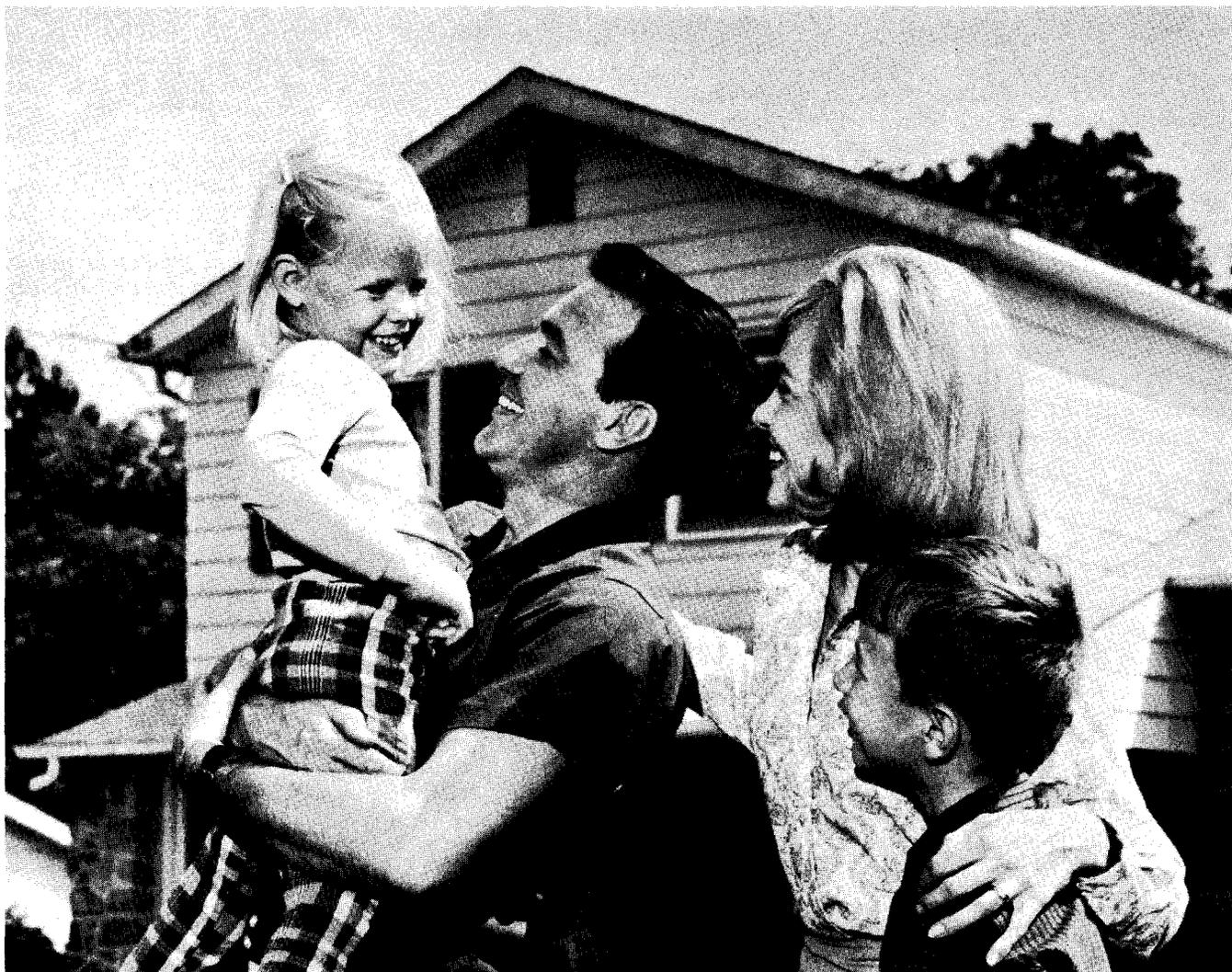


The Presbyterian Guardian

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The Role of a Christian Father

"Inevitable division" anticipated

On August 11 in Weaverville, N.C., a coalition of four conservative organizations within the Presbyterian Church, U.S. ("Southern") announced formation of a steering committee to rally support and make plans for eventual separation from the parent church.

The announcement had been long awaited, and the audience (gathered for the annual rally held by *The Presbyterian Journal*) was enthusiastic. The Rev. Donald Patterson, chairman of the new committee and a pastor in Jackson, Miss., noted "the apparent inevitability of division in the Presbyterian Church US caused by the program of the radical ecumenists," and promised "to move now toward a continuing body of congregations and presbyteries loyal to the Scriptures and the Westminster Standards."

Failure to stem the tide

At the recent General Assembly of the "Southern" Church, conservatives made their most impressive effort yet as they sought to persuade their church to back away from its current trends. Despite excellent organization, and by very close votes in many instances, the conservatives still lost most of the crucial issues. The assembly insisted on going ahead with a restructuring plan that will reduce the number of presbyteries and effectively weaken conservative voting power. It also beat down attempts to withdraw the denomination from union talks, both with the United Presbyterian Church, U. S. A. and in the Consultation on Church Union (COCU).

On these and other issues, conservatives saw themselves as having done their best and yet having failed. The decision to restructure is generally understood by all parties as the prerequisite to approval of a plan of union with the United Presbyterians. Practically speaking, conservatives must move now or see their best opportunity lost.

"Inevitability" qualified

The Weaverville announcement did recognize, however, that "the Sovereign Holy Spirit may be pleased so to revise our Church as to make revisions in the plan [to separate] necessary." Presumably, the one specific event that would seriously alter such a plan would be the defeat of the proposal to unite with the UP Church.

This very fact, though, confronts the conservatives with

"Separation from Unbelief"

An additional supply of these tracts is now available. These are reprints of an article (originally in the November 1970 *Guardian*) by Dr. George W. Knight setting forth the biblical imperative for the Christian to separate himself from unbelief. Can you use this in witnessing to others? You may have these at 50¢ for ten copies, \$2 for 100; we pay the postage. Let us know how many you can use.

a dilemma. They rightly fear that such a merger would spell the end of any real testimony to Scripture or the Reformed faith. Yet their only practical hope to maintain a truly Presbyterian church seems to lie in the present proposed plan of union. In the face of conservative opposition, leaders favoring union felt obliged to incorporate an "escape clause" in the plan in order to secure any possibility of final approval. If conservatives are to be allowed to leave a merged church without losing their properties, they must at least refrain from opposing this plan of union with its "escape clause."

Prospects for success

The new steering committee did not spell out just how it intended to "move now" toward a continuing church. Nor is it clear just how much support there is for a division now. (Estimates range from ten percent to twenty percent of the "Southern" church.)

But already a rift appears in the conservative ranks. Dr. L. Nelson Bell, founder of *The Presbyterian Journal* (a leading force in the plan for dividing the church), announced that he had severed all connection with the *Journal* and stated his intention to "stay in" and continue the fight there.

Conservatives did persuade the General Assembly to authorize the appointment to the joint committee working on the plan of union with the UP Church of someone opposed to that plan. Honoring the intent of that decision, the assembly's moderator named lawyer W. Jack Williamson (secretary of Concerned Presbyterians, one of the four groups making up the new committee at Weaverville) as the "opposition" representative. Following a similar authorization by the United Presbyterian assembly, its moderator named Dr. Edward Dowey (principal architect of the *Confession of 1967*) as its "opposition" representative. Dr. Dowey's opposition, however, is not to union but precisely to that "escape clause" provision that would allow dissidents to stay out!

If the "escape clause" can be preserved despite the opposition of those like Dr. Dowey, it is possible that we shall yet see a continuing Presbyterian church at least in the South. But, judging from past performance, if the "liberal" leadership feels it has the power to force the union proposal through, the "escape clause" may well be jettisoned. Whether, faced with the almost certain loss of their church property, the conservatives will still make the break remains to be seen.

For those who remember similar situations over thirty-five years ago, and for those who may have "made the break" more recently even at the cost of church property, it is hard to avoid some feeling of disappointment that conservative forces in the Presbyterian Church, U.S. have not taken a stronger stand for separation from unbelief regardless of the consequences. Still, so long as there is the possibility of withdrawal "with honor" and with property, we should pray that the Holy Spirit will lead all true Christians in the "Southern" Church to see the need to "move now" toward a continuing church true to historic Presbyterianism.

—J. J. M.

A layman calls to the pulpit

LOUIS J. VOSKUIL

The following article is a positive plea for a preaching emphasis on God's lordship over all of life. As such, it agrees with much of the emphasis of the writers of *Out of Concern for the Church* (reviewed in the March 1971 *Guardian*) without, we believe, falling into some of the faults of those authors, as noted in the review.

The view from the pulpit

On a Sunday morning, the scene that meets the pastor's eye is usually a pleasant one. Row on row of scrubbed, brushed, scented, pressed, and polished families—the flock gathers to be fed from God's Word, their confessed standard for doctrine and life. Yet the mind of the minister sees beyond the homogeneous facade to the variety of attitudes, values, life situations and temperaments that exist among his people.

