all things”)? No. Can that teacher tell you that that tree exists to the glory of God (“For...to Him are all things”)? No. Has that teacher truly understood that tree? No! How can he understand it when he denies the God who created it, who sustains it, and for whose glory it exists?!

This holds true for every classroom. In a truly Christian school every class is a religion class, for no fact can be taught unless it is taught in its relationship to God. In all classes - biology, literature, mathematics, health, art, music, etc. - every thought must be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (II Corinthians 10:5). The education children receive is fundamentally religious. The question is whether they are being saturated with the false religion of the kingdom of Satan (whatever shape that may take) or the true religion of the kingdom of Christ.

For covenant children, the Lordship of Christ must be taught in every class. In their education they must be saturated with the Christian God. There is, then, no return to the public school, regardless of what, by God’s goodness, it may have to offer. Van Til writes, “If you have been taken out of the miry clay, do you jump back into it because of some glistening objects that you see in it? Do you run back into the house now almost burned to the ground in order to save your silverware?”⁵

Given the fact that public schools exclude God from the outset, is there ever a place for Christians in the public school system? While there may be extreme exceptions, we must insist that covenant children belong in Christian schools. Christian parents who send their

children to public schools will need not only to teach their children the Scriptures, but they will need to unteach the values learned from teachers and peers at school. Why entrust the education of covenant children to those who do not belong to the covenant? Why hand the sheep over to be taught by the wolves? Why allow our children, who are taught the things of Christ at home and in church, to be taught by those who deny the Lordship of Christ at school?

The public school system is no environment for a covenant child, for it must be remembered that the continuation of the covenant to the children of believers is not automatic. Hence, “religious education is not only desirable but essential. It is the God-provided and God-commanded means for the continuation of the covenant of grace.”⁶

We are caught up in a war. This war is carried out not only in adults, but in the hearts of our children. “The war between Christ and Satan is a global war. It is carried on, first, *in* the hearts of children, *for* the hearts of children.”⁷ There is no neutral ground - not a square inch in heaven or on earth or under the earth in which there is peace between Christ and Satan. Christian parents dare not be content to sit in their fox holes and wait the battle out. The battle today is more pointed and urgent than it has ever been before. The heat from the

Why entrust the education of covenant children to those who do not belong to the covenant? Why hand the sheep over to be taught by the wolves? Why allow our children, who are taught the things of Christ at home and in church, to be taught by those who deny the Lordship of Christ at school?



flames of the battle will only grow hotter. This battle is a fight to the death. It is in the educational field that the battle for or against God is being decided today.⁸ Who will be the conqueror of our children's hearts? Christian education of our covenant children in Christian schools is one of the strongest armaments in our possession to ward off the enemy. Let us insist on using them.

Notes

All Scripture quotations are taken from the NKJV, unless otherwise noted.

- ¹ Van Til, Cornelius. *Essays on Christian Education*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1979. P. 27.
- ² Berkhof, Louis, and Van Til, Cornelius. *Foundations of Christian Education*. Ed. Dennis E. Johnson. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1990. P. 3.
- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- ⁶ Kuiper, R.B. *The Glorious Body of Christ*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1958. P. 217.
- ⁷ Van Til, *Foundations*, p. 26.
- ⁸ Berkhof, *Foundations*, p. 130.

Rev. Brian Vos is the pastor of the Trinity United Reformed Church in Caledonia, Michigan.

Sound Bites

Torch and Trumpet 1958

January 1958

“The gospel of saving grace is a mystery in the sense that we can know it only when it is revealed to us. It is undiscoverable by us.”

* * * * *

“Man was, at best, a fallible creature. He was capable of falling into sin. But the glory of the redeemed man will be confirmed in holiness, forever beyond the possibility of apostasy.”

The Mystery of God's Will
Leonard Greenway

“Jesus' prophetic work, that is His teaching, has no power over the hearts of men apart from His priestly work of substitutionary sacrifice on the cross and His present intercession at the right hand of God.”

* * * * *

“All of this implies that Jesus Christ is not and cannot be acknowledged as Lord except by those who are forgiven and born again. We may summon the nation to acknowledge Christ as Lord, and we should not fail to sound forth the challenge; but the challenge is not merely that men shall listen to His teachings and obey His precepts. It is basically the challenge to repent of sin, turn to Jesus Christ as the divine Savior, accept Him as our Lord and Master, and therefore to demand that all those who have surrendered to Him shall regulate their lives by His will.”

Christ's Lordship and the Cross
Henry J. Kuiper

February 1958

“The Bible is filled with promises, but basically there is only one promise, one prevailing promise, to which all other promises of grace are attached. It is the promise of salvation first given in the Garden of Eden.”

Sealed With the Spirit
Leonard Greenway

“[T]he Church must require of its members a confession of adherence to the truth and at the same time recognize its calling to build up those members in the knowledge and love of the truth. If it fails to let the light of the gospel shine in all its clarity, if its trumpet gives forth an uncertain sound, it cannot satisfy the spiritual hunger of its members, nor will it be an effective agency for the conversion of sinners.”

Do We Want Community Churches?
Henry J. Kuiper

“An interpretation of philosophy either honors God or it honors man; it either regards God or the created universe as ultimate. If man and the universe are made into ‘god,’ then by virtue of their inner contradictions the Christian believes, such systems of thought will eventually prove to be self-destroying.”

Orthodoxy... Conservative or Radical?
W. Stanford Reid

“When there are men who no longer want to preach to wrath of God, because He is a God of love;

when there are leaders who are afraid of being militant and shun controversy concerning matters of faith, we do not see how we can say that all is well and that orthodoxy is evenly distributed.”

“[W]hen men finally reach the stage of denying the essentials of the faith as the virgin birth of our Lord, and the historicity of Genesis, or when they begin to chisel away at the verbal inspiration of Scripture, they have reached the last stage of Liberalism. But - and this is the point to observe - men who come to such denials have for a long time had an attitude, an approach, and a spirit which may be called liberal.”

“We build on what God in His grace has given to the churches in the past, and we intend to hold fast to the faith once delivered to the saints - also in theology!”

“The fear of theological liberalism is not simply a reflex of the immigrant mind; it is a realistic appraisal of the world in which we live.”

Is Our Theology Vital?
Henry R. Van Til

March 1955

“An unbelieving teacher may know a lot about world history, but it takes a Christian to see the real meaning of history.”

The Head of the Church
Leonard Greenway

“The purpose of our creeds is not to put them on display as antiques, or to serve merely as records of the doctrinal insights of former generations. They are the Church’s official interpretation of Scripture in its most fundamental teachings.”

“Those who cannot subscribe to our confession are free to join the Church with which they are in closest agreement. As long as not all Christians can agree on the proper interpretation of Scripture, denominations are necessary.”

Should We be a Confessing Church?
Henry J. Kuiper

April 1958

“[P]art of Satan’s subtlety is to persuade us of his nonexistence so that he can more successfully entrap us in his snares.”

Dead in Trespasses and Sin
Leonard Greenway

“It is almost unavoidable not to come away with the impression that here (in Genesis 1) is a plain statement of the *how* as well as the *that* of creation.”

