



The Outlook

Devoted to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith

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We Have Not Passed This Way Before

Joshua 3: 1-6

“Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure. Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which you must go, for you have not passed this way before.”

(Joshua 3:4 NKJV)

As we begin a new year, we always do two things. We look back over the past year and we look forward to the year that lies ahead of us. When we look back over the previous year, we are familiar with it. We remember the events. We recall the twists and the turns that were involved in the shaping of our lives. No doubt, some things were good. But I am sure there were

some trying periods in our lives last year as well.

In my own life, as I recall the year 2002, one event scars those months deeply. In March of 2002, by way of an accidental drowning, the Lord called home my twenty-one month old nephew. It was devastating then, and, to a certain extent, it still is. We joyfully wished one another

a “Happy New Year” in January. Those cheers now seem so hollow and ironic. We did not know how our lives would be changed in the month of March. When we first began 2002, we had no idea that such a difficult event was only weeks away.

But by faith, we press on. We continue to confess that all of our lives and times are in God’s hands and we trust the way of the Lord. And now, the year 2003 is upon us. As we look to the months ahead in the coming year, we realize that the pathway that lies before us is completely unknown to us. As familiar as we are with the past events of 2002, we are completely unfamiliar with the coming events of 2003. These weeks and months are uncharted waters. We have not gone



Volume 53, 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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this way before. It is not strange for us, therefore, to have some feelings of uncertainty and apprehension.

For this reason, we turn to the first six verses of Joshua 3 as the Scripture basis for this meditation. In Joshua 3, the children of the Lord, the Israelites, found themselves in a similar situation. It was time for them to travel. They had to move forward. The Lord had safely brought His people up out of the land of Egypt. They had completed their 40 years of wandering in the desert. Now, under the leadership of Joshua, the people were preparing to take possession of the promised land.

The spies had returned from Jericho, reporting that the people of Canaan were fainting for fear because of the Israelites. Now it was time to move. The time had finally come for the Lord's people to cross the Jordan river and enter into the promised land. This is the situation at this point in Joshua 3. The Lord's people are preparing to take their first steps along a new pathway; a way that they had not gone before. Perhaps they too, had some feelings of uncertainty and uneasiness about what lie ahead of them.

That is why the Lord, in His mercy, tells the Israelites that He will go first! The Lord would go ahead of them and then they were to follow. The Lord is a Shepherd who graciously leads His sheep. It is very interesting to note that the people were not to follow too closely! The priests were to lead the Israelites by carrying the ark of the covenant which represented the presence of God among His people.

But as the priests carried the ark,

verse four explains, the people were to stay back "about two thousand cubits". So, how far is that? Two thousand cubits is approximately 1,000 yards. Another question we may want to ask is "why?" Why did the people have to stay back 1,000 yards from the ark and then follow from that considerable distance?

The Lord Himself explains this when He says in verse four, "Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which you must go, for you have not passed this way be-

*Sometimes we want
to push a
wheelbarrow of
"what-ifs" ahead of
us into the new year.*

fore." The Lord tells His people to follow Him because they do not know the way. They had not gone this way before. They did not know where they were going. They did not know what lay ahead of them. But the Lord graciously leads His people because He does know the way.

I think it will help us look ahead to 2003 properly if we picture this scene of the Israelites drawing near to the Jordan. The priests carried the ark of the Lord some 1,000 yards ahead of the people as they walked toward the Jordan river. As soon as the priests touched the river, the Lord Himself opened the way for His people to cross over safely into the promised land.

These verses serve to comfort us today as we begin to cross a new year. Although we must confess that we do not know what the coming months will hold for us, it comforts us to know that the Lord knows the way. There may be only wonderful days waiting for us, but there also may be difficult days ahead. Sometimes we want to push a wheelbarrow of "what-ifs" ahead of us into the new year. We are concerned about "what if illness comes" or "what if war breaks out" or "what if some tragedy happens".

That is why Joshua 3:4 is a source of comfort for us. How comforting to know that we are not without a Leader. We have a Captain and a Guide who not only knows the way, but in fact goes ahead of us, having ordained all of our steps.

The Israelites could not envision every event which would take place in the conquest of the promised land. However, at this point, they could see the next 1,000 yards. And that was all they needed. The Lord was going ahead of His people. For us, too, we cannot envision every event of our lives in advance. But as we go with our God, we can handle the next 1,000 yards. We can live one day at a time.

It is true that we cannot be sure what 2003 will have in store for us. But that's okay. There are lots of things we do not know. However, at the same time, there are many things that we do know. We know that the Lord knows all things. Acts 15:18 says, "Known to God from eternity are all His works."