There is the contractor, faithful supporter and elder of the church. His wife's clothes reveal his income. But tomorrow, he will meet the pay-off man of the "syndicate" in order to keep on operating. He's just landed a fat contract for a shopping center through his right "connections." His conscience pinches, but that's the way things are and it lets him give generously to his church.

Three rows back is the truck driver. His boss defied the "syndicate," so Joe rides now with nervous eyes and a gun on the front seat. His wife lives in constant fear.

Then there's the steelmill worker. It's dog-eat-dog in the shop, where a hard-learned skill and union strength are all the security he has. The union takes \$25 a month, no choice; but he doesn't protest, because it would only bring a threat in response. And, he would do anything to keep the next man from learning his skill. He knows this doesn't square with the sermons on love that he's heard. Still, he can love his neighbor in the next pew—but on the job?

In the back sits the young meatcutter with his wife and baby. He must drive thirty miles across town to work because that's where the company placed him. He doesn't protest either; the company is under pressure to hire more blacks and jobs are hard to find. So he lives with the cursing, the cheap jokes, the hatred of blacks, and even joins in, helping to load packages with broken seals for the ghetto markets. That's the world he lives in.

Across the aisle sits the hippie-styled student, sullenly present only because his parents want him there. He once showed a lot of promise for the church. But he couldn't stomach the Viet Nam war and finally got his conscientious-objector rating. As a medic, he watched men die. Now he smokes pot, seeking euphoria—but with less effect than his parents get from alcohol. He's turned off to the church because it didn't understand a kid who refused to fight for the flag. He still confesses Christ, but *not* the mores of his former community. He uses his medical skills in a free clinic for a poor neighborhood.

Over on the left sits the corporation vice president. Tomorrow he meets with his peers from other firms to determine their market prices. Monopolistic? Of course; but such cooperation is necessary if companies are to meet union demands. That's the system, and vigorous competition would destroy them all. And he has to arrange "entertainment" for the firm's executives at the convention. But he brushes this off, too; he just can't be the guardian of company morals.

In the choir sits the fourth grade teacher from the Christian school. Dedicated to her task, she works hard for her children and worries quite a bit. Somehow, what she does is not much different from what her friend does in the public school. She can't quite understand the reality of God in all of knowledge, much less communicate it to her students. So, she emphasizes patriotism and loyalty to the church.

There in the center is Mrs. Brown, typical of many housewives in the pews. Being a mother just isn't what the magazines picture. Her husband has become immersed in his career, and the thrill of marriage has soured. So she focuses on her children, but they don't respond the way she wants. She disciplines strictly; but when that seems not to work, she gives in to their demands. Still, they act better than the neighbor's kids.

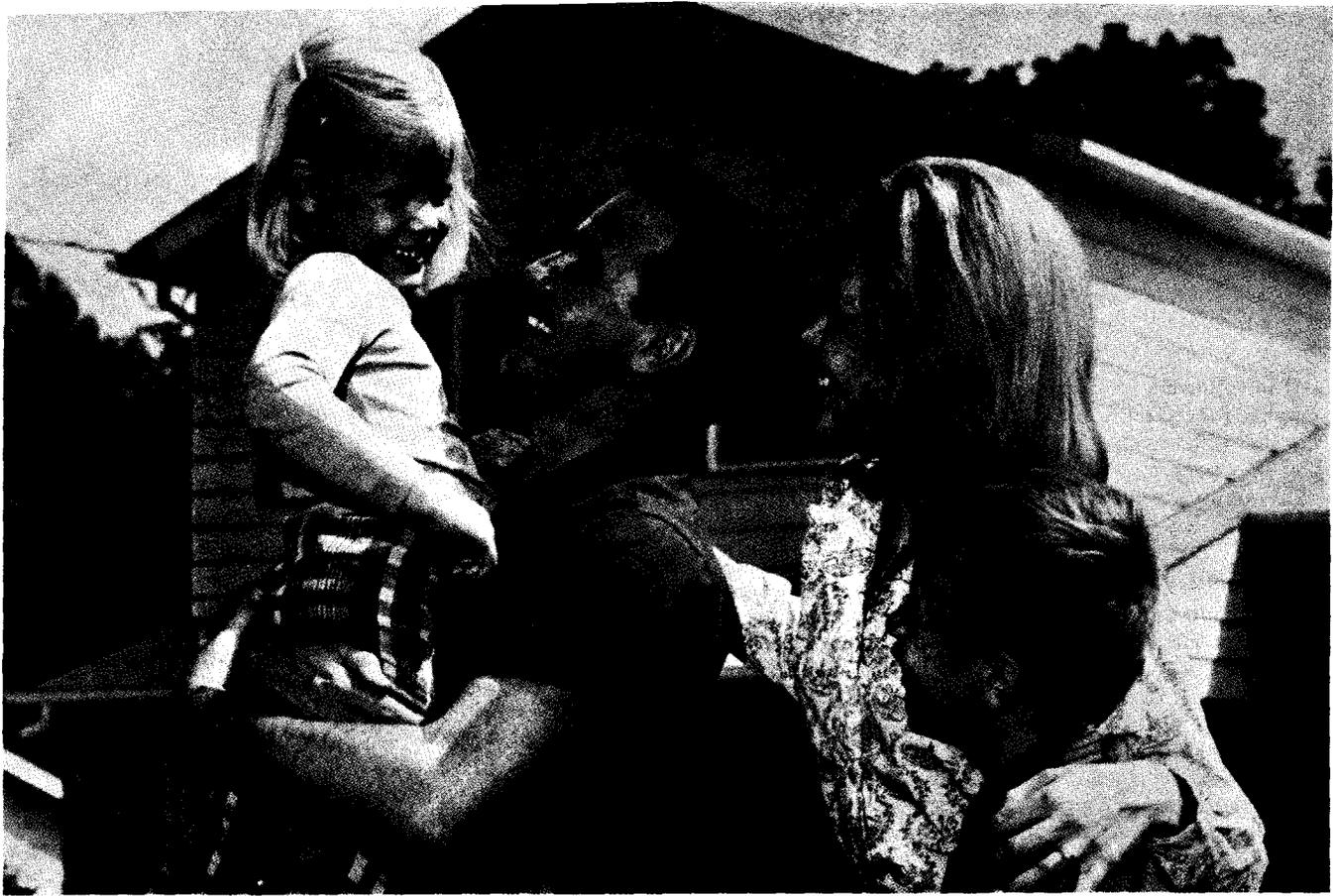
Right up front sits the deacon, Sunday school teacher, head of the evangelism committee. For him, his job at the post office is indifferent except as it allows him to support his family. What really counts is the opportunity to witness (not on the job, of course), to lead people to Christ and eternal blessings. He worries if he doesn't hear the gospel invitation from the pulpit often enough. Life revolves around the church; for the rest, he just endures this vale of tears.

The response of the pulpit

Perhaps I've overdrawn the picture. Still, it is taken from personal contacts or reliable information from others. The first impression from this scene might be the bewildering variety of problems and needs to be met, and the difficulty for any pastor to meet them all.

There is, though, another rather obvious similarity present among all these people, one that we usually overlook. All of them have been deeply touched and shaped by American values and life-styles. We must realize that today's society is not some part-Christian or neutral arena where we operate to earn a living; but American society is based on a faith that competes with biblical Christianity. As a result we live schizophrenic lives, inconsistent Christian lives. What really eats at us in the pew is our divided loyalty.

What shall the pulpit do? Some offer consolation to the flock, hand out spiritual band-aids and aspirin, denounce
(Continued on Page 116.)



The Role of a Christian Father

KENNETH G. SMITH

The Rev. Kenneth Smith is a father, a pastor (presently serving in Northern Ireland), and former Director of Christian Education for the Reformed Presbyterian Church, N. A. (the "Covenanters"). We hope you read his article and show it to others.

When George McManus invented the unforgettable Maggie and Jiggs in "Bringing Up Father," he may have been saying much more than was commonly understood. The obvious picture of a domineering shrew outwitting and outmaneuvering a rather indulgent spouse needs little comment. The title of the comic strip said it all.

What may have been in McManus' mind as a sub-theme would subtly show itself in Jigg's desire to escape from it all down at Dinty Moore's. What has happened since McManus was popular is not new in kind, just in degree. Jiggs and Maggie hung in there. The modern Jiggs takes his escape through divorce—that is, if he has what it takes.

Rather than climbing on the bandwagon to dismember Maggie, a prototype of today's "Lib," I would like to propose that there lurks in every man the desire for fulfillment. And every man likes to have his "Dinty Moore's" where he can sound off and know the boys will listen. The problem comes when a man can't find such a place.

In the Christian community, of course, we say he has the church. But it is my opinion that for years men have had basic needs which have been left unfulfilled, while the church has given itself to children, youth and women. The men? Too often they are not around. Or if they are, they become submerged under titles, responsibilities, and activity, leaving a personality longing in vain for someone to notice and listen to him.

A father is a person

So when one begins to think of a "father" in the Christian home, instead of automatically thinking of his duties, I propose we must first think of a person, a someone. Who, after all, is he? And what makes up his personality? He has individuality; God made him that way. Yet he is not independent. His characteristics often reveal unconsciously the same characteristics of his own father and mother. But he is someone nevertheless.