Reading Genesis 1
Martin H. Woudstra

“We may indeed encounter scowling faces and experience bitter opposition by the world when we refuse to acknowledge its redeemers and deliverers in social matters. Let us nevertheless go on ‘in Kuiper’s line’ as people of the antithesis!”

Antithesis - Not Adaption
Henry A. Venema

May - June 1958

“The Bible knows nothing of a cooperative salvation. A dead person cannot assist in his own resurrection.”

“The eye that sees salvation in the person and work of the Son of God, the ear that hears the good news of the Gospel, the hand that lays hold

upon the Savior, are all of God. He makes Christ real to us. The *motions* of sin within us are ours. The *movements* of grace are His.”

Saved By Grace
Leonard Greenway

“Americans must learn not only that neutrality is impossible but also that all education is religious. All education serves some god.”

The Deeper Problem in Education
Walter A. De Jong

July - August 1958

“[A] good Christian mother can, just by her attitudes and actions, do much to give her child a correct understanding of what God is like, and how He deals with us.”

“As important as Sunday School, Christian school, and catechetical instruction are, they may never be a substitute for training in the home.”

“If a mother wishes the faith to be important to her child, it must be evident to the child that the faith is important to his mother.”

Occupation..Housewife and Mother
“Peter” Pavitt Palmer

“Time and space figure so prominently in the affairs of mankind, that we need constantly to remind ourselves that time and space are created categories.”

“Omnipotence is not dependent on or limited by time.”

“[T]he miracles of the Bible, both of the Old Testament and the New Testament, indicate that time was a negligible factor, while in God’s providential dealings a day may do the work of a thousand years.”



“The solution of the problems of the first chapters of Genesis does not lie in making time and space infinite, but in the recognition of the Almighty power of that God whose wonders of old the Bible is constantly telling us.”

*The Time Element
in Genesis 1 and 2*
Oswald T. Allis

September 1958

“Reformed teachings are not special teachings which some have added to Christian truths believed by all true followers of Christ. Reformed doctrines are identical with Christian Doctrines.”

“Let us not become charmed by the fallacy that the success of our mission work and the strength of the Church are to be measured by the number of those whom we receive as members.”

“The number of those who want Christ only as their ‘personal Savior’ is larger than those who are ready to receive Him as Lord.”

*Should a Reformed Church Do
Reformed Mission Work?*
Henry J. Kuiper

“Paul felt a great obligation toward his fellow men. He was indebted to bring them the gospel of saving grace. Paul makes us feel that our neighbors have a right to expect us to be interested in their souls since we have the great treasure of the gospel. To keep the day of glad tidings to ourselves is doing our fellowmen an injustice.”

“[T]he believer is anointed a prophet, priest, and king. This means not only that he is appointed

by God to proclaim the gospel, but also that he is qualified to do so by the Holy Spirit.”

Calvinism and Passion for Souls
Katie Gunnink

October 1958

“[T]he theory of evolution was not the product of a scrupulous observation of facts, but, to the contrary, a product of philosophy.”

“[I]t is necessary to emphasize that the truth of evolutionism, its great popularity notwithstanding, is only a theory, a hypothesis, a product of speculation. It is an assumed position upon the basis of which men reason and conduct experiments. These are not statements contrived by anti-evolutionists, but facts admitted by evolutionists themselves.”

“[T]he two branches of science which are supposed to supply the evolutionists with information are geology and palaeontology - the rocks and the fossils. Now evolutionists will reason and draw conclusions from one to the other and visa versa. At times the rocks and their strata are used to determine the age of fossils found in them and at other times the fossils are used to determine the age of the rocks....This is reasoning in a circle and an error which, I suppose, would not be countenanced in any other science.”

Evolution...Still a Guess
Nicholas J. Monsma

November 1958

“[I]n heaven our Lord will be the very center of interest and attention, for He will be all glorious, and we will no longer be self-cen-

tered. We will not be able to turn our eyes away from Him.”

*What are the Souls
in Heaven Doing?*
William Hendriksen

December 1958

“Satan is public enemy number one! He laughs at legislation. He chuckles at New Year’s resolutions. He listens to marriage vows and then proceeds, wherever possible, to set a trap that often springs before the first anniversary. He attends church faithfully with the one desire that ‘strange fire’ shall be offered to Jehovah.”

The Wiles of the Devil
Leonard Greenway

“It takes a good deal of spiritual living to be able to reach the height of adoration in our devotions.”

Christmas Adoration
Henry J. Kuiper

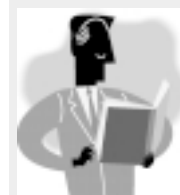
“No matter how good our gifts are, if they are divorced from an acceptance of God’s gift, then they are not, and cannot be, pleasing to Him.”

Some Thoughts on Giving
“Peter” Pavitt Palmer

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Looking Back

When I write now and then about some aspects of the ministry (including ministers), then I have in mind especially the United Reformed Churches. Not only because I am a minister (emeritus) in that federation, but also because we are a young federation with all the attendant weaknesses and problems. One could say that for these churches the honeymoon is over. Now we are facing the realities of ecclesiastical life. In the past decade or so there was a certain excitement about a new beginning, and that was appropriate. The battles were over and that was a relief. We had (and have) reason for thanksgiving. It was God's good hand over us.

But sin and weaknesses came with us. We were not and are not a perfect church by any stretch of the imagination. Old sins cleave to us and we cannot rest on our laurels. There is no reason for pride, thinking that we are better than others. Pride comes before a fall. May God keep us from that. May He be our guide even to the end (Ps. 48:14)

Let me be a bit more pointed. We now have two congregations whose ministers have been severed from their churches. We also have number of very small congregations where there is strife and discord. That does not attract other members or families. The fact of the matter is that if things do not improve, these small churches will not be viable.

These are not nice thing to write about. They make me very sad. But

we cannot deny reality. We must face up to these problems, and be much in prayer for our federation. There are many good things for which we should give thanks, but many little foxes can destroy the vineyard. Paul admonishes the Ephesian elders to give heed to themselves and to the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made

There is and has been much talk about the calling to the ministry. Much of it is very subjective in nature, and has done untold harm to the church.

them overseers (Acts 20:28). But that is not only the task of elders. The entire congregation must exercise mutual admonition. In the words of Hebrews: "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, . . . and let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the Day approaching (10:23, 25).

Elsewhere I have given a bit of advice for young ministers. But since so much of the weal or woe of a congregation depends on the minister I want to say a few more things about the minister and his ministry. First a word or two about the call to the ministry. I quote from Lloyd Jones (*Preaching & Preachers*):

It was Mr. Spurgeon, I believe who used to say to

young men - if you can do anything else do it. If you can stay out of the ministry, then stay out of the ministry.' I would certainly say that without any hesitation whatsoever. I would say that the only man who is called to preach is the man who cannot do anything else, in the sense that he is not satisfied with anything else. This call to preach is so put upon him, and such pressure comes to bear upon him that he says, 'I can do nothing else, I must preach.'