If hardship awaits us, we can be

encouraged by Job's faithful confession in Job 23:10: "But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold." As we have now begun to travel the pathway of 2003, we should recognize that we have not passed this way before. This pathway is new to us. But also, at the beginning of this new year, we should realize that God knows the way. He goes before us. He knows every event that will unfold in our lives and He promises that His grace will be sufficient for us.

Because of our God, we can look ahead to 2003 with confidence as we follow the Lord unwaveringly. When we follow humbly and faithfully, then we can be assured that it will indeed be a happy new year!

Rev. Stephen De Boer is the pastor of Eastmanville United Reformed Church in Coopersville, Michigan.

The Snare Of Misdirected Pity

Part Two

Euthanasia

Euthanasia, including assisted suicide, is another example of misdirected pity in our present culture. It is being tolerated and accepted by people in our society out of pity for someone experiencing suffering. The Bible teaches us to have compassion for and give help to those suffering. Certainly every legitimate medical means should be used to alleviate suffering. However, the pain in our heart when seeing a loved one suffer may not allow our pity to make us willing to break God's command: "Thou shalt not kill." God has given life and only God may take our life or the life of a loved one when suffering.

In his book, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*, Robert H. Bork writes:

Modern liberalism's obsession with the autonomy of the individual is taking us to a culture of death. Ironically, the freedom of the individual to choose death has made it far easier for others to choose his death. The autonomy is often theirs, not his. (p. 186)

Pity for those suffering was used by the media in the embryonic cell research debate prior to President Bush stating his decision whether to support the research with tax money. The media's repetitive televising of Christopher Reeves in his wheelchair, making a desperate

plea for government support of embryonic cell research to help him and others who suffer, was using compassion and empathy in an attempt to convince and promote the justification of using living embryos for medical research. Pity was used to make a plea for letting the ends justify the means, even though the means meant the destruction of the life of the embryo.

Radical Feminism

Abortion, planned parenthood, women in office, and inclusive language all are factors in our society and church community which have become popular out of pity for women through the cause of radical feminism. The woman is promoted as needing pity for inequality and in need of choice for herself and her body. Robert H. Bork in his book, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah* writes:

The hostility towards the traditional family goes hand in hand with the feminists' hostility towards traditional religion. They see religion as a male invention designed to control women. (p. 205)

Robert H. Bork goes on to explain the feminists' agenda within the church:

The strongest force seeking to destroy traditional religions is feminism. Radical feminists have very little use for religion or churches as they



are, but they do not leave the churches whose doctrines and liturgies they find objectionable. They work within to change the churches so that the final product will bear little resemblance to Christianity. (p. 287)

Robert H. Bork further explains the effects of feminism within the church:

The damage done to traditional religion that is most obvious to the people in the pews is the feminist drive to make the language of the scriptures and liturgy “inclusive.” As in all of feminism’s endeavors, the charge is that the traditional - in this case the English language and the original language of the Bible - are unjust and offensive because they make women feel left out. (p. 287)

From the above statements, a major question arises as to whether a Christian may be empathetic toward any facet of radical feminism.

Divorce

Divorce is being accepted and tolerated readily today out of pity for anyone who is unhappy or unable to follow one’s own personal pursuits and happiness. In the book, *The New Tolerance* by Josh McDowell and Bob Hostetler, one finds the following quotes:

Christian churches and denominations, both mainline and evangelical, have been gripped by a struggle for and against the new tolerance in the areas of love, sex, and marriage. (p. 180)

So rampant is the new tolerance in the church today that biblical standards are being ignored - or redrawn - in favor of a more “tolerant” approach...one that seeks to redefine marriage and sexuality according to human standards and “sensibilities.” (p.182)

William S. Bennett in his book, *The Broken Hearth*, writes:

...Marriage itself, detached from any objective foundation, is seen by many as

Marriage is now viewed not as a covenant but simply as a contract based on self-interest, convenience, and individual self—fulfillment.

possessing little or no intrinsic worth but as being a means to an end; the end, that is, of “personal happiness” or “fulfillment.” (pp.11 &12)

Above all, marriage is now viewed not as a covenant but simply as a contract based on self-interest, convenience, and individual self-fulfillment. As contracts go, moreover, it is among the weakest in contemporary American society; in the words of the family scholar Maggie Gallagher, “We now live in a society where it is legally easier and less risky to dump a wife than to fire an employee.” (p.29)

Permissiveness

Lack of discipline or permissiveness in the home, in the church, and in the judicial system results when child, transgressor, or criminal receives pity rather than correction and justice. When one pities a person with behavior God dislikes, one reinforces and promotes that behavior and prevents proper Christian discipline and justice. Self-control, a fruit of the Spirit, is hindered in development when pity replaces loving Christian discipline. Reinforcing these concepts, Dr. Dobson in his book *Bringing Up Boys*, p.207, quotes Michelle Malkin in “Baby Boomer Parents Are Asleep On the Job,” Creators Syndicate, Inc.:

Thanks largely to the radical egalitarian ethos embraced by the Baby Boomers, American notions of discipline have grown softer than the down filling in a teen’s sleeping bag. Kay Hymowitz, author of *Ready Or Not: Why Treating Children As Small Adults Endangers Their Future and Ours*, notes that nowadays “adults imagine themselves as children’s allies, trainers, partners, friends, facilitators, co-learners, and advocates. Their role is to empower children, advocate for them, boost their self-esteem, respect their rights, and provide them with information with which they can make their own decisions. But is this really what children need?” My child needs her parents to be parents, not playmates....¹

Cal Thomas, in his article, “Ethics

are missing in action in America,” *Grand Rapids Press*, July 4, 2002, summarizes a consequence of misdirected pity resulting in permissiveness and toleration:

Wrongdoing was once treated seriously. Today, it doesn't matter and what we tolerate we get more of.

Universal Salvation

Universal salvation is being taught and accepted today out of pity for human beings having to be told that there is punishment in hell unless one knows Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The culture's cry for inclusiveness with its insistence that salvation be promised to all with any religion or set of beliefs is gaining acceptance. The one biblical way of salvation is considered too exclusive and harsh even though God, the author of salvation, states it in His Word as an absolute truth. It's much more pleasant and easy, and appears more compassionate for the preacher, when he proclaims that everyone will get to heaven by any religion and other ways than through Jesus Christ alone. Such theology develops into a false gospel, built on the premise of pity. In their book, *The New Tolerance*, Josh McDowell and Bob Hostetler point out:

The new tolerance that has crept into the church threatens their [your children's] assurance of salvation, their belief in the Bible, and ultimately their faith in a Christ who is the only way to salvation. The tolerance that exists in the church today may even encourage them to seek salvation somewhere else... thus endangering their

eternal souls. (pp. 188, 189)

William S. Bennett in *The Broken Hearth* states:

Deep moral convictions are often thought to be antithetical to the spirit of tolerance; in fact, they are not. A very particular and very misguided conception of tolerance holds sway today: the tolerance, rooted in relativism, that proclaims we cannot know right and wrong, that rejects assertions based on inviolable principle,

Misdirected pity causes the toleration and condoning of the evil rather than purging the sin from the Christian's life and the Church.

that believes truth is a mere social construction. But this is no tolerance; this is moral exhaustion and sloth. (p. 138)

Properly understood, tolerance means treating people with respect and without malice; it does not require us to dissolve social norms or to weaken our commitment to ancient and honorable beliefs.

No-Lordship Theology

In some evangelical circles a no-lordship gospel is being promoted out of pity for the sinner who doesn't want to repent and leave his sin. It teaches that one can accept Jesus as Savior without the need of repentance. Some evangelists are misdi-

recting their pity for sinners, by teaching that Jesus can be one's Savior without being one's Lord. Thus, misdirected pity for the sinner becomes a snare to the proper presentation of the Gospel, proclaiming a flawed, false gospel. The following quote from the book, *Faith Works: The gospel according to the Apostles* by John P. MacArthur, Jr. sums up the no lordship gospel and its effect:

I am deeply concerned as I watch what is happening in the church today. Biblical Christianity has lost its voice. The church is preaching a gospel designed to soothe rather than confront sinful individuals. Churches have turned to amusement and show business to try to win the world. Those methods may seem to draw crowds for a season. But they're not God's methods, and therefore they are destined to fail. In the meantime, the church is being infiltrated and corrupted by professing believers who have never repented, never turned from sin, and therefore, never really embraced Christ as Lord and Savior. (p. 88)

Conclusion

The Christian must develop and practice compassion and concern for the widow, the fatherless, the suffering, the prisoners, the poor, the hungry, the needy, the lost, and for whomever the Bible tells us to show compassion, as doing it for the Lord. However, misdirected pity in which the Christian directs his pity toward behavior which God



detests, finds abominable, or has commanded against, leads such a person into dangerous spiritual consequences. It can easily take one away from God's Word to one's own purposes. Misdirected pity causes the toleration and condoning of the evil rather than purging the sin from the Christian's life and the Church. Misdirected pity leads to the error of calling evil good and good evil as stated in Isaiah 5:20: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." A Christian must be compassionate, empathetic, and sympathetic; but one must not pity what God does not pity and does not want pitied nor practiced. Showing biblical pity is a virtue, but practicing misdirected pity becomes a snare to the Christian and to the Christian church.