A man who plays the role of a father in a Christian home really needs this self-concept first of all. I am not considering him psychologically and apart from the Christian context. Our generation has tended to depersonalize mankind, men and women alike, resulting in many men in our churches who do not believe a discussion of their own personality and aspirations, not to mention their

problems, is worthy of anyone else's time. Except at their "Dinty Moore's," wherever that may be.

But I am talking about normal life. When we say to today's world that man's (and this includes men!) chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever, we must not assume that he necessarily understands and feels his own personal worth. How a man gets that self-image is another subject. I simply point up that, being a father in the biblical sense is being someone. And enjoying it!

A father is a person who "relates"

This leads then to the matter of being able to "relate" in terms of personality. Every man lives in terms of three relationships. This phenomenon shows itself in both the Old and New Testaments where man's responsibility to love God, and his neighbor as himself, becomes explicit. Here again we confront a culture which no longer recognizes, even subconsciously, that a personal God exists and cares about the activities of his creatures.

So when we present the Christian gospel, we must delve deeply into the biblical doctrine of the nature of man and his essential characteristics as a *creature*, not just the highest form of a biological evolution. It may seem strange to be discussing this in an article about fatherhood, but it is not really strange. Our culture has forsaken so much! And it shows in the lives of many men who have difficulty relating at all, not to mention relating in love.

A father is a "child"

The gospel of Christ brings man to a place where the Bible calls him a "child" of God, and he prays, "Our Father . . ." The blessing of being able to relate to God as one's heavenly Father makes a profound effect in a man's life. He knows God cares about him. He knows he belongs to God. He knows God's forgiveness in Christ is real. He can fail, yet find restoration. How beautiful to know God "holds him on his lap," a position every Christian covets!

Talking this way does not come easily for some men, for they have never known this kind of relationship on a human level. And it then becomes difficult to separate these three dimensions of God, self and others. They intertwine. We can say the relationship to God is first, and that's true. But sometimes this comes about essentially through someone, and we can no doubt say it usually comes this way.

As the covenant view would suggest, this normally comes through or from the parents. It is my purpose here to establish that a father in the biblical sense relates to God, to himself, and to others on the basis of love. Without this he may sire an offspring; but he certainly has not been a father. He may bring home the bacon; but if he has no rapport with his wife, he can hardly be called a good husband.

As a person, he relates to the Person of God as his heavenly Father. Such a man will of necessity relate to others as a person.

A father is masculine

May I suggest that the role of the father also brings up the whole matter of masculinity. A father is a man, sexually speaking, and he must act like one. Beyond that,

he must feel like a man!

Unisex notwithstanding, the Bible teaches that God made man generically in two sexes. Being a man has much in common with womanhood; but it also has its unique characteristics.

One can get lost at this point in a morass of psychological conjecture. I would like to stick to the simple, yet profound, truths of Scripture. The fact he is a man is significant, since God made him that way. His sexual identity builds on that truth. As a man he has a mandate to have dominion in the created world, and his wife shares in that responsibility as his helper.

This therefore places the man in the lead role, not because of his psychological makeup, but because of God's creation and appointment. In the father role, he assumes the lead as the head of the household—not as a domineering monarch—but as a man of God, loving in his relationships, and as a person seeing himself in Christ as important. Such a man sees his wife and children as important too; but he doesn't confuse the roles.

I am becoming more and more impressed with the unconscious influence a man bears on his children when he begins to appreciate the role of "ruler" in the universe. How a man goes to work—and why—speaks volumes to his children. When he sees his calling as important to God and society, and has beside him an enthusiastic helper, the children gain a powerful sense of why they are here. And all of this stems from the father's being a man and enjoying the role God gave him.

A father is a parent

The other aspect of the masculine image deals with the matter of reproduction, and of assuming the proper responsibility for those children God may give. Having the potential to bring forth fruit makes a man important. But when he recognizes the significance of his own personality in Christ, his wife becomes more than his source of amusement; she is someone who has become one with him. And together they share the joy and stewardship of parenthood. A father who can accept and love his children as persons, or as Charles Schultz once called them, "Li'l People," has mastered the basic idea. He can be *someone* to them, and they are *someones* to him. And they begin to recognize what a relationship to God can be like!

I have not attempted to write on some of the duties involved in being a father, for these often flow naturally from a person who has found himself as God meant him to be. The Bible speaks of a man's obligations to instruct, chasten, play, and work with his children; and God does not condone the father's giving his children over to their mother as "her job." But it proves fruitless to discuss these duties until a man has learned the importance of conducting himself as a person. When that happens, his fatherhood begins to take on life and color, and the children notice. And in time they begin to recognize how Christ gives that sense of meaning to personality, and they are drawn to the Lord.

Every father therefore conveys an image of a personal God who cares, or of an impersonal God who couldn't care less. What image do you convey to your family?

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Article on Scripture "misleading, inaccurate"

Dear Mr. Mitchell:

Your article in the May 1971 issue of the *Guardian* concerns the report on "The Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority" prepared by a study committee of the Christian Reformed Church. As a member of that committee I was pleased to see that your ecumenical concern led you to examine that report. However, I regret to say that I believe your editorial is both misleading and in part inaccurate, and calls for a response.

Your title—"A new approach to biblical authority/or, Did that serpent really speak?"—is, I believe, misleading. You suggest yourself that this title is "perhaps" "a journalistic trick to get . . . undivided attention." You do add, rather reluctantly, that the report does "insist that the Bible is 'unconditionally authoritative for faith and life,' including all aspects of human life."

Near the end of your article, which is critical of the report for the most part, you include a complimentary word. You write: "The framers of this report want to avoid any loss of the historical reality of the redemptive events recorded in Scripture. Some of the best portions of the report deal with this particular area of concern" (p. 72). It might have been helpful if you had expanded upon the main emphases of the report so your readers might have had a more accurate impression of the report in general. Permit me to single out a few of the main emphases of this report, which is not really "a new approach to biblical authority" as your title suggests.

Positive emphases

The report unequivocally stresses the complete and pervasive authority of the Bible for all of life. It places a much needed stress on the fact that the content and purpose of Scripture is to set forth the saving revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The report rejects any view that considers some parts of the Bible to be authoritative and other parts not authoritative, or less authoritative. The report also warns against the danger of making the believer's confession of Scripture's authority depen-

dent in any way on scientific or scholarly research. And throughout, the report emphasizes the historicity of the biblical events. A sympathetic reading of the report ought to lead one to see that this report opposes the new theology evident in writings of many recent Dutch theologians.

About the serpent

Your article might leave the impression with anyone who has not read the report itself that the report specifically deals with the serpent [in Eden] and leaves this an open question. As a matter of fact the report does not at any point deny the existence of a real garden with trees and a speaking serpent. The mandate to the committee was to consider methods of interpreting Scripture which have appeared in recent Reformed writings, and it is primarily with certain principles of interpretation that the report was concerned.

When the report accepts as one legitimate approach to Genesis 1-11 the principle that the revelation contained in these chapters "is given in words, concepts, and symbols known and used by the recipient of that revelation" (p. 294, *Agenda for 1971 CRC Synod*), the acceptance of such a principle does not constitute blanket endorsement in advance of any interpretation merely because it claims the support of that principle. Sound exegesis, as suggested at the conclusion of your article, will have to be followed in the correct interpretation of any passage of Scripture. And as a member of this study committee, I do believe that when Satan tempted Adam and Eve, he made use of the speaking serpent. The report nowhere states that "how you interpret this serpent in Eden is an 'open question,'" as you write (p. 63). Your comments on this matter are misleading and inaccurate.

Views of authority

In the section of your article entitled "two views of authority," you imply that the framers of this report hold the second of these and reject the former, more traditional view. As a matter of fact, both views are held within the

committee, and I personally hold to the first of these two views—the one you designate as "the correct view." I am personally convinced that this first view is the view that best expresses the nature and character of Scripture's authority; but I find it possible to tolerate the other view because I have discovered that, in spite of different formulations, both views come to the same conclusions, even though they reach these conclusions along slightly different avenues. Unfortunately, I cannot illustrate that within the limits of this letter.

The second section of your article is called "two qualifiers of authority." The committee did not use the term "qualifier" in the sense of delimiting or restricting authority, but in the sense of defining or describing the authority of Scripture. No member of the committee would contend that the Seventh Commandment (which you use as an illustration) is not universally binding on all men. What the committee means is that all parts of Scripture must be understood within the context of Scripture itself, or to use your words, "God who proclaimed that portion . . . meant it to be heard and obeyed in its total context" (p. 63, italics added). Certainly "the adulterer is guilty, on the authority of God who issued this commandment, whether that sinner ever comes to hear about Christ or not," as you write (p. 63). But the committee is contending that when he does not know Christ, and thus does not know God, he does not hear this commandment or any word of Scripture as the authoritative Word of God—although he is responsible just the same.