There is and has been much talk about the calling to the ministry. Much of it is very subjective in nature, and has done untold harm to the church. Men have gone into the ministry because their mothers have pushed them into that direction. I have known men who have gone through a crisis (personal, family, etc.) and then promised God that if He would see them through this crisis, they would enter the ministry. The results have often been tragic. There have also been recent converts who felt that they could only serve God in the ministry ("full-time" kingdom work). Listen to Jones again:

Let me put it like this - and I am speaking from personal experience. You are certain of the call when you are unable to keep it back and to resist it. You try your utmost to do so. You say, 'No, I shall go on with what I am doing; I am able to do it and it is good work.' You do your utmost to push back and to rid yourself of



this disturbance in your spirit which comes in these various ways. But you reach the pulpit when you can not do so any longer.

A man does not appoint himself. He is not put into the ministry merely by the pressure of the Church. The two things go together. Both sides have been neglected. I have known many men who have deceived themselves. I have also known many cases where men have been pushed into the ministry who were never meant to be there, by false teaching on the part of the Church. The two things must go together.

If I can be pardoned a personal note, Jones says he is "speaking from personal experience." I can say the same thing: While farming for seven years, I fought against the call to the ministry. I was determined to farm. But I too can say that there came a time when I could no longer resist. And in my 33 years of ministry I never had any doubts where the Lord wanted me. Since He called me, I could count on His blessing. The ministry is only for those "who can do nothing else."

Rev. Jelle Tuininga is an emeritus pastor in the United Reformed Church living in Lethbridge, Alberta.

The Gods That Failed

Will Our Civilization Survive?

Something has gone wrong with our twentieth century civilization. Mankind today is full of fear and anxiety. Toynbee in his *A Study of History* sought to analyze the breakdown and the disintegration of civilizations. Lash, in *The Dilemma of Our Times*, claims that the prevailing mood of our day is "one of somber pessimism and of bitterness." Modern man's hope of a triumphant march to a blissful society capable to fulfill all human desires has undergone a rude shock. The anticipated millennium did not arrive.

The rapid advancements in technological science have left modern man more fearful than ever. Modern man has been rudely disillusioned and he is fearful that the house he himself created will now collapse on his own head. Sputnik and Mutnik have even added to that fear. The present crisis is not restricted to Western civilization but touches every major geographic area of the world.

All kinds of diagnoses and panaceas are being offered to instill new hopes for a survival. Toynbee has written about an "affiliated civilization" (*A Study of History*, p. 244) which may arise out of the debris and death of our present civilization. Others are not so hopeful that western civilization will eventually enter upon an "era of the Prodigal Son again coming to himself," and

learn to understand "his alienation from the source of his true being" (Lowry, *Communism and Christ*, p. 112). Our world is in the throes of a gigantic struggle between individualism and collectivism. On the one hand we have an extreme individualism in which each one goes his own way, striving to fulfill himself by charting his own course and using others as it suits him. On the other hand our modern society and its culture have produced a collectivism in which the individual counts for nothing. Will our present world survive this struggle?

Modern Science

Science has been a mighty factor in creating the crises of our present world. We have, indeed, become one small world. The World Wars of the past few decades were rather evidences and results than creators of the crisis. Instruments of production and the increasing competition for raw materials and for markets of distribution have resulted in placing within the hands of men the means by which they can destroy themselves and their civilization. Science has produced the modern machine age. The machine has made man's conquest of nature possible, but it has also turned on man and conquered man. It has liberated man, but it has also enslaved him. The gods which modern man created have failed him in the hour of peril.

Some are turning to religion to find a source of comfort. But many are turning to gods that will once more miserably fail man in the crisis hour of our modern civilization.

Nihilism - Existentialism

The Nihilist is determined to forge his own future by his own will in complete defiance of the nothingness in which all will finally end. We are today confronted with an intellectual, rapidly spreading world of thought known as Existentialism, which has been correctly termed a "philosophy of the meaninglessness of life, of the nihility (nothingness-D) and mortality of human existence which is devoid of any prospect or future" (Spier, *Christianity and Existentialism* p. xvii). The teachings of Existentialism have found a very fruitful soil in our time of crisis because of the catastrophe that has come to our modern twentieth century. Many have lost all faith in their modern culture and have now turned to a new god that will utterly fail. Existentialism claims it has discovered the answer to the ills of the modern man. Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Jaspers, Heidegger, Marcel, Lavelle, Loen, Sartre, are all advocates of some form of Existentialism; but though there is a wide divergency of thought among them, not one advocates a return to true historical Christianity. One of the most popular is Jean Paul Sartre, the Frenchman. He denies that there is a God who plans and directs our universe. Man simply appears on the earth for no ultimate reason or purpose, and he "only afterward defines himself." He is at first nothing and afterwards he becomes something; that is, whatever he wills himself to

be (Sartre, *Existentialism*, p.18).

Among the Existentialists Sartre is the one who brings the teachings of Humanism to their logical conclusion. According to Humanism, man must become completely autonomous, that is, he must create his own laws and norms to achieve full freedom for himself. This means he cannot condone or tolerate the idea of a supreme God. Faith in a God is a barrier to real freedom for the individual. Man must be outside of all law and must be responsible to no one except himself. To save man from even greater chaos than the

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present one, and to assure him of a better future, Sartre proclaims a false gospel. For if man is what he makes of himself he must also choose what will be good for all other men. My choice must be one that can be imposed upon all others as well as myself.

It is at this point that we see how Sartre's philosophy shows why humanism is bound to lead to despair. The terrible anguish of the individual is increased by consideration of the fact that every other individual has precisely the same right as myself to determine what is freedom and what is a real threat to his freedom. The

false god of Sartre, worshipped by large numbers today, is nothing less than anarchism; for each individual makes himself a god.

The Increase of Religion in America

There is another factor in American life today which, in the opinion of many, will dissolve the anxieties created by the threat of cultural self-destruction. Barbara Ward, in her "Report to Europe on America," has said that there is every sign of a notable "turn to religion" among American people today (*The New York Times Magazine*, June 20, 1954). All kinds of figures are adduced to prove that within the United States religion is "on the upswing." It is pointed out that from the year 1949 to 1953 the distribution of the Scriptures within the United States has increased 140 per cent (Report of American Bible Society, 1954). According to a recent poll, four-fifths of adult Americans said they believed the Bible to be the "revealed Word of God" rather than a grand "piece of literature" (Catholic Digest, 1954). To offset at once this enthusiasm over the increasing religiousness of Americans, we hasten to add that a Gallup Poll revealed that fifty-three per cent of Americans could not even name one of the four Gospels (Public Opinion News Service, Dec., 1954).

No one will doubt the "upswing" in religion in the United States. The Gallup Poll conducted in 1955 indicated that no less than ninety-five per cent of the people in our country professed belief in the Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish religion while only five per cent expressed no preference of any kind. Sixty-



eight per cent of our population is classified as Protestant, twenty-three per cent as Catholic, and Four per cent as Jewish. In the years 1926 to 1950 the population of the United States increased twenty-nine per cent, but in that same period church membership grew twice as fast as the population. Total church membership in 1950 was counted at eighty-five million, and in 1954 at ninety-five million, making an all-time high.