Notes

1. Michelle Malkin, 'Baby Boomer Parents Are Asleep on the Job,' *Creators Syndicates*. 17 November 2000.

Mrs. Jan Groenendyk is a retired Christian School teacher. She is the wife of Rev. Marion Groenendyk. They are members of the Bethany United Reformed Church in Wyoming, Michigan.

A Comfort Filled Document

"Comfort, O comfort My people, says your God." Isaiah 40:1

This year *The Outlook* is beginning a study of what many people consider to be an outdated document. Some ministers have said it takes us away from the Bible. Still others, even within reformed circles, refuse to preach on it. With this issue we begin a look at the Heidelberg Catechism.

An Age of Fear

The Heidelberg Catechism was written in a day and age filled with fear. Other catechisms written at the time were stressing guilt before a holy God. The church of the day was pointing to the people in the pews and telling them to fear God's judgment. People were hearing the message: "Tremble under the wrath of God lest He send you to hell where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth forever." In the middle of all of this fear, the Heidelberg Catechism asked the question: "What is your only *comfort* in life and death?"

In 1997, Pope Paul VI, on his eightieth birthday was quoted in *Time* magazine saying: "We feel the fragility of human life. The fear of God's judgment at the moment of

death is always present and full of mystery." This quote came from the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church, a man considered by many to be the most pious and most religious person in the whole world. And he lived in the fear of God's judgment! The Heidelberg Catechism asks, "What is your only comfort in life and death?" The living God speaks to the prophet Isaiah and tells him to "comfort, O comfort my people."

When you tour the cathedrals of Europe, once you get beyond the gargoyles and the frightening carvings on the outside of the building, there is at the doorpost of each cathedral a gruesome, ominous portrait of the last judgment. It is painted there to entice fear into all who enter the cathedral - fear of the

"What is your only comfort in life and death?"

Question 1 - *Heidelberg Catechism*

second coming of Jesus Christ. The Heidelberg Catechism has at its doorpost and throughout its entirety “comfort.”

The Theme of the Catechism

The whole theme of the catechism from Lord’s Day 1 to Lord’s Day 52 is comfort. A comfort that is found in Jesus Christ.

- Question 1 asks: “What is your only comfort in life and death?”
- Question 2 asks: “What must you know to live and die in the joy of this comfort?”
- Question 52 asks an incredible question: “How does Christ’s return ‘to judge the living and the dead’ comfort you?”

The Heidelberg Catechism is rich and full of comfort - personal comfort for God’s people through Jesus Christ.

It is important to know that the mid-1600s, when this document was first written, was not the first time this comfort had ever been proclaimed. This was not something that the authors of the catechism, Casper Olevianus and Zacharius Ursinus, thought up out of the blue.

God had already come to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and promised them comfort. In a world that was suddenly stained with sin, God said He would put enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. God also promised that the day would come when the child of the woman would crush the head of the serpent.

Throughout the Old Testament the people of God awaited the Comforter - the One who would “speak

kindly to Jerusalem; and call out to her, that her warfare has ended, that her iniquity has been removed. (Isaiah 40:1)” Comfort!

The systematic approach that the Heidelberg Catechism takes toward Scripture can be reflected in Lord’s Day 1, which is a summary of the Heidelberg Catechism. The flow of the very first answer, as well as the flow of the whole catechism is taken from another systematic theologian - the Apostle Paul. Look at the similarities in Answer 1 and Romans 8 where Paul writes:

:31 “If God is for us, who can be against us?”

:35 “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”

:38 “I am convinced that neither life nor death, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is un Christ Jesus our Lord.”

As we look at the catechism in the upcoming issues of The Outlook, keep an eye open for that theme throughout the articles. Comfort in life and comfort in death which is ours because of Christ.

Rev. Wybren Oord is the pastor of the Covenant United Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan and editor of *The Outlook*.

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– Phillipians 2:16

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Looking Back

Last month I wrote that once the Christian Reformed Church awoke from its ethnic slumber and became less introverted, evangelism became its number one concern of the denomination. Everything within the church had to be geared toward church growth. From an admitted parochial imbalance in its early years, the scale tipped to the other extreme: church growth at all costs. Along with that change came a de-emphasis on Reformed distinctiveness. The new trend moved toward evangelicalism.

I'm of course writing this for the United Reformed Church in North America also. May we may not fall into the same one-sidedness. Evangelism, properly understood, is important. But it should never be at the expense of the Reformed confessions.