The other "qualifier" of authority to which you refer involves what is sometimes called the "human element" in Scripture, and includes the quotation from H. Ridderbos (as well as one from J. I. Packer). Personally, I preferred to omit the Ridderbos quotation because of its ambiguity. However, you have given it a sense which is contrary to the words of the quotation and the overall intention of the committee. You are entirely correct when you write (with italics) that "*it is erroneous to suggest that inspiration failed to protect God's written Word from whatever faulty views its human writers may have held!*" (p. 72). Indeed, it was by means of inspiration that

The Presbyterian Guardian

EDITOR

JOHN J. MITCHELL

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God enabled the writers of Scripture to produce his infallible Word. But the committee neither says nor suggests what you have put into those italicized words. And it is misleading on your part to generalize the phrase "views of the structure and working of the universe" to "whatever faulty views its human writers may have held." When you write (p. 63) that "of course we need not speak this way" of liver and kidneys as the seat of emotion or passion, you really indicate basic agreement with what the committee was saying in this connection, even though you suggest saying it in a different way. I fully agree that the biblical writers, even as we still today, often use the language of common, everyday experience when they speak of sunrise, the four corners of the earth, etc. But in your italicized statement you appear to make the committee say what in fact it does not say!

Criterion of interpretation

Finally, there is the section of your article entitled "a new criterion for interpretation" in which you speak of what you consider the worst part of the committee's report. Frankly, I am amazed at what you do with the committee's reference to the binding character of the Reformed creeds for a Reformed church. You interpret the report to mean that "any interpretation is to be allowed in the church so long as it does not question the historicity of basic redemptive events or

does not happen to contradict the creeds" (p. 72, italics yours). And that leads you to add that "therefore, the question of the talking serpent is an open one" and that this position elevates "a man-made set of documents to a position of infallibility" (p. 72).

This is a most unfortunate misreading of the committee's report. In this section of the report the committee is simply affirming the binding authority of the creed for the church. I had expected you to applaud this point, especially since I found you appealing to the Westminster Confession (I, 4) early in your article in a very definitive way. And I agree with that appeal and with the statement of the Westminster Confession.

You could have avoided this misinterpretation of the report and this false charge if you had taken note of the statement in the immediate context of the report. There it is stated that "where the creeds allow for a certain freedom of interpretation, there we must exercise Christian toleration. *In all things, however, we are bound by the Word of God*" (*Agenda*, p. 299, italics added). I have italicized those words and I wish they had been italicized in the report so that you would not have missed them. The report does not elevate the creed above Scripture. It is simply appealing to what is considered settled and binding in a confessional church, unless it is proven contrary to Scripture.

Mr. Editor, there are other details in your article which I would like to comment on, but this letter is already long. May I recommend that your readers obtain a copy of the report and read it in its entirety carefully for themselves. It can be obtained in booklet form from the Christian Reformed Publishing House, 2850 Kalamazoo Avenue S. E., Grand Rapids, MI 49508. Good ecumenical relations demand a thorough and accurate understanding of one another.

FRED H. KLOOSTER
Grand Rapids, Michigan

The editor's response

Dr. Klooster, one of the members of the Christian Reformed Church's committee on "The Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority," feels that

my analysis of the committee's report to Synod is unfair (as given in the May issue of the *Guardian*). True, I did not report on many good features of that report simply because such good aspects were not news. Over the years we have come to expect much good from the Christian



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Reformed Church; what made this report newsworthy was the strangeness of some of its conclusions.

It is also true that I may have misread the report at places and so made "the committee say what in fact it did not say." I am glad the committee did not mean to say some of what I read into its words. Still, when it says that "inspiration does not correct [certain] views . . .," I find it hard to escape the conclusion that "faulty views" are involved, and from the context that such "faulty views" may have ended up in Scripture. I only wish Dr. Klooster might have suggested a more acceptable interpretation of this "ambiguous" sentence.

My use of the speaking serpent of Genesis 3 is also said to be "misleading and inaccurate." I grant that the report does not *state* that the serpent's historicity is an "open question"—it does not even mention the serpent. My reference, however, was intended to show one possible result of applying the committee's own conclusions to a particular detail from the Scripture record. I should have made it clear this was what I was doing.

But then, neither was the question of the serpent derived simply from my own imagination as a "journalistic trick." On the contrary, this very question of the historicity of the serpent has been debated in the Netherlands and even discussed in Synod. It is one element in the ferment that led up to the erection of this study committee by the Christian Reformed Church. Moreover, the committee itself focuses particular attention on Genesis 3.

Approaches to Genesis

What is the committee's conclusion about Genesis 3? The report notes that various approaches are followed in interpreting the early chapters of Genesis. One approach would view the references to Adam and Eve, the trees and the serpent, as "teaching models" to instruct us as to the basic significance of sin. The committee rejects the teaching-model approach, not apparently because the *approach* is necessarily wrong, but because the *evidence* for it and the results from it are unsatisfactory in this particular instance. (*Agenda*, p. 292).

The report then discusses two other

"approaches" to Genesis 1-11. The committee precludes this discussion by saying that "an affirmation of basic historicity does not necessarily commit one to the view that the narrative is a literal description of an event" (p. 294), a statement that is equally applicable to the Gospel narratives and the events recorded there. This statement in itself would leave the serpent's historicity an "open question."

The first approach would grant "the essential historicity of these chapters," but would argue "that they should not be interpreted as a literal description of events" (p. 294). The second would recognize "the thematic character of these chapters" and would come "much closer to interpreting these chapters as literal descriptions of events" (p. 295). Either "approach" could leave the serpent's status an "open question."

But what does the committee want? The committee itself sees no reason to judge for or against either approach (and it suggests no other approach). It says: "It is not our purpose to judge the correctness of either. Our confessional statements, as well as our basic confession concerning the authority or reliability of Scripture, do not force us to choose for one or the other. Both positions preserve the intent of the confessional statements, both function on the basis of principles considered acceptable [to whom?] in the interpretation of Scripture. . . . Where theological and exegetical differences of opinion exist, they must be tolerated so long as they do not conflict with that confession" (pp. 295f.). Surely, leaving any "difference of opinion" concerning the serpent's historicity in the realm of tolerated views is to leave it an "open question."

The more basic concern

More important is the question of what all this means. What does it mean to affirm "essential" or "basic historicity" while denying the literalness of the only description of the events we have? What does it mean to find the principles of such an approach "acceptable"?

Does the committee not realize where this approach comes from, what principles really do underlie it? Has the committee not seen how a con-

sistent application of this "historical-critical" approach has led to logically sound conclusions that the committee is most unwilling to accept? Kuitert, one of the most debated theologians in the Netherlands, employs just such a method and ends up denying the literal historicity of Adam and Eve. It is not that Kuitert misuses a valid method; he employs the method quite consistently—up to the point where he himself wants to go. The committee now finds it "acceptable" to employ the same method—but wants us to stop short of Kuitert's conclusions.

Could it be that the method is *not* based on such "acceptable principles" as the Christian view of history as the unfolding of God's eternal purposes within the created order, or the Christian view of Scripture as the infallible recording of God's Word, with all the authority of God the Author, spoken in human language through holy men "borne along" by God's Holy Spirit? Kuitert did not learn the method from such Reformed teachers as Kuyper or Bavinck, Warfield or Machen. This "new hermeneutic" comes from the thinking of such neo-orthodox theologians as Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling.

On what principles is this "historical-critical" method based? It is not simply out of a concern for the "human element" in Scripture. It is rather based on an unbelieving philosophy that will not admit the idea of a personal, sovereign, independent-of-creation God who has existed from all eternity, who made man's mouth and man's ear so that the Creator is fully able to utilize both to communicate meaningfully and inerrantly whatever he desires to his creature man; a God who is separate from and not at all dependent on creation, yet is fully able to insert himself into space-and-time history so as to leave a mark there that has real significance for the weal or woe of mankind.

But all human thinking, except that which is solidly grounded in the Scripture, insists on making man himself the ultimate reference point for all reality, and insists on repeating the sin of Adam who wanted to be as God. Modern thought sees man as a part and product of the natural world ruled by that world's arbitrary and impersonal "laws," yet somehow

possessed of a sense of responsibility, of freedom to choose, to act, to believe.

The problem for all such apostate thought, with its view of blindly determined nature subject to no outside control, is to maintain an area in which genuine human freedom is possible. Thus, since the time of Immanuel Kant, all unbelieving philosophy has postulated two realms of "history" or arenas of human activity, the phenomenal realm where we live and die in accord with the blind "laws" of biology, and the noumenal realm of faith, of responsibility, of freedom.

God, as the ideal of good and focal point for man's freedom, can only be found in that noumenal realm, in that "history" known as *Geschichte* that is over and above, separate from the nitty-gritty of physical existence. What happens in the physical or phenomenal realm is said to be *Historie*, and happens in accord with such deterministic "laws" as that of cause-and-effect. God, of course, cannot be a "cause" of anything in the realm of *Historie*, or else he too would be caught in the crunch of "natural laws." And man, if he is to enjoy genuine, "authentic" freedom, must project himself into *Geschichte* where God dwells and acts.