It seems that our day is also notably free from such popular atheist figures as Darrow and Ingersoll. In our day this type of free-thinker simply could not gain a large hearing in our country. The feeling that is dominant today is: "How could anyone be against religion?" Even in politics it is a great advantage for a candidate to have some religious affiliation. Only one among the ninety-five Senators in the 83rd Congress professed to be without any religious affiliation. To all this must be added that religious books have a far better sale in our present decade than ever before. Such writers as the two Niebuhrs, Buber, Tillich, and Kierkegaard enjoy a large following among the intellectuals of our nation.

It is agreed that public opinion is more favorable to religion today in the United States than ever before, and that we have made rapid strides ahead religiously since the 1920s. From a very superficial appraisal we would be inclined to think that our nation is deeply religious and that only five per cent of the population are the objects of mission work and in need of conversion to Christ. We certainly have the quantity if figures mean anything; but

how about the quality of the Christianity that is professed?

Decadence of American Religion

The religion which bound the early immigrants to our country was virtually a transplantation from the old world to the new. Churches were organized rather along racial and national lines. Immigrants who had the same religious convictions would break up into different groups because of language barriers. Many of the second generation cast aside the religious identification

A religion of only moral ideals stands in no need of divine revelation.

of the first generation immigrants. To a large number the religion as well as the language of their fathers was a foreign importation to be discarded as excess baggage. With the rise of a third generation of Americans, the ties with the old country were almost completely severed, and the old racial and national groups also disappeared.

Through legislative enactment the stream of immigration dried up, and the tie to the old historic Christian creeds also vanished. Most of our denominations are transplantations of parent churches from across the ocean. But when we step behind the external institutional glory to examine the foundations of American Christianity, we have reasons to be alarmed. Religious illiteracy exists

to an alarming degree. The contents of the latest edition of any popular magazine is better known among church members than their creeds and the Bible. This means we must contend with a rootless Christianity, one that is without doctrinal foundation; it is a Christianity without real theology. Arnold classified it as a "morality touched with emotion?"

A religion of only moral ideals stands in no need of divine revelation. It can get along exceedingly well without dogmas and historical creeds. The Christianity of the average American has been reduced to a golden rule Christianity, a religion rooted merely in the Sermon on the Mount with the supreme emphasis on brotherhood and love. Other fundamental doctrines of the Scriptures are unknown or completely ignored. The premise upon which most of American Christianity is based is that men are not inherently bad but basically good.

This type of Christianity, so prevalent in America, is no longer the classical Christianity taught in the Scriptures. The Christianity of tradition has become an unknown religion. T. Valentine Parker in his book *American Protestantism*, makes this observation, "With all our progress in knowledge and our emphasis upon education, members of the churches know less of the Bible than did their grandparents. College students coming from supposedly Christian homes are ludicrously ignorant of the book that holds the record of Christian revelation. The explanation of it all is indifference" (page 87).

It cannot be denied that in our nation we have two types of Chris-

tianity, and the one that should be well known is largely unknown, while the one largely accepted is the worship of a false god. God as Lawgiver and Judge has been removed and replaced by the Jesus of the four Gospel narratives. Divine wrath and divine punishment have been replaced by an all-compassionate love. Man is represented as being able to save himself and others by a diligent pursuit of the pattern of the life of Jesus. Such doctrines as the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Deity of Christ, Vicarious Atonement, Predestination, Justification do not fit into the pattern of the religion of Jesus the martyr-hero. The entire New Testament is considered important only in so far as it interprets or illustrates human brotherhood.

American Christianity and Historic Creeds

The revolt in our own nation against dogmas has become itself a dogma. Christianity stripped of its doctrinal foundations and advocating only the acceptance of so-called Christian ideals makes such ideals its god. It ceases to be a religion of salvation. Man becomes his own savior, and raises himself to the status of a deity. What happened to Jesus, if we follow his footsteps, will happen also to us.

It is not difficult to understand that a Christianity loosed from God and centered in self-sufficient man can easily yield to diabolic forces based on the autonomy of man. Hitler appealed to it, promising a new and better Germany based on the worship of man. Communism also promises a better salvation than the one promised by American Christian-

ity. It undertakes to create a heaven on earth, not through the agency and ability of one man, but through corporate man.

It was this emphasis on man's autonomy and sufficiency in the writings of Nietzsche and Karl Marx which gave them such a wide hearing. Both Fascism and Communism teach that the individual exists merely for the welfare of the community; and that the individual, if needs be, must be sacrificed to achieve the highest good of the community. Society can do with man as it wills.

The teaching of Scripture that man is created in the image of God is totally lost, and the distinction between man and the animal has been virtually wiped out. As soon as man loses the truth of his creation in the image of God, the sense of his personal dignity and personal worth must vanish. He becomes a puppet in the hands of men stronger than himself, and so he reaps the bitter fruits of his idol worship.

It has been correctly said that much of America's Christianity today is a religiousness without religion, without content, without a commitment to God and Christ and the infallible Scriptures. What do Americans believe and what is the real content of their faith? Their god is an "unknown God" and their worship a worship of faith itself. Most Americans turn to religion merely to obtain peace of mind and the church must administer some kind of sedative to soothe upset nervous systems.

Herberg says in his Protestant-Catholic-Jew: "Not God, but man.-man in his individual and corporate

being - is the beginning and end of the spiritual system of much of the present-day American religiosity... In this kind of religion it is not man who serves God, but God who is mobilized and made to serve man and his purposes — whether these purposes be economic prosperity, free enterprise, social reform, democracy, happiness, security, or peace of mind. God is conceived as man's omnipotent servant, faith as a sure-fire device to get what we want" (p. 284, 285).

The popular volume, "This I Believe," edited in 1952 by Edward P. Morgan, bears out the fact that the kind of religiousness accepted by Americans is one in which God, Christ, and the Bible play a very minor role. To dethrone God inevitably results in the enthronement of an idol god, and is sure to lead to the disintegration of our civilization through the forces of inner decay.

Must we, then, receive as members in our churches all who claim to be Christians? The distinction between religion and secularism appears have lost its meaning. Many assume Christianity to be identified with what is called the American Way of Life, including the mere need of religion and "a faith" instead of the old historic Christian faith demanding repentance, the broken and contrite heart, and the acceptance of Jesus Christ both as Savior and Lord.

Rev. Ralph J. Danhof
[1900-1971] was the Stated Clerk of the Christian Reformed Church when this article was first published.



Islam's Doctrine of God

Ever since the September 11, 2001, attacks by Muslim terrorists against the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, the question has been raised, "What is the difference between Christianity and Islam?" Many can't see a real difference between these two major world religions. Students of comparative religion in secular universities and colleges are taught that all religions share similar beliefs. They are told that since Christians and Muslims are monotheistic, they worship the same God, even though certain details may differ. And shouldn't different people, in different countries, and from different cultural environments find their own way to God and have a religion suited to their own peculiar circumstances? Does God not welcome all who approach Him through their own history, language, or cultural heritage?