I have a question: if evangelism is so important, why was no mention made of it in all of Paul's letters or in the seven letters to the churches in Asia Minor? Not once do Paul or John or Peter urge their readers to become more engaged in evangelism. All one reads in John's letters in Revelation, or in Paul's letters to his readers are two things. First, hold fast to sound doctrine, and, second, live a godly life in harmony with the gospel. You will read that over and over again in their writings, but not a word about evangelism. How come? Is it perhaps that John and Paul (and the Holy Spirit) have a different view of evangelism than we do?

One looks in vain in the Scriptures

for this type of mandate. What one does find over and over again is a concern for the general welfare of the church, especially faithfulness to the gospel and a concomitant lifestyle. That is Christ's concern to the seven churches of Asia Minor. Nothing more and nothing less. To Sardis, Christ says, "you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead." To Philadelphia he says, "I know you have little strength, yet you have kept my word, and have not denied my name." The pastoral epistles are a sustained admonition to guard the faith and to put it into practice.

The apostle placed no pressure on the church to produce converts. There were no monthly sales reports. They did not think of themselves as salesmen of the world's greatest product, as we are sometimes told to think of ourselves. This business of salesmen or a great product is a catchy idea taken over from our Western business world rather than from the Bible
(Hokabergen in *Banner*,
March 14, 1975).

Here we do well to read Vance Havner:

If the time, money, and effort spent in trying to work up evangelism in lukewarm churches were spent in calling the churches themselves to repentance, confession, cleansing, and empowering, evangelism

would be a natural result. ...The New Testament epistle-writers concentrated not on stirring up Christians to evangelize but rather on developing healthy Christians through spiritual food, rest, and exercise.

Take a moment to look up these texts: Ephesians 5:15; Philippians 2:14 and 15; Colossians 1:10, 4:5; I Thessalonians 4:11, 12; I Timothy 2:7; Titus 2:5b, 10b; Titus 3:8b; I Peter 2:12; I Peter 3:1,2; 3:16. The Heidelberg Catechism says "that by our godly walk our neighbors also may be won for Christ" (Lord's Day 32). See also Matthew 5:13-16.

There can be no doubt but that the Bible sees evangelism in terms of conduct and life-style first of all.

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

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

The church's primary task is to build up the people of God as committed, mature, thoroughgoing citizens of the kingdom of heaven in the

(continued on page 32)

The United Reformed Churches in North America

Peter Y. De Jong

The U.R.C After Seven Years: A Few Thoughts for Our Reflection and Rededication

Soon it will be seven years since the first steps were taken to organize a federation of churches now known as the United Reformed Churches in North America. It seems appropriate, then, for us as members to reflect on the way by which Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of the church has led these congregations. But recounting the many blessings experienced also requires a humble confession of the sins which still stain our lives every day. Only in this way will a reflection on the past stir us to rededicating ourselves to serve the Savior-King with ever greater devotion.

The background and occasion for the decision to organize another federation of Reformed churches on the North American continent can be rehearsed in a few sentences.

Such a rehearsal is not only appropriate for those who lived through the years before 1995 but especially necessary for the children, young

people, and growing number who have come from other denominations with a strong desire to unite with a faithful church which without compromise seeks to proclaim and live by the sovereign grace of God in Christ Jesus.

Decades of Turmoil

By the late 1980s and early 1990s a growing number of Christian Reformed people either with or without pastoral and consistorial leadership broke ties with that denomination. Hardly did this come overnight or without much soul-searching and prayer.

For at least three decades that denomination was experiencing an "identity crisis." Before 1940 the Christian Reformed Church, under its leadership, was staunchly Reformed as so many of its synodical decisions demonstrate. But shortly after World War II strange winds begin to blow within those broader assemblies. By the 1960s and early 1970s two divergent groups could

be clearly discerned. One was agitating for change and the other was seeking to maintain the confessional basis upon which those churches had been founded.

Soon the focus turned to the issue of women in ecclesiastical office. One synod would modify what an earlier synod had decided, only to be changed again the following year.

The fundamental issue, often pointed out in many excellently-written articles in this periodical, lay far deeper. It was the issue of the clarity, the trustworthiness and the absolute authority of all that the Bible clearly teaches. At stake also was the biblical view of the creation of the universe and man. Only when after repeated protests and appeals for two decades met with no favorable response, did congregations and many members leave the Christian Reformed Church.