Of course, in the final analysis *Geschichte*; the whole dimension of religion, faith, grace, and salvation, and even the very concept of "God," is only a projection of the fertile mind of man—that flesh-and-blood, biologically determined computer-product of the impersonal physical world. "Freedom" for man is to be "in God"; but "God" finally exists only as a figment of man's imagination.

The need to ask questions

So, when we hear phrases like "essential" or "basic historicity," in a context where methods of biblical interpretation derived from existentialist philosophy are said to be based on "acceptable principles," then we must ask what sort of "history" is really meant? The committee of the Christian Reformed Church does not at all want to conclude that Adam's sin took place somewhere off in the realm of *Geschichte*, or to believe that Jesus' resurrection was the projection of the believing minds of his disciples. But the "historical-critical" methods found "acceptable" by this committee will not

lead the interpreter of Scripture to understand that Jesus rose from the dead in an event that took place on this earth once-upon-a-time, in such a way that the physical eyeballs of certain men, working according to God-ordained laws of optics, actually beheld a living, breathing, eating, touchable body of the Lord of Glory! Let's be blunt about it; any hermeneutical method that does not lead consistently forward to such a conclusion is not based on acceptable principles. And that is why we must ask questions.

The committee did not ask such questions. The committee, though it admits the existence of a view of Scripture's authority that understands Scripture as possessed of the very authority of God the Author, not only as to the "events" recorded but to the words used to record them, does *not* ask the churches to maintain *this* view, so necessary in the face of the neo-orthodox denial of the very possibility of a God who might act and communicate truth infallibly through human words and into this space-time world.

The committee does not warn against the "historical-critical" method of biblical interpretation, though its members should be aware of the source of this "new hermeneutic." Rather, it finds such a method permissible and judges that it is based on "acceptable principles."

Still, the committee does not want to accept all the results that may come from a consistent application of the "historical-critical" method to the understanding of Scripture. It is obviously aware that some of the results go too far. So, the committee is concerned to call a halt at some point. But where should this be?

The committee recommends that Synod call on the churches "to maintain the clear witness of the creeds to the authority of Scripture as the saving revelation of God in Jesus Christ, a revelation rooted in the historical reality of redemptive events as recorded in Scripture, yet honoring such freedom of exegesis or diversity of insight as does not conflict with our forms of unity [i.e., creeds]" (p. 298).

Dr. Klooster is "amazed" that I interpreted this sentence to mean that "anything goes" so long as it does not contradict the church's confessional standards. He points out that the report insists that, even in matters of interpre-

tation, "we are bound by the Word of God." But if that Word is to be interpreted with the "freedom of exegesis" spelled out above, then what other final criterion is left but the creeds of the church?

I sincerely regret that I have been unable to read the report otherwise than as it was interpreted in the earlier article. I only wish it were different. And for those readers who may well be perplexed at all this, please follow Dr. Klooster's advice and secure a copy of the report for yourselves and study it most carefully.

It is true that the doctrine of Scripture, of its authority, and of the right principles of its interpretation, are the crucial areas of concern for the Christian faith today. If we allow any view, any hermeneutical approach, to cast doubt on the reality of the space-and-time historicity of the facts of Scripture, or even of the God-given character and authority of the records, then we shall be, as Paul says, "of all men most miserable."

—J. J. M.

New address

The Rev. W. Ralph English, Box 186, Pusan, Korea.

43rd year for Westminster

Philadelphia, Pa.—On September 8, opening exercises were held for the start of another year for Westminster Theological Seminary. The opening address was given by the Rev. Gerald I. Williamson, pastor of the Reformed Presbyterian Church ("Covenanter") in Wichita, Kansas. Mr. Williamson's address, "Fire in My Bones," was a moving challenge to entering seminarians to discern whether they possessed the burning urgency to proclaim God's Word that comes from the Holy Spirit and to nurture that "fire in their bones" throughout their seminary training.

More than sixty new students are enrolled, with over a hundred others returning. Living accommodations, particularly for married students, are an increasing problem. But such a problem is evidence of the continuing interest among young men from all over the world to receive that training for the ministry which Westminster faithfully continues to provide.

Can there be a Christian group therapy?

GERALD H. O'DONNELL

Much of the controversy generated by the dialog between Jay Adams ("Group Therapy—or Slander?" in the February 1971 *Guardian*) and Donald Semisch ("A Reply to Professor Adams," in the April 1971 issue) seems to stem from confusion over what group therapy actually involves.

This is seen especially in Mr. Semisch's comment: "Can we honestly find that Dr. Adams gave us a fair view of the brothers in Christ who sincerely believe there is a form of encounter group that leads people to a deeper personal relationship with Christ and their fellow Christians? . . . It is ironic that Dr. Adams has slandered (using the term as it is defined legally) those who use groups in churches or among seminarians, with prayer believing they advance the cause of Christ."

These remarks raise a basic issue. Is the form of group encounter being used today in Christian churches, colleges, and seminaries a truly "Christian group therapy" as Mr. Semisch suggests? Or is it actually a non-Christian form of therapy being practiced by Christian people as Dr. Adams claims? The answer requires us to examine the techniques and presuppositions of contemporary group therapy.

Group therapy defined

As used in contemporary psychotherapy and counseling, the term "group therapy" has very specific implications. A mere glance at the many volumes on group therapy available today (such as O. Hobart Mowrer's *The New Group Therapy*, John W. Drakeford's *Integrity Therapy*, or Frederick Perl's *Gestalt Therapy*) makes it obvious that when contemporary psychologists use the term "group therapy," they are speaking of a particular type of group encounter.

Although psychotherapists differ somewhat in the type of therapeutic encounter they advocate, it is possible to list several general characteristics of contemporary group therapy:

1. Usually a "group" implies a small group, ideally of five to fifteen persons.
2. The members of the group are generally quite homogeneous. Typically, group participants are selected on the basis of some common problem, such as alcoholism, drug addiction, neurotic anxiety, psychosomatic disorders or schizophrenia.
3. One or more individuals function as group leaders. These may be professional counselors, or persons who have "come through" the problem common to the rest of the group.
4. During the first group session, the leader will seek to develop a deep emotional relationship with a dynamic give-and-take between all participants.
5. In subsequent sessions, the leader will encourage uninhibited expression of pent-up emotions and conflicts. Nothing is to be held back, but a person is expected to reveal completely his "true inner self" to himself and the group.

Group therapy at a seminary

What actually goes on in a group therapy session can best be shown by a specific illustration. In 1966, Dr. Ward A.

Knights, Jr. conducted a workshop in "clinical pastoral education" with ministers and seminary students. Sharing the role of leader with Dr. Knights were two assistants: Cloyd, a parish minister; and Doug, a chaplain in a mental hospital.

In one session, the group turns its attention to John, a seminary student, and claims that his silence is actually an offensive display of aggression toward the rest of the group. In an attempt to provoke him to express his aggression freely, the group begins a verbal assault on John. After some time Dr. Knights furthers this provocation by turning his chair so that his back is toward John. The dialog then proceeds:
DON: If you don't want [Dr. Knights] to have his back toward you, why don't you ask him to turn and face the table or speak to you? (Pause.) Do you feel you insult him, or would it be impossible for you to ask something like that of somebody else!

JOHN: It wouldn't be impossible.

CLOYD: John, I'm feeling very bad about you.

JOHN: Well, why?

CLOYD: The fact that you are just kind of sitting there.

Either you don't mind being s--- on, or else you got this deep anxiety you're not ready to admit to. And it's about yourself, you know, about your strength. Because he just turned around and you might say slapped you in your face. He said to hell with you! This is how it interprets to me. And yet this doesn't bother you, you say. I wish you'd clobber him one.

JOHN: I don't know. It isn't my reaction to do it.

CLOYD: Don't you have any feeling — any desire, really?

JOHN: No . . .

DR. KNIGHTS: John is s---!

CLOYD: John, at least you can move your chair.

JOHN: But I have no reason to.

DR. KNIGHTS: John is a s---head sponge! (Pause.)

JACK: You don't want Ward to turn around, do you? It's more comfortable having him so that he won't look at you and you don't have to look at him.

JOHN: Well, I don't know.

JACK: Would you feel more comfortable if we all turned our backs on you?

JOHN: I would feel very uncomfortable then. (Pause. Meanwhile, several members of the group turn their chairs around so their backs are toward John.)

JACK: Are you conscious of yourself? Aware of yourself? Do you know who you are?

JOHN: I think I do.

JACK: Who are you?

JOHN: That's a question I don't know how to answer to.

JACK: Why don't you?

JOHN: I don't know, because I would have to tell . . .

JACK: Have to tell what?

JOHN: (Inaudible.) . . . I would have to tell what I am totally.

JACK: What are you totally?

JOHN: And I guess that I'm not willing to do that.

JACK: Why not? (Pause.) You afraid?

JOHN: No, I just don't think it's anybody's business to know some things.

JACK: So you're afraid.

JOHN: Of some things, yes.

CLOYD: Are you afraid to talk about them in terms of facing yourself, or are you afraid to talk about them to the group?

JOHN: Well, it's that I'm not interested in telling the group. (Comments made by a few followed by laughter.)