Rabbi David Hartman from the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem, asked, "Is single-minded fanaticism a necessity for passion and religious survival, or can we have a multilingual view of God - a notion that God is not exhausted by one religious path?"

In reaction to the hatred shown by some to Muslims, there is now a twisted view of religious tolerance, which denies that Islam and Christians are competing faiths. The virtues of Islam, the wisdom of Allah, and the greatness of Muhammad are praised. Ecumenical services are even held with the local imam present. Liberals in mainline denominations declare that to ascribe

an absolute finality to Christianity is to express spiritual arrogance.

Some stress that the difference between Islam and Christianity is mainly cultural. But Islam claims to be the only true religion. Muhammad Assad, an Austrian convert to Islam, declares that his faith, unlike other religions, is not only a spiritual attitude of mind, adjustable to different cultural settings, but a self-sufficing orbit of culture and a social system of clearly defined features. In *The Qur'an and Its Impact on Human History*, Allahbuksh. K. Broth states that in Islam "religion has been perfected. That is another way of saying that with Islam the age of new revelation has come to a close." And he adds, "The Holy Qur'an thus embodies the final-most communication from the Divine." In other words, the conflict between those two faiths is not just cultural but theological.

Franklin Graham had it right when he said, "The God of Islam is not the same God of the Christian or Judeo-Christian faith. It's a different God." Graham was not intolerant, he simply stated the key difference between Christianity and Islam - the Allah of Islam is not the same as the God of the Bible. True tolerance gives us the right to say, "We think you are wrong, but we will defend your right to hold a wrong view."

The Creed

Islam has the shortest Creed of all religions, and none is so often re-

peated. Wherever Islam has spread, the ritualistic formula "La Ilaha illa Allah, Muhammad rasul Allah" (There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is Allah's Apostle) is recited. By this creed the faithful are called to prayer five times daily. It is the very foundation of the Islam faith. Its followers never grow weary of extolling its simplicity.

In his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* the British historian Edward Gibbon (1737-94) describes Islam with subdued admiration, just because its creed is so simple compared to the Christological doctrines he had to deal with in previous sections of his book. He even said, "A philosophical atheist might subscribe to the popular creed of Mahometans, a creed too sublime for our present faculties." But as the Dutch missiologist Dr. H. Kraemer points out, "The truly remarkable and puzzling thing in Islam, however, is that it is, notwithstanding its undeniable simplicity, a manifold riddle." But the creed and its theological and practical implications must be understood if we want to present the Gospel to Muslims.

The Divine Oneness

At the core of its creed is the doctrine of the Oneness of Allah. The Koran denies that God has any partner or companion associated with him. It confesses God's unity and sole Oneness. On the surface, this doctrine means two things: there is only one, true God and all pagan gods are false; second, Allah is not trinitarian. Consequently, this confession shows that the Islamic concept of God is a rejection of the Biblical revelation of God. For ex-

ample, the belief in the Divine Oneness finds expression in a visible demonstration in Mecca. When a Muslim arrives in Mecca for his pilgrimage, he must walk seven times around the Ka'bah (A cubical stone building in the court of the mosque in Mecca that is called the "House of God".)

Muhammad Assad notes that if we move in a circle around some object we thereby establish that object as the central point of our action. And he adds "The Ka'ab, towards which every Muslim turns his face in prayer, symbolizes the Oneness of God." One contemporary Muslim writer describes the Islamic view of God this way: "In attempting to understand the nature and works of God, we learn that: God is only One without a partner or son. He is the Creator of the universe and everything that is to be found in the universe. He is the Compassionate and Merciful and His mercy is to all creatures."

The Trinity

Christians acknowledge the Trinitarian character of God. This is made necessary by our insistence that the God who redeemed the world through the cross is not different from the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and the prophets. We have access to the Father through the Son in the Spirit (Eph.2:18)

Islam plainly contradicts then the core truth of the Christian faith - the Fatherhood of God, and the Sonship of Jesus Christ, Who is also Saviour and King, and the person and work of the Holy Spirit. The Koran states: "O people of the Scripture: do not exaggerate in your

religion nor utter aught concerning Allah save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, son of the Mary was only a messenger of Allah, and his word which he conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from him. So believe in Allah and his messengers, and say not 'Three' - Cease! (it is) better for you! Allah is only One God. Far it is removed from his transcendent

When a Christian talks to Muslims about the Triune God, a knowledgeable Muslim will immediately reply, "You have committed the worst possible sin."

majesty that he would have a son. His is all that is in heaven and that is in the earth. And Allah is sufficient as defender." (Surah iv:17).

The Sin of Shirk

The doctrine of Trinity is a difficult obstacle in the presentation of the Gospel. Because of its uncompromising emphasis on God's absolute unity, Islam calls the unpardonable sin - the giving of an associate or partner to God.

When a Christian talks to Muslims about the Triune God, a knowledgeable Muslim will immediately reply, "You have committed the worst possible sin; the sin of shirk. You have given God an associate. You placed another beside Allah. You are on the way to hell unless you

repent of that horrible sin." And the Koran declares, "Lo! Allah pardoneth not that partners should be ascribed unto him. He pardoneth all save that to whom He will. Whoso ascribeth partners unto Allah hath wandered far astray." (Surah iv 116).

The Cross

At the centre of the Christian faith is the cross of Christ. Christians betray themselves and the Gospel when in a spirit of twisted tolerance and pluralism they act as if the Cross of Christ is incidental to the being of God. In fact, the God we worship cannot be known apart from Christ and His cross. The Christian faith is about the God who had entered into human suffering in Christ and whose righteousness was revealed, not in his judging, but in his justifying man and making him righteous.

Muhammad Assad teaches that there is no universal redemption of mankind in the teachings of Islam. "Redemption and damnation are individual. Every Muslim is his own redeemer; he bears all possibilities of spiritual success and failure in his heart." He quotes the Koran, "Allah taketh not a soul beyond its scope. For it (is only) that which it hath earned, and against it (only) that which it has deserved." (ii:286) And another verses says, "And that man hath only that for which he maketh an effort."(liii:39)

What stands between Islam and the Christian faith is the cross of Christ. The apostle Paul said., "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power



of God.” (1 Cor. 1:18) The post September 11 Christians’ relations with Islam can not change. We cannot participate in ecumenical services with Muslims, followers of Muhammad, an opponent of the Gospel.

Autocratic Will

Allah is the source of both good and evil. His will is supreme. Whom he wills he forgives and whom he wills, he punishes. He acknowledges no rule, standard, or limit except His own rule and absolute will. “As He wills it” is the constantly recurring expression in the Koran. Allah is not bound by law, covenant, or moral code.

A Christian can say, “I stand on the promises of God.. He is faithful in keeping his promises.” The Muslim can never say this. Because Allah cannot be held accountable by people for his claims and promises. He is arbitrary and unpredictable. A Muslim can never be sure of his eternal destiny. Allah rewards or condemns at will.

He has also a free range to change his laws as he pleases. The Koran declares, “Such of Our revelations as We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, we bring (in place) one better or the like thereof. Knowest thou not that Allah is Able to do all things?”(ii: 106). He is ever more prone to punish than to reward, to inflict pain than to bestow pleasure, to ruin than build.