A New Federation Is Born

Out of that unhappy situation the organization of the Alliance of Reformed Churches arose, prompted by the invitation of the Lynwood IL consistory. Within a few years, after much discussion and preparation, a large number of those churches decided to organize as the United

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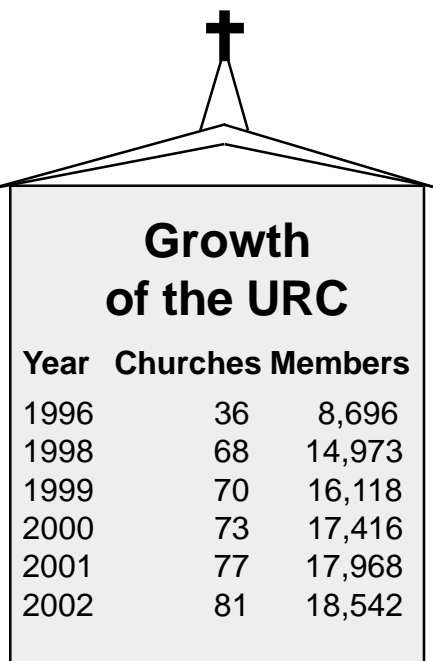
Reformed Churches in North America.

Already as a “preparatory” meeting several far-reaching decisions were taken. First, of course, on the official basis of the federating churches an unswerving commitment to Holy Scripture as the absolute authority for doctrine and life and subservient to it the Three Forms & Unity. Also tentative approval of a Church Order was approved which recommended the use of the 1957 edition of the Psalter Hymnal and its liturgical formularies.

“Charter membership” for churches and ministers was left open until the first official synod, scheduled for the following summer. These uniting churches were also arranged in three “classes” or regional assemblies to meet either two or three times annually.

Statistical Review

With this, let us engage in a “statistical review,” found in the annual



| Growth of the URC | | |
|-------------------|----------|---------|
| Year | Churches | Members |
| 1996 | 36 | 8,696 |
| 1998 | 68 | 14,973 |
| 1999 | 70 | 16,118 |
| 2000 | 73 | 17,416 |
| 2001 | 77 | 17,968 |
| 2002 | 81 | 18,542 |

Yearbooks, first published for the URC in early 1998. Although these say little about spiritual life and ecclesiastical faithfulness, they do remind us of the growth, both in the number and membership of these congregations, including a few not yet fully organized.

Presently the churches in the URCNA are served by 832 elders and deacons and 115 ordained ministers. Of those ministers 74 are

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pastors in congregations, 8 or 9 engaged in outreach both at home and abroad, another 4 as professors of theology. 3 “on leave” and 26 listed as “retired” but who often help out when requested.

In Canada there are 31 URC congregations with 6,489 members; in the United States 50 with 12,053 members. Twenty-seven were able to keep their church properties in agreement with the 1970 synodical decision of the CRC.

Some congregations have experienced amazing growth, even doubling their membership within four or five years. Two record a significant loss of members. Six small congregations, the latest Athens, Ontario, have disbanded. During this period five ministers of the Word have died. Meanwhile, at

least six ordained pastors left for other fields of labor, two quite recently to serve the Reformed Churches in New Zealand.

From the statistics other encouraging factors can easily be gleaned, although some consistories still fail to report as fully as requested by our Stated Clerk. Internal growth can be somewhat measured by number of baptisms. Each year there are almost twice the number of live births reported for either Canada and the United States, while the number of recorded deaths in the URC is always somewhat lower than the national averages. Also the number received into membership each year far exceeds that of those who have transferred. A much smaller number are listed as “resignations” every year

A steady expansion to new areas continues. Recently, in the Belgrade, Montana, area a group of Reformed believers is organizing as a URC congregation. Also serious efforts are being made to establish a URC church in Bellingham, Washington, and Muskegon, Michigan, and possibly elsewhere.

Confessionally Faithful

Especially in the beginning it was often said that the URC would become no more than an “asylum” for discontented old folk who resisted all change and longed to return to what the CRC was fifty or seventy five years ago. But decisions taken at its preparatory assembly and confirmed by its first official synod clearly demonstrate that the URC’s aim is to be a confessionally faithful Reformed federation striving earnestly to reform

itself according to God's Word and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let anyone who still thinks the average URC consists largely of old people attend one or two services. By far most of those present are young couples and families with three, six and even more children and young people who fill many a pew twice every Lord's Day.

Until now - and hopefully this will continue for decades - the URC has resisted any attempt to place under denominational Committees and Boards any work which a local consistory and congregation can, by Christ's commission and the Spirit's guidance, carry out. With many other ministers and members I, too, have witnessed the slow but continual drift in the CRC towards a hierarchical control by boards

and their "experts." Often this has throttled, far more than many are aware, the zeal and strength of local congregations and the exercise of the office of all believers. Also in this respect the URC, together with many ordained ministers and members without any CRC connections, is seeking to develop a Reformed character unique in these times when all the main-line denominations are losing active members by the tens of thousands every year.

Not a word or phrase of the above, however, is intended to "grieve" any faithful consistories and members of the CRC who are still striving to maintain that church's historic positions. For that this writer, now almost 87 years, owes under God's providence far too much for the instruction and spiritual care which he has received.