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: He's afraid.*

The verbal assaults in this group session were not limited to John or even to those present in the group. Complete openness about one's past experiences will necessarily involve discussion of relationships with other people. Somewhat later in the therapy session Dr. Knights urges John to try to get at some of the reasons why he is afraid to express his aggressive feelings freely. John responds to this probe by attributing his present inability to get along with others to an unsatisfactory relationship with his father. John speaks as if his parents were completely responsible for his problem and as if he were a helpless product of a poor home environment.

This group session led by Dr. Knights is representative of more moderate forms of encounter that have been introduced into Christian churches, colleges, and seminaries. It is not necessary to emphasize the more extreme forms used, as at Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California, where "open confrontation" involves complete disrobing and uninhibited exploration of the bodies of group participants. There is enough danger in the milder forms of group encounter.

Group therapy — slander or slandered?

Dr. Adams describes the free expression of feelings in group therapy as "slander." But Mr. Semisch, arguing that Dr. Adams misused the term, insists that "slander is well defined legally as the injuring of a person's character or reputation by *false* statements." He maintains that group therapy does not necessarily foster slander thus defined.

This disagreement ought easily to be resolved by an examination of group encounters. Can there be any doubt that the group comments about John contain false and injurious statements? Or, can there be any doubt that John's blaming of his father for his own problems is a false and injurious statement?

Most significant, however, is the fact that slander is no mere side effect of group therapy. It is built into the very techniques used. In normal conversation, one is expected to justify any attacks made on others. But in group therapy, a person is encouraged to speak freely whatever he thinks or feels. Rarely, if ever, would someone challenge him to prove the truthfulness of his remarks. If John honestly feels that his father has caused his difficulty in relating to people, then he is expected to express that feeling openly. No one in the group will respond by asking, "Can you back that

*Quoted from a tape recording entitled "Self-Actualizing Group" by Dr. Ward A. Knights, Jr. The tape is distributed by the American Academy of Psychotherapists as a representative example of group therapy for use in teaching and research. Used with permission of the AAP.

up, John?" or "Aren't you being a little unfair to your father?" As appropriate as such challenges might be in normal conversation, they are grossly out of place in group therapy. Because it lacks this restraining influence, group therapy does indeed encourage slander.

But cannot Christians develop a form of group therapy that discourages slander? Cannot we simply eliminate the profane and abusive language that characterizes many current group encounters? Would not such revision result in a "Christian group therapy"?

Presuppositions of group therapy

All these questions ought to be answered negatively, because group therapy involves more than techniques of group encounter. Underlying the techniques are the following presuppositions about man and his problems:

1. All of a person's desires and feelings are part of his character as a human being and are therefore good. He should welcome and accept all aspects of his personality and expect others to welcome and accept him *as he is*.
2. A person's psychological growth will be furthered by a free and uninhibited expression of all aspects of his character. One should not feel bound by moral and religious standards as long as he is honest about his failure to conform to them and is willing to face the consequences of his own behavior.
3. The deepest and most desirable form of interpersonal communion exists when one person shares his innermost feelings freely with another. There should be willingness to tell a person frankly what you think of him in addition to sharing with him all other feelings and attitudes.

These presuppositions are clearly contrary to a biblical view of man and of interpersonal relations. Although man still retains much of the beauty and nobility that were his as being made in God's image, yet his character is corrupted by intentions, thoughts and feelings that are the expression of a heart the Scripture describes as "deceitful above all things and desperately corrupt" (Jeremiah 17:9). Jesus likewise described men as "whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness" (Matthew 23:27).

Just as it is best to leave a coffin sealed, so the hate and lust of our hearts is best left sealed inside unless these feelings can be expressed in a context of confession and repentance toward God. Uninhibited discussion of sinful feelings and conduct, apart from such a context, easily becomes a form of boasting. Giving free vent to aggressive impulses is not a biblical solution to John's problems. The fact that it was an ordained minister who said, "I wish you'd clobber him one," does not make that advice Christian counsel. Of course, John ought to face up honestly to the existence of any unjustified aggressive feelings he might have. But those feelings ought only to be expressed in a context of confession to God and to the individuals concerned.

Biblical principles for "encounters"

Furthermore, according to Scripture the deepest form of interpersonal communion is *not* established by a free sharing of feelings. It is established through a demonstration of truly Christian love one for another.

Paul describes love as "patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does

(Continued on Page 119.)

A layman calls to the pulpit

(Continued from Page 107.)

the evil and corruption of life "out there." Meanwhile, they structure the lives of their people within the organized church to keep them from the world's evils. We are "in the world" to be sure, but not very happy about it; we wish we could really get out.

Or, we set up evangelism programs (which we still feel are more in the Arminian or Anabaptist than the Reformed tradition) in order to reach into that evil world and pull others up to the high ground we enjoy in the church. Meanwhile, we shy away from such issues as war, race or poverty, even though these are the great issues facing our nation. It's much easier to denounce crime, juvenile delinquency, illicit sex, alcohol and drugs. But underneath it all is an other-worldly approach; the sermons don't really speak to the lives we live in this present world.

In contrast, the Reformed tradition has always taught that *all* of life is under Christ's lordship, that each man as made in God's image must do *all* things in reference to the Creator. "What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul?" (Deuteronomy 10:12). Or, as Paul put it, "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Colossians 3:17).

Unfortunately for many Christians and for many Reformed believers as well, that vision of the all-embracing kingship of God has been lost. Many Reformed Christians really do not believe what both their tradition and the Scriptures have told them. We act as though life were not religious in its totality, as though there were a neutral area out there beyond the confines of the church, as though the Christian can function out there quite well so long as he doesn't violate any of the moral precepts taught in the church.

Cultural spirits at work

The truth of this historic Reformed contention perhaps should be underscored. The "cultural mandate," God's command to his creature man to rule the earth to the Creator's glory, left no area of life untouched. The fall of sin, though it involved a total rejection of God's authority, still could not erase the fact that man was a creature in God's image and made to rule over God's creation. The sons of Cain, in fact, did make great cultural progress even though it was done to the glory of man.

That characteristic in man's endeavors holds for all his cultural efforts ever since. Every culture is shaped and molded by some spiritual dynamic, be it Christian, or pagan and secular, or a synthesis. The spirits at work in any age give form to society's institutions and are reflected in the attitudes, values and goals of the people. Man cannot help but respond as a religious being to God's creation order.

At times man has worshipped the forces of nature that touched his life, and his ideas of kingship, urban life, warfare, and art were affected by his religious views.

Israel's deliverance from Egypt was not just from physical slavery but was a total redemption from a pagan culture; and Israel's continuing struggle with the gods of Canaan was an equally total and cultural struggle.

Today, the Reformed understanding of life still holds. The notable difference is that we live *anno domini*, and even in a post-Christian era. Western man's cultural response today invariably embodies the attempt to build a secularized version of God's kingdom. The only adequate challenge to that is the full proclamation of the kingdom of God that exists among us now in power.

The American experiment

When America had its birth, the Puritans possessed something of the vision of God's kingdom (though with certain flaws). By the time of the Revolution, even this vision had largely been eclipsed by secular rationalism. The covenant had become the social contract. Some cultural influences of Puritanism found their way into the Constitution; but they were largely transformed to harmonize with the Enlightenment faith in man.

American civil order is based on The People, not on the sovereignty of God. All men of good will are presumed to agree on what is right and true without any need for Scripture. Thus the American democratic civic faith was born. And from these ideals developed the "melting pot"—that worked quite well, so long as new arrivals adopted the democratic faith.

To challenge this basic faith in its essentials is to be un-American, to commit the great sin against The People. American Christians absorbed much of this faith. Church revival occurred from time to time, but the vision was largely restricted to personal, Sunday-only faith. We learned to accommodate two rival faiths because our vision of the kingdom of God was not as embracing as the democratic faith. We can even put "Worship God on Sunday" together with "America, Love It or Leave It" on the same car bumper. As long as Christianity will stick to the private, spiritual side of life, it can coexist nicely with its rival.

The more sensitive Christians, caught in the snare, are viscerally aware of the tension. The rest of us are quite comfortable with the best of the two worlds in which we live. Let it be clear that I am not calling for revolution, or even repudiating democracy as a means for involving people in self-rule. But when allegiance to the American civic faith captures the hearts of Christians, rather than total submission to the Lord Jesus Christ, then the church is in trouble.

An example of what the American democratic faith has done is its treatment of the black minority. The Constitution itself defined a slave as $\frac{3}{5}$ of a man, for purposes of Congressional representation, but denied him even $\frac{3}{5}$ of a vote. After the Civil War the Supreme Court recognized the black man's civil equality but still consigned him to his segregated place (*Plessy vs. Ferguson*). And we white Christians often sought to keep him in "his place," on the job, in residential communities, in the schools, and even within the organized church. And few were the pulpits that spoke against the practice! No wonder evangelical black Christians feel "our God is too white." And talk about God's kingship over *all* of life

can only sound farcical from white lips speaking to a ghetto audience.