For the Muslim Allah’s contradictory actions are not problematic. His will is beyond understanding. Kenneth Gragg comments, “ So God is the One Who leads astray, as well as the One Who guides. He is

the One Who brings damage, as also does Satan. He is described also by terms like the Bringer-down, the Compeller, or Tyrant, the Haughty - all of which, when used of men, have an evil sense. In the Unity of the single will, however, these descriptions co-exist with those that relate to mercy, compassion and glory.”

***A Muslim
doesn't know
the richness of ... a
relationship with
Him.***

Submission

Islam has been called a religion which has almost no questions and no answers. The name Islam itself exemplifies its spirit: Islam - absolute surrender to the Almighty Allah, who has not revealed himself, but rather who has revealed his desires, wishes, and will. And his will, according to Islam teaching, is limited to Islamic law. It is the religion of complete and absolute submission. The Koran states, “Say: Lo! The guidance of Allah is Guidance, and we are ordered to surrender to the Lord of the Worlds.”(vi:71).

Muhammad Assad points out that as long as a Muslim sincerely and consciously submits to the laws decreed by God, he is free to shape his personal life to whatever form his nature directs him. A Muslim then performs the will of Allah when he follows the dictates of the Islamic legal system. He is Allah’s slave but not his child.

Personal Relationship with Allah

Another question is: “Is it possible for a Muslim to have a personal relationship with Allah?” He can never come to know Allah intimately. Allah is not involved in his affairs. He is too far away for him to have intimate fellowship with his follower. To be a Muslim means belonging to a religious - political community rather than an expression of a personal faith. In Islam God then is the Sovereign Monarch who requires his followers to submit to him as obedient slaves. A devout Muslim is entirely absorbed in the greatness and majesty of God while his own person vanishes away.

Prayers in their prescribed forms are more of a continual acknowledgment of God’s majesty and sovereignty than of a personal communion. Allah is the wholly other and not our Father. “Fellowship does not exist between God and man,” observed Kraemer . “God is too exalted for that and the relation of Father-child between God and man is not primarily abhorrent to the Moslem because of the association of parenthood and sexual life, but because it suggests a sacrilegious lack of reverence toward the Divine.”

Conclusion

In the light of the antithesis between Christianity and Islam, how are we as Christians to communicate the true character of the Triune God? A prerequisite is to know our own faith and to learn about Islam in order to proclaim to them in truth and love the Gospel. A Muslim doesn’t know the richness of the

(continued on page 24)

Mid-America: An Academy with a Vocational Aim (2)

(The following is the text of Cornelis P. Venema's inaugural address as the first president of Mid-America Reformed Seminary, September 27, 2001. This is the second part of the address. In the first part, Dr. Venema emphasized that Mid-America as a seminary is an academy, a school.)

An Academy That Honors Scripture and Confession

One reason the emphasis upon the seminary as an academic institution is challenged is that, when this is all a seminary seeks to be, it does not serve the church. When I speak of the seminary as an academy, however, I do not mean to separate it in any inappropriate manner from the church. A seminary, unlike a theological faculty in a university setting or a school of religious studies at a state institution of higher learning, exists for the benefit of the church. Though it must be a place where serious theological study occurs, in the best tradition of Christian scholarship, employing the texts and theological writings of the Christian tradition and church, its mission is to serve the churches by preparing her students for the ministry. Lest my emphasis upon the seminary as an academy be misunderstood, then, let me mention those characteristics of its academic work that are essential to its fruitfulness in serving the church. These characteristics are a necessary antidote to the scourge of seminaries, which as academies serve to undermine rather than bolster the ministry of the Word of God in the churches.

Biblical in Its Basis

First of all, the discipline of theology

in the seminary as an academy must be thoroughly biblical in its foundations and content. The science of theology, when it is pursued upon any other basis than an unswerving commitment to the inspiration, authority and infallibility of

A Seminary's mission is to serve the churches by preparing her students for the ministry.

the Word of God inscripturated in the canon of the Old and New Testaments, can only degenerate into "talking about man in a loud voice" (to use a quaint expression of Karl Barth in his criticism of Protestant liberalism). Seminary education that does not spring from an uncompromising respect for and devotion to the Holy Spirit's speaking in the text of Scripture is of little or no use to the church. Unless the Word of God in Scripture is regarded as the source and standard for the theology and the preaching of the church, seminaries, and the pulpits that reflect their teaching, can only echo the culture and society of the

present day. Indeed, theological education that does not "believe without a doubt all things contained" in the Scriptures (Belgic Confession) can only harm the church.

This was brought home to me recently, when I read in the *Chicago Tribune* a report about the debate within the PCUSA over the issue of the ordination of practicing homosexuals. The report noted that, recently, 33 of 58 Bible professors at Presbyterian seminaries had signed a statement advocating a lift in a ban upon this practice. One of their spokesmen, a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, was quoted to say, "they [biblical texts condemning homosexual practice] are words out of a particular context. Our context is so significantly different that I don't think the words are any longer living, but dead words if we try to teach them without contextually understanding them."¹ So much for the idea that the grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord lives forever (Isa. 40:8)! Or that the Word of God is "living, and active, and more powerful than any two-edged sword" (Heb. 4:12)!

Unless a seminary builds upon the solid foundation of the vitality and truth of the Word of God, it can only become like that house built upon sand of which Christ speaks in Luke 6:43-49. The flood tides of the present culture will undoubtedly overwhelm it.

Confessional in Its Commitment

Moreover, theological study in a Reformed seminary must be confessional. Contrary to the now gen-



erally discredited notion of dispassionate inquiry, which is warranted by universally accessible and incorrigible first principles of reason, the academic work of a Reformed seminary must be carried out in self-conscious submission to the great confessional symbols of the Christian faith.

One of the unfortunate tendencies of some Protestant views of *sola Scriptura* is that they often encourage a kind of biblicism. “No creed but Christ” means, in effect, that I need not bother with the great traditions of biblical study and theological scholarship of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. I can contentedly approach the text of Scripture, as though I did so without the company of a great cloud of witnesses who have gone before me. There is a kind of craving for the “contemporary” today that inevitably produces a faddishness. When he witnessed this phenomenon in the middle of the last century, C. S. Lewis quipped, “fashions come and go, but mostly they go.” Os Guinness terms this the “Generation Hex”: the penchant to label generations (“Baby busters,” “The New Lost Generation,” “Twentysomethings,” “Generation X,” “13ers” [13th generation since Benjamin Franklin!]), as though there were periodic seismic shifts in the makeup of people requiring a new approach to effective communication with them. How often have we not read articles or books calling for a radical change in the message and medium of the church. New times demand, so it is said, a new and more fashionable gospel. Invariably, these calls are rooted in the conviction that the historic confessions of the Christian church no

longer serve as an adequate basis for the ministry of the gospel today.