In the above we have only mentioned what is observable and has been reported. Far more significant, indeed, would be careful and prayerful reflection, in so far as possible, on both its "strengths" and its "weaknesses." But for every faithful member of the URC the time is here not only to reflect on the way in which the sovereign Lord has also been leading these churches but especially to rededicate ourselves to his service in gratitude for all the blessings received.

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Dow R. Haan, Sr.

The United Reformed Church: The Road Ahead?

Some years ago one of our churches had a text printed behind the pulpit. It was a verse from the Bible that was plainly visible to all who came to worship. It read as follows:

I JEHOVAH CHANGE NOT

This quote from Malachi 3:6 served as a precious truth and a comforting reminder that if God in unchangeable, even so is His Word. However, while God does not change, what people think concerning God and His Word often does continue to change.

A recent survey illustrates how biblical literalism (the belief that the Bible is God's word for word composition) has declined steeply in the last twenty five years. It used to be the predominant view held by 65% of American's as recently as 1963. Now only 32% regard the Bible as coming verbatim from God. From the *Los Angeles Times*:

According to professor Kromminga written in his book *The Christian Reformed Church* "At its inception the CRC was firmly entrenched in the conserva-

tive camp. To them (our fathers) orthodoxy in doctrine and practice was a possession so precious that we find then that the Christian Reformed Church was composed of a people who desired above all else to be orthodox. In their case orthodoxy must be interpreted as an adherence in the letter and spirit of the Reformed Confessional Standards and Polity."

How have the mighty fallen? Sadly, we must admit doctrinal changes have taken place. Many of the Re-

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*This picture begs for a caption.
How about about Nehemiah 13:16-18?*

formed circles today would find themselves and their church in the 32% bracket.

The late professor R.B. Kuiper wrote some fifty years ago in his book entitled, *The Glorious Body of Christ* as follows:

Today the glory of the church is thinly veiled. It is no exaggeration to assert that in the main, it (the Church) presents a picture of advanced decadence and extreme feebleness.

This statement proved to be prophetic in light of the changes that took place during the next fifty years. Many were the uncertain sounds which were emanating from our Synods, ranging on issues such as Creation vs. Evolution, Women in the Offices of the Church, Conditional Membership for Gay and Lesbians, Discontinuance of a Common Liturgy, and referring to God as Feminine "She".

These issues all stem from a measure of unbelief and rebellion. They are contrary to the Scriptures and born out of compromise, in an effort to bring love and unity within the church.

The Scriptures inform us that:

If the trumpet give an uncertain sound who will prepare himself to battle (I Corinthians 14:8).

Jesus said:

Sanctify them through the word, for thy word is truth (John 17:17).

Solomon was a man to whom God gave exceeding wisdom and understanding. His wisdom excelled the

wisdom of all the children of the East and the wisdom of Egypt, for he was wiser than all men (I Kings 4:29-31). Solomon wrote:

My son fear thou the Lord and the king, and meddle not with those who are given to change (Proverbs 24:21).

Our forefathers came to this country (North America) to escape the liberal dictates and persecution of the Netherlands State Church. They felt it incumbent to serve God according to their consciences, and to preserve the purity of their faith.

For the same reason we find today that individuals have been leaving the Christian Reformed Church and establishing independent churches, banding together to form a new denomination, namely the United Reformed Churches in North America.

Since we have seen that people are inclined to change, the URCNA should be doubly on guard to protect our Reformed Doctrines. We must not permit history repeat itself and have these very same doctrines we sought to preserve taken away from us yet again.

Our federation has only been in existence a few years. Already our last Synod was presented with an unorthodox version of the creation story called the "Framework Theory". Basically the theory denies the literal six twenty-four hour days, as revealed in the scriptures.

Sound familiar?

It's the same old story all over again. God apparently misspoke himself when He referred to days!

Following a lengthy discussion

Synod voted to reject the proposal. However, it was not a unanimous vote. Can we infer from this vote that we have ministers and elders in our federation who do not agree with our doctrinal stand on creation? Already we may be a house divided against itself.

Synod Escondido was somewhat of the opinion that it should compromise, apparently for the sake of unity. They agreed to change, by referring to DAY as "Historical Days" instead to the literal twenty-four hour days, as revealed in Genesis.

Does this compromise allow for various interpretations, including that for periods of time? Has Synod, by the use of the single word "Historical" opened a Pandora's box to accommodate various interpretations on creation, and has this nullified our doctrinal stand on the subject of creation?

May we as a federation remain on guard that the desire of our heart is to serve the unchanging God through obedience to His uncompromising Word.