We need the Kingdom vision

The vital dynamic of the Christian faith is blunted in our peculiar American limping between Jehovah and Baal. How does today's pulpit follow Elijah's call for faithfulness to the Lord? or Jeremiah's? or Habbakuk's? What does it mean to claim to preach the whole counsel of God, if we ignore the agony of our neighbors? When we proclaim the Word of God, must it not be addressed directly to where we live demanding a response of repentant and obedient service in all of our life?

We seem to have a problem deciding how, or even if, the pulpit is to speak on the social issues of our contemporary world. Out of a fear of the misnamed "social gospel," we separate evangelism from social concern as though the message of Scripture came to modern man's soul through a vacuum.

Meanwhile, those of us in the pew don't seem to feel the power of Satan very much. The reality of sin does not grip us. Why aren't we being persecuted by the world—as Christ said we would? To be sure, we feel twinges of conscience now and then, but the effect is negligible. Is it because preaching has been largely directed toward personal morals and, relatively speaking, most of us live decently moral lives?

We have little sense of the principalities and powers that shape our world. We have little sensitivity to the spiritual struggle going on today for the minds of men, because for us "religion is an individual matter." It grieves me when Christians, exposed to Reformed preaching all their lives, still judge a Christian college solely on the devotional life of the students who attend. The Devil can effectively neutralize Christians by bricking them up in their churches; within two generations, the lack of spiritual dynamic in our "outside" lives will begin to kill us off inside the churches as well.

Would that we had the vision of Isaiah, crying out in agony, "I am a man of unclean lips"; and "I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips"!

What we need now

We in the pews, torn between allegiance to the secular faith and submission to the Lord Jesus, need a stirring proclamation of the kingdom of God as that which embraces all of our lives, that kingdom whose entrance is gained through the reconciling work of Christ when he broke the hold of Satan's kingship over this world. All power in heaven and earth is given to our Lord. So, our hope is secure and we gain new courage in our vocations and daily life.

You who are preachers must explore the Scripture's gospel of God's kingdom to learn what it means in its full sense. I am not simply asking for some social dimension to what already exists, but for a full study of that vision of God's lordship over all of life, both in the private and public spheres of our existence.

Proclamation of that kingdom must bring us to a broader vision of what Christian freedom is. Too long it has been thought of in terms of the "right" to drink a beer, dance, play cards, or go to the theater. We need to hear about the freedom we have *because* Christ is Lord of all, that

in him all things cohere, and that these truths open up the whole world to us. We need to know that Christ's dominion casts out demons, powers and principalities, so that the Christian is free to move out and to claim all areas of life for his Lord. "All things are yours, whether . . . the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (1 Corinthians 3:21-23).

Having been made free from the power of sin, we must now work to realize the freedom we have in all spheres of life by continuing in Christ's Word as his disciples. The pulpit must challenge us to work out the freedom of his Word in our intellectual life, our political life, our esthetic expression, our social relationships, and all the areas of our lives.

It should be obvious by now that I am not calling for a "social gospel." Rather, I am calling for Reformed pulpits to recapture their tradition, and to proclaim the all-encompassing kingdom of God, the only full alternative to the humanistic kingdoms whose bankruptcy is even now becoming apparent in Western civilization. Only this will free us from the tensions we now experience in our lives of bitter synthesis.

Do *not* leave your pulpits to lead marches for world relief, but rather point us to the Christ who redeemed us as his disciples to claim the world in his name and to cast out evil spirits in his power, as we witness to his redemption—"For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever" (Romans 11:36).

This is a slightly condensed version of an address given at a Seminar for Pastors, in March 1971, at Wheaton, Illinois. Professor Voskuil teaches history at Trinity Christian College and is an elder in the Forest View Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Tinley Park, Illinois.

The Session Book

Have you ever wished to know how some other church met a problem that you now face? The *Guardian* believes that news of what your local session has done may be of real help to others. Let us hear about it.

A "Covenant Child" for how long?

The Bible points to the age of twenty as the age of individual responsibility in Exodus 30:14 (for offering of atonement money); Numbers 1:3 (for census and military service); Numbers 14:29 (held accountable for refusal to enter the Promised Land). On the basis of such Scripture, one session has decided that children of church members would be regarded as "covenant children" until the age of twenty.

This session hopes that many of its young people will have confessed Christ and obtained communicant membership well before this. But those who reach their twentieth birthday without having professed faith in the Lord will then be particularly urged to do so or will forfeit their church membership. The session believes that this policy allows young people the maximum amount of time for reaching a mature decision while it also honors the Lord's concern for his church's health. [Ed. note: It should be noted that forfeiture of church membership should only be taken after proceeding in accordance with the provisions of the Book of Discipline.]

Evangelism and Prayer

There are two sources of confusion among Christians concerning the relationship of prayer to evangelism. Both of these are due to shortsighted misunderstandings of our Lord's own intention for us.

The first source of confusion is in those believers who are sensitive to doctrinal issues while often remaining insensitive to the relationship between evangelism and prayer. They emphasize the power of the written Word, but have less awareness of the absolute necessity for calling upon the Father to apply that Word to sinners with power through the Spirit.

Commonly, these orthodox Christians have a certain fear of fervent public prayer among believers. Not only are they afraid of displays of "enthusiasm," but they feel that the main task of the church at this end time is to "hold the line," maintain the true doctrine, and "wait" for God to accomplish his sovereign good pleasure in the area of evangelism.

Since these believers are perfectly right in their determination to maintain the faith in our time, it is difficult for them to see that they are actually heretical and unorthodox when it comes to the doctrine of prayer. But it is, in fact, a serious deviation in doctrine to neglect the biblical teaching that all Christian work hinges on the supplication of God by his people and "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:19).

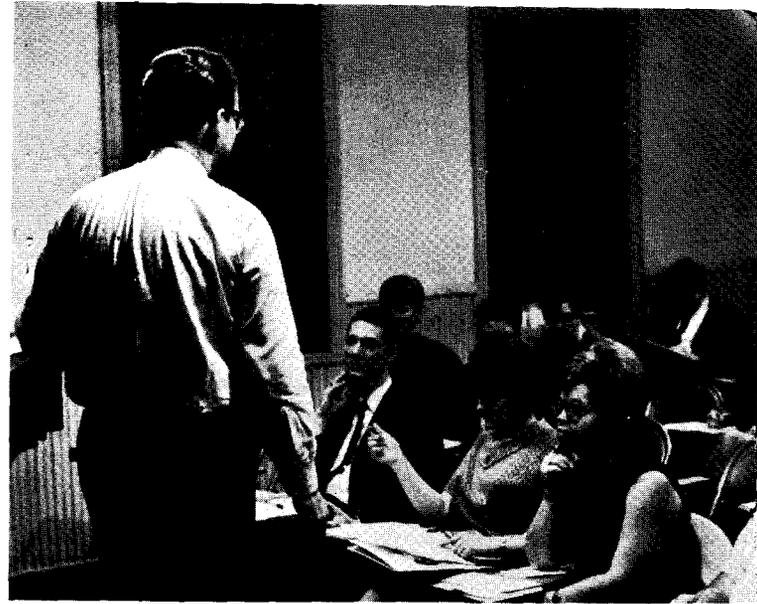
The second source of confusion is in those believers who, though quite sensitive to the importance of prayer, tend to think of prayer almost as a commodity, a mere vehicle for carrying forward the next evangelistic campaign. These zealous Christians are so intensely concerned with enlisting "prayer support" for the work that they stand in grave danger of equating "prayer support" with other kinds of "support"—material means and organizational structures.

Again, these believers are perfectly right in their recognition of the necessity of prayer. But this proper emphasis easily misleads them into thinking that they need no further instruction in a biblical theology of prayer. As a result, they are robbed of the blessing of further growth in the doctrine of prayer, and may unwittingly fall into the grave error of attempting to manipulate God as did Israel in the days of Eli (1 Samuel 4).

Christ's absolute sovereignty

The central principle for evangelism and prayer is the absolute sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Revealer of the Father through the ministry of the Spirit of the Lord.

Christ is the only revealer of the Father. No mere man, no matter how eloquent or gifted, can reveal the Father. In himself the minister of the Word, and every witnessing Christian, is completely helpless. This is the clear implication of Jesus' prayer of jubilation recorded in Matthew 11:25-27. The emphasis here is on the absolutely unique



CECIL JOHN MILLER

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role of the Son as the One who makes known the things of God. "All things have been delivered" to the Son (verse 27). Because he is equal to the Father, no one can know the Son but the Father. And, no one can "know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him" (verse 27). (See also John 1:18; 8:12; 9:1-41; 12:32; 2 Corinthians 3:15-4:6.)

Christ reveals the Father through the ministry of his Spirit. Matthew 11:25-27 clearly indicates that saving power and knowledge of God come through the incarnate Son of God. But this does not tell us how the Son sovereignly makes the Father known to those whom he chooses. For this, we must turn to the book of Acts, where we learn that it is the ascended Christ, sitting at the right hand of God, who has received the gift of the Spirit from the Father, and poured him forth upon the apostles and their hearers at Pentecost (Acts 2:32-33). The book of Acts therefore is not to be understood as the "Acts of the Apostles" or even the "Acts of the Holy Spirit" in some abstract sense. Instead we have in this book the inspired record of the Acts of the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of the Lord (Acts 1:12). (For further study of this subject, see: Acts 1:4, 8; 2:47; 9:1-19; 12:17; 13:1-12; 16:14; 18:9-10; 19:10, 20; 23:11.)