Mid-America Reformed Seminary, however, if it is to be an academy that serves the church, must engage the study of theology in a “collegial” spirit, in concert with others who have gone before or who are contemporary with us. As a school that subscribes to the great confessions of the continental Reformed churches (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort) and the British isles (the Westminster Confession of Faith), we stand in a rich and catholic tradition. This means that we are obliged to embrace the full-

***Theological study
in a Reformed
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confessional.***

ness of the Reformed faith. We may not succumb to the parochial spirit of those who would oppose these Reformed confessions to each other. Rather, we have the blessed opportunity in God’s providence to serve students who represent the full range of the Reformed and Presbyterian family of churches, whose confessions we share and to which we commonly subscribe.

Catholic in its reach

Because it is biblical and confessional, the training of a Reformed academy will also be catholic in its reach. Herman Bavinck, in his address on “The catholicity of Christianity and the Church,” defined catholicity as follows:

The catholicity of the church, as the Scriptures portray it for us and the early churches exemplify it for us, is breathtaking in its beauty. Whoever becomes enclosed in the narrow circle of a small church or conventicle, does not know it and has never experienced its power and comfort. Such a person shortchanges the love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the fellowship of the Spirit and incurs a loss of spiritual treasures that cannot be made good by meditation or devotion. Such a person will have an impoverished soul. By contrast, whoever is able to see beyond this to the countless multitudes who have been purchased by the blood of Christ from every nation and people and age, whoever experiences the powerful strengthening of faith, the wondrous comfort in times of suffering to know that unity with the whole church militant that has been gathered out of the whole human race from the beginning to the end of the world, such a person can never be narrow-minded and narrow-hearted.²

When we confess “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church,” we are committing ourselves to embrace the whole of what properly belongs to the church, excluding nothing that ought to be included (and, of course, including nothing that ought to be excluded). This has profound implications for the service of Mid-America Reformed

Seminary on behalf of the church. The seminary as an academy may not neglect the wisdom of the past for the passing whims of the present. Before students are asked to read contemporary theologians, they need to become conversant with the great theological literature of the catholic Christian church. Because catholic theological study embraces past, present, and future, it requires balance. It also recognizes the absolute claims of Christ and the gospel upon the whole of life within God's creation and all areas of Christian scholarship. Conversely, theological study that is characterized by a simple-minded repetition of the past, or a studied indifference to the intellectual currents and challenges of the present day, is not catholic in its reach.

I purposefully stress this feature of the confessional commitments of a Reformed seminary because there is today, especially among conser-

vative Reformed communities, the temptation to resort to a kind of "Reformed fundamentalism." Reformed fundamentalism narrows the reach of the faith to a few key fundamentals. Because there are some critical pressure points at which the faith is under attack, these become the all-consuming focus of attention and interest. The Christian faith, in this context, is reduced to a few key doctrinal fundamentals. Such fundamentalism also forms its position in reaction, rather than in responsible engagement with the best of the Reformed theological tradition. For example, because institutions of higher learning within the Christian community have not always consistently upheld the highest standards of biblically-faithful scholarship, scholarship as such is disparaged. This kind of Reformed fundamentalism does no credit to the gospel, and offers little help to the church in her ministry of

the gospel of the kingdom. Reformed fundamentalism is unable to offer an informed alternative to what it rejects. Such fundamentalism can only blow the trumpet of retreat in the face of contemporary challenges. (*to be continued*)

Notes

¹Richard N. Ostling, "Gay debate put in biblical terms," *Chicago Tribune* (July 29, 2001), Section 2, 8.

²Herman Bavinck, "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church," trans. John Bolt, in *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 227.

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Paul Murphy

Like Apples of Gold in Settings of Silver (Part 4)

Seminaries

When discussing the advancements of the Reformed faith, we need to mention distinctively reformed seminaries. MidAmerica, with which we are most familiar, just celebrated its 20th anniversary. There are also Whitefield Theological Seminary in Florida; Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina, whose president is Dr. Joseph Pipa; Knox Theological Seminary in Florida started by D. James Kennedy; and Bahnsen Theological Seminary in California. In our

own town, there's Puritan Theological Seminary, where Dr. Joel Beeke and Rev. Krahe teach; Chesapeake Theological Seminary in Maryland begun by T. M. Moore, a Westminster Seminary graduate; and of course we could talk about the influence of the many campuses of Westminster Theological Seminaries and Reformed Theological Seminaries. And then of course we can talk about individual congregations which are taking up parsonage training programs, raising and training men for the ministry right in their own local setting.

Education

There is also the movement in classical education in our country. Classical education is formed around the Trivium, which for centuries was a tried and true method of education. From the Association of Classical and Christian Schools and in their monthly newsletter, there are multitudes of references of classical schools budding up around the country. The home school movement is something that ought to be greatly encouraging. It holds out great promise for the church,



and it holds out great promise for the Reformed faith in our day as well. Yes, there are a lot of evangelicals and a lot of fundamentalists who are home schooling. Of course there are secularists as well that are home schooling, but the Reformed faith is having an enormous influence in this area. At a recent conference, a minister from a reformed congregation got up and preached to an assembly of 2,000-3,000 people about the importance of catechizing. You know, they just soaked it up like a sponge soaks up water. They swamped him afterwards to receive further instruction, "Where can they can get catechisms?" "How can they do this?"

Why are these movements, classical education and home schooling, promising and encouraging movements? Let me tell you why. Because these are mothers and fathers, families along with their children, that are taking the faith seriously. They are taking their covenant obligations seriously. They are taking their responsibilities to their children seriously. They are taking the whole subject of education seriously, which is something greatly lacking in far too many of our circles. And I tell you that is going to bear great fruit, just as the Christian education system at its best bore great fruit.

Brothers and sisters, I relate to you some of these stories and statistics as evidence and as observations of what God is doing in America. As evidence and as observations that it is a glorious, a thrilling time to be Reformed. When God is at work, the Reformed faith is alive and well! That is an understatement. It is an understatement to say that the

Reformed faith is alive and well. It is growing, propagating, it is prospering in these circles, and it is having an effect on evangelicalism. When Moody Press begins to publish Reformed works, you know that something is flowing in the right direction.

I would like you to note two things about all these stories, statistics, evidence, and observations. Of all that I mention to you there is nothing that is older than 20 years. These are all developments that have occurred in the last 20 years, and the vast majority of them are things that have developed in the last 10 years.

The profound and pervasive influence is not just the Reformed faith in general, but of Dutch Reformed theology in particular.

I mentioned at the outset that we have all gone through discouraging times of declension: ecclesiastically, spiritually, morally, theologically, and even in our own fellowship. I present these things to tell you, brothers and sisters, that there is every reason to be encouraged. God is doing great and wonderful things.

I would like you to note a second thing, though, and I think this will particularly encourage you. The profound and pervasive influence is not just the Reformed faith in general, but of Dutch Reformed theology in particular. I was listening to some lectures recently about South-

ern Presbyterianism and the lecturer was commenting on how, from 1955 to 1980 there was a revival of Reformed Theology in the south. It showed itself in the Pensacola Institute of Theology, which had annual lectures and Reformed men in to lecture and preach regularly. It was shown in the development, foundation, and growth of Reformed Theological Seminary, at least at its inception and high point. I listened with interest because generally the lectures were about the decline that was occurring in southern Presbyterianism. And as my ears perked up and I listened to this revival of Reformed theology that occurred in the south, what names did I hear mentioned as to those who were prominent in that particular movement? William Hendrickson, P.Y. DeJong, Simon Kistemaker and others. Those names are Dutch Reformed names whom God used for a revival of Reformed theology in the south. That revival has just taken off. I use that word guardedly, but it has just taken off in the south.

Of course, we could talk about the influence of Dutch Reformed theology in particular at Princeton Seminary. Vos left Calvin to take up his position there. Later at Westminster Theological Seminary, there was the influence of Cornelius VanTil, a son of the Christian Reformed Church. R. B. Kuiper, Herman Ridderbos (from the Netherlands), and Vos whose works were largely translated by Richard Gaffin. There was a beautiful blending that occurred between the Westminster and Continental traditions there at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and then was carried on out in California as well.

We could talk about the influence of Dutch Reformed theology in particular in the person and labors of Bob Godfrey, president of Westminster Theological Seminary in California, who of course was nurtured and disciplined in a Christian Reformed Church in the San Francisco Bay area. His influence has become widespread, not only as a preacher and teacher and a very gifted one, but as president of an institution renowned and respected around the world.

Jay Adams and the whole nouthetic counseling movement is a direct result of Cornelius VanTil. I had the privilege of meeting Dr. Adams some ten years ago when he was in Grand Rapids, and I asked him if Cornelius VanTil had any influence on his work. And he said. "Influence? He is responsible the whole thing." They have bi-coastal counseling centers at both Westminster seminaries. They have seminary programs. They published *A Journal of Biblical Counseling*, *The Journal of Modern Medicine*, and *Biblical Ethics in Medicine* and numerous other influences. All are a result of Dutch Reformed theology.

And who can forget, and who would want to leave out, a mention of Christian education. We take Christian education for granted in our circles. But you should know that in Reformed circles in general, such as Presbyterian churches and others, and certainly in the evangeli-

cal church at large, Christian education is not a distinctive, not an emphasis. By and large it is entirely absent. And yet more and more people are catching a vision for Christian education. The classical education movement, the home school movement, others in Presbyterian and evangelical circles, are noticing. And where did that begin? It began with the passion of Abraham Kuyper, Cornelius VanTil, Louis Berkhoff and others.

These developments in the last ten years, these influences of Dutch Reformed theology in particular, have had a prominent, pervasive influence in the church, in our country, and in our day. Brothers and sisters, I am not even going to take time to consider the missionary results, benefits, blessings, and encouragements or international developments about the Reformed faith... such as what has gone on in Korea, what is going on in Malaysia, and in other places as the Reformed faith is caught by people there and taking off like a flame. Great reason for encouragement!

By now, you might want to correct me or at least qualify me, "Well, Pastor Murphy, are you talking about this as a revival?" Well, I would say there is a revival of the Reformed faith in our land. I think it is unmistakable. Is there a revival occurring in our nation? No. Am I looking at the world through rose-colored glasses? Do I just have a Pollyannish perspective on what is

going on? Am I failing to recognize and neglecting to pay attention to other great threats, both from within and without the church, to the faith once for all delivered to the saints? No, but I write here to encourage you.

Allow me to say there are major threats looming on the horizon for our land. Two of the most prominent, I believe, are the government as it becomes more and more self-consciously anti-Christian, and the homosexual movement as it becomes more and more THE ideology and philosophy reigning in the public square.

Allow me to give you an example of that. Some of you might have heard that the state motto of Ohio, which is on all their state seals, is a quote from the Bible: "With God, all things are possible." Recently, that saying, as a state motto, was declared unconstitutional. On the same day, homosexual unions were declared legal in Vermont. Just think of what a providential indicator the Lord has displayed there. An abomination is protected by law. And Christianity, on the very same day, is rejected by law. There are major threats out there. I am not Pollyannish. I am not viewing things through rose-colored glasses.

Well then, where is the encouragement, you might ask? Let me conclude by saying just a few things. We need to recognize that if we use the analogy of a building, not a build-

I asked Jay Adams if Cornelius VanTil had any influence on his work. And he said. "Influence? He is responsible the whole thing."



ing as a church building, but perhaps a building more like an apartment building or an office building, then that building's strength and integrity depends upon the strength and integrity of its foundation. I used to work in construction and my job was putting in foundations. The strength and integrity of a structure depends on the strength and integrity of the foundation. I tell you, bothers and sisters, that the Reformed faith is the foundation of the building which is the evangelical church. The Reformed faith is the foundation of the church. If the Reformed faith is strong and growing, then that will yield a positive effect in making the whole structure one with strength and integrity.

And where is the encouragement then? The encouragement is simply to look at the evidence and observations, the stories and statistics which I related to you in these last four issues of *The Outlook*, and to recognize that God is doing great things in the midst of His people, to and for, and with the Reformed faith. Compared to things that go on in the evangelical church, Promise Keepers and other fads, the numbers that I mentioned to you are insignificant. Compared to what is going on in our nation as a whole, it may not be that great.

But allow me to conclude by pointing you to something that we all hold dear to our hearts as Reformed believers. And that is that God doesn't need numbers to accomplish His purposes. "It is not by might and not by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts." We are those whose confess "our Lord God almighty reigns" and, I tell you, He is doing great things.

Do you remember in I Samuel 14, Israel had to fight the Philistines and they had no weapons? Jonathan and his armor bearer went out with their weapons alone. God sent a panic among the Philistines and they wound up killing themselves and routing themselves and Israel defeated them.

Do you remember the story of Hezekiah's prayer when Lachish was under attack by the King of Assyria? After he prayed, on the morning they went out, the angel

If the Reformed faith is strong and growing, then that will yield a positive effect in making the whole structure one with strength and integrity.

of the Lord had killed 180,000 men. The Lord doesn't need numbers to accomplish His purposes. He needs faithful men and women who recognize that He sits on the throne. Who recognize that they are called by Him to be faithful, steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain.

Can we confess that? Can we confess, with Martin Luther who in the dark times of the Reformation, often found himself in the midst of depression, against the forces which so often seemed to outnumber him? Those forces are alive and well to-

day. I made reference to them. Can we confess with him the words of "A Mighty Fortress"?

"And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, We will not fear, for God has willed His truth to triumph through us. The prince of darkness grim, We tremble not for him; his rage we can endure, for lo! his doom is sure. One little Word shall fell him.

That Word above all earthly powers - No thanks to them - abideth; The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him who with us sideth. Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also; the body they may kill. God's truth abideth still, His kingdom is forever."

We can confess that, and we must. AMEN!

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(Continued from page 17)

love of God in Christ Jesus. But the twice born of God may call Him our Father, and have an experiential relationship with Him. "Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear; but you received the Spirit who makes you sons. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself testified with our spirit that we are God's children." (Rom.8: 14-17).

The Author of this article writes under the alias of "Dick Wunnink" due to past threats received from the Islam community when writing about this subject.

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