Christ's vehicle, the church

The first principle for evangelism and prayer is the absolute sovereignty of Christ, the centrality of Christ's Spirit in accomplishing the work of evangelism. The second principle is closely related to this sovereign ministry of Christ and can be summarized thus: *Christ ordinarily uses his church as the vehicle for exercising his ministry among men.*

In itself, such a statement sounds like a truism. Is it not merely to say that God uses the church? Of course. But a great deal is at stake here.

God works in close relationship to the prayerful obedience of his people. This we discover as we see the inspired record of God's working. He gives his Spirit, "to them that obey him" (Acts 5:32), and this obedience takes the specific form of the disciples' waiting in prayer for the gift and the working of the Spirit. In digesting this thought, it will help if you reflect on the following:

- The Lord *receives* the gift of the Spirit while he prays (Luke 3:21-22).
- The Lord *teaches* his disciples to seek the gift of the Spirit through earnest prayer (Luke 11:1-13, especially verses 9, 10, 13).
- The Lord *commands* the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they are filled with the power of the Spirit (Luke 24:49).
- The disciples *obey* their Lord by waiting in *united* prayer for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14; 2:1-4).
- The disciples *are filled* with the Spirit while they pray at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) and subsequently when they seek power anew to confront their enemies with all boldness (Acts 4:23-31).

God also gives us a norm for evangelism—namely, *boldness*. This too appears plainly in the record. Led of the Spirit, the people of God pray for boldness in their witness to the world (Acts 4:23-31). Stephen, the Spirit-filled preacher, is in his bold preaching the model evangelist for the church (Acts 6, 7). And Paul assumes that "boldness" is the only way in which the gospel *ought* to be made known (Ephesians 6:18-20). What is presupposed here is that the church must pray for the gift of the Spirit so that the gospel herald will proclaim the truth in this forthright, convicting manner.

Some conclusions to draw

What we have seen through our reflections upon Scripture is that Christ is the sovereign Head of his church who fills the obedient church with evangelistic power as the answer to the prayers of the people of God. From this several conclusions follow:

1. Whenever men are converted, the glory is Christ's first and last because, regardless of the preacher, Christ is the One who is the only Revealer of God through his Word and Spirit.
2. No matter what our gifts, training, and past blessings, we are absolutely helpless when it comes to carrying out effective evangelism. The greatest and most harmful delusion that the evangelist can have is the notion that when all is said and done the work depends upon his own efforts.
3. God is especially pleased to bless the *united* prayer of Christians who, recognizing their own incapacity, call upon the name of God for a new manifestation of his power and presence. Or to put the matter even more strongly, the gospel will *not* be made known in the way it ought to be proclaimed unless God's people pray fer-

vently for the ministry of the Word. (See Ephesians 6:18-20.)

4. It is the duty and privilege of the evangelist to *enlist* the people of God in praying that he may have a holy boldness in proclaiming Christ, and that Christ will open and keep open the doors of opportunity (Colossians 4:2-4; Romans 15:30-32; Ephesians 6:18-20).

5. We must go to the work with great confidence in the power of the Head of the church. If we obey him in sanctifying ourselves and seeking the gift of the Spirit in prayer, we must *expect* that souls will be begotten again through the Word of God and the Spirit (1 Peter 1:23; Acts 18:9-10; 19:20). He will bless us not only in terms of gifts and faithfulness but also in relationship to our faith. For faith without expectancy is no faith at all.

"Lord, grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word" (Acts 4:29). May it be so even today!

(Continued from Page 115.)

not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

Love so defined includes many strong inhibitions. Love involves *not* expressing jealousy or boastfulness; *not* demanding the free and uninhibited expression of one's way; *not* accepting wrongdoing in another person's life; and *not* telling him off freely but bearing with and enduring his weaknesses. One of the most serious omissions in Dr. Knights's therapy session is the lack of any expression of Christian love among the participants. Without this love, interpersonal communion becomes shallow and meaningless, regardless of how free and uninhibited the discussion may be.

Because the presuppositions underlying group therapy are unbiblical, a simple revision of certain aspects of the technique cannot transform group therapy into "Christian group therapy." Rather, commitment to a biblical view of man requires us to challenge group therapy's basic premise that spiritual healing can best be achieved through an uninhibited expression of feelings.

Of course, there is a place for a type of "group therapy" in the Christian community, if that term is understood literally to mean healing administered by a group. In fact, the church of Jesus Christ ought to be a truly therapeutic community in which believers pool their gifts and work together in order to administer the healing power of Christ. Believers as a community of prophets ought to bring the healing Word of God to bear upon personal problems. As a community of priests they ought to bear the burdens of others in prayer. As a community of kings they ought to use their talents and abilities to enhance the welfare of others.

If there were more of this kind of "Christian group therapy" in the church, troubled Christians might not be so quick to turn to non-Christian therapeutic techniques for help.

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Here and There in The Orthodox Presbyterian Church

Summer Bible conferences over — now what?

The chief news event for many Orthodox Presbyterians (and about the only one received recently!) is that the summer Bible conference season is over. By now, of course, that's hardly news. But the followup should be.

Why do people, like your editor, volunteer year after year to help conduct Bible conferences for young people? Speaking for myself, there are two reasons:

Evangelizing young people

This is the chief reason. Those who volunteer to teach, to direct, to cook, to counsel, to do whatever it takes, do so because they believe that it is imperative for us to evangelize young people. And we believe that summer Bible conferences are effective in such evangelizing.

The proof for this frequently comes from local church sessions. Time and again, in answer to a very natural question, young people presenting themselves as candidates for communicant membership will point to a Bible conference experience as the turning point in their lives.

Why would this be so? Is it that the teaching and the preaching in the local church, and the guidance at home, are so ineffective? Not at all. It simply seems to be a fact that a week apart from the regular routine, a week of intensive concentration on Scripture, a week with time to think alone, to talk with other young people, to get answers from counselors, to exist in an environment where things of the Lord are the primary concern—such a focus seems to draw together all the past instruction and the present experience in a way that the Holy Spirit seems pleased repeatedly to bless.

That is not to say that a week in

Bible conference will guarantee a conversion! Nor does it mean that Bible conferences are only for those not yet converted. Actually, many of those who come year after year do so because they enjoy the Christian fellowship that is possible with others of their own age and interests. And these "repeaters" also show the effects of their growth in grace and knowledge, a change that is often quite startling to those of us who only see the young person after a year's interval.

Joy in the Lord's service

That's the other reason why we volunteer. To be sure, I happen to enjoy the natural surroundings, the trees, the birds, the lake. And I also enjoy renewing fellowship with many after a year apart. I do not always enjoy the mud, the rocks, the strenuous schedule (Just try keeping *ahead* of a group of young people for a whole week!), or the painful results of engaging in sports for which I'm not in shape.

This second reason is, frankly, a rather selfish one. Many of us volunteer simply because of the joy we receive from being involved in a work for the Lord where the results are often quite visible in changed lives. There's nothing quite like watching and helping a young soul come to see and trust the Lord Jesus Christ! It may come with a struggle and tears, or like a new day dawning. However the Spirit does it, to share such an experience is one of the greatest joys a Christian can have.

There is also the joy of genuine Christian fellowship with these young people. They seem to want fellowship, and to be more open to it than some of us older folks. I don't mean that all of them do, since the degree to which they have grown in grace varies widely. But

the opportunity to speak together about what the Lord has done is frequently there for those adults who volunteer to work with these young people. And that is a joy indeed.

How do we follow up?

There are many things I might say here, like: Why don't you consider volunteering your services next year? Won't you make these Bible conferences a special matter of prayer? Shouldn't you work to get more young people to attend? Or, perhaps you might help underwrite the costs for one?

Yet I think the more important followup is for those of you who did go to Bible conference this summer. For a few days there you were reading your Bible regularly, immersed in a Christian setting, enjoying friendships and Christian fellowship. Did you receive any benefit? If you did, don't you think that ought to be shared with others? That way we can all rejoice in the Spirit's work! And that way is perhaps one of the best ways to avoid the let-down that sometimes comes after we return and get back to the daily grind.

For those who did not go, perhaps the main thing is to check into those who did. Is there any evidence of a work of the Spirit there? By all means, encourage it now. Your concern may be just what is needed for that growth in grace to continue. On the other hand, the very fact that some new fruit of the Spirit is apparent will be a means of encouragement to you also.

Summer Bible conferences are over for another year. But if any work of the Spirit of Christ took place, it ought to show in changed lives that manifest the fruits of the Spirit. For all of us, the followup is to look for these, to share in them, to enjoy together in genuine Christian fellowship the goodness of our loving Lord and Savior. That's what Bible conferences are for, and that's what the Christian life is all about.

—J. J. M.