Mr. Dow R. Haan Sr. is a member of the Covenant United Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He is a regular contributor to *The Outlook*.

Sound Bites

Torch and Trumpet 1969

February 1969

“No preacher is furnished to preach simply by possessing a gift to analyze a text and by the ability to lay it out in verbal form! If the word he would preach to others has not first of all been the instrument of his own personal indoctrination and instruction unto sanctification, he is not fit to declare it unto others.”

“The Word of God must be to us first of all, that Book which we relish because here we see the face of God whom we love, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ.”

“The problem with our preaching is the shoddiness of our lives in the realm of practical piety as expressed in domestic life and in our speech.”

“You are never free to be an instrument of blessing to your people unless you are free from the effects of their smiles and their frowns.”

What's Wrong With Preaching Today?

Albert N. Martin

March 1969

“All who listen to us preach for any measure of time should come to the conclusion after sitting under our ministries, that unless they repent and bring forth the fruits of repentance, they shall perish even though their heads may be packed full of

objective and correct orthodoxy.”

“...we are lulling our people to sleep through our failure to set before them in a close experimental way the marks of true faith as opposed to the faith of demons.”

What's Wrong With Preaching Today?

Albert N. Martin

May 1969

“Christian action, properly conceived, is always reformational. It confronts an apostate world, under the grip of a false world-and-life view and moving in the wrong direction, with the call of Christ to reform, to be transformed.”

A Call to Christian Communal Action

B. J. Haan

“As Reformed Christians, we have the message which the world needs. We have to bring this to the people of our world, here and now. Christianity alone has the answer. Now, this isn't anything new, but we don't act as if we really believed it.”

“For a Time Such as This”

John Zinkand

July 1969

Let's admit: Preaching that is truly irrelevant is not preaching at all! It may be soothing or pleasing or something, but it simply isn't Biblical preaching.”

“If our sermonizing is sweet rather than prophetic, a palliative rather than serious, conversion and repentance-demanding admonition, then we had better get on our knees before the Lord.”

Why Christian Reformed Youth Are Turned Off by Present Forms of Worship

John H. Piersma

October 1969

“...the clergy in the CRC are a tight-knit little fraternity who look upon each other with rose-colored glasses. Privately they may discuss the faults of a brother in the clergy with candor and detail. Before the public, that is on the floor of classis or synod, however, the same men refuse to lift a finger toward the discipline of a fellow member of the clergy.”

“We believe that we are too conservative to find a comfortable home in the CRC today.”

What About CRC-RCA Merger?

Gordon H. Girod

“Not only does there appear to be a growing lack of interest in Christian instruction - as well as a frightening loss of understanding of what it is all about - but also, more ominously, the spirit of secularism has infiltrated our own ranks so successfully that by and large we have become incapable of distinguishing friend from foe. What passes for sound Christian education is more often than not a thoroughly secular affair.”

The Enemy Within: Secularism in Christian Education

John Van Dyk



November 1969

“When the sermon has lost its meat and authority, then the pastor needs candles, kneelings, pulpit switching, offertory prayers with the back to the congregation, cantatas that minimize sermons - anything to fill up the lack of the Word of God.”

* * * * *

“The answer to the problem of the restless church and declining attendance is not the shortening of the sermon and filling the lag with liturgical trappings, but is the precise opposite: in expounding the eternal Word of God.”

The Underground Church
Edwin H. Palmer

The New Perspective on Paul

The Contribution of N.T. Wright (1)

Of all the authors who are to some extent identified with the “new perspective on Paul,” perhaps none is as prolific or popularly known as Nicholas Thomas (“Tom”) Wright. Though Wright prefers not to be identified with some monochrome development known as “the new perspective,” he clearly writes as one convinced that a return to the older, Reformation view would be to turn back the clock.¹ In the light of the writings of Sanders, Dunn, and others, Wright is convinced that we need to take a “fresh” look at the biblical, and especially Pauline, texts, without the encumbrance of the traditional formulations and confessional (especially polemical) positions of the sixteenth century.

Unlike some of the prominent authors associated with the new perspective, Wright regards himself as an evangelical whose commitment to the great tenets of Christian orthodoxy is unswerving. Though he acknowledges that he no longer sees things in black and white as he once did, Wright affirms that he remains a “deeply orthodox theologian” who wants to present a fresh reading and defense of the gospel to the (post-) modern world.

In 1999 *Christianity Today* fea-

tured Wright in an article by Tim Stafford, who described him as “a big-hearted, friendly bear of a man, who loves to talk, loves to debate on television, loves to preach, and thoroughly enjoys being dean of Lichfield Cathedral near Birmingham, England.”² As this description suggests, Wright represents a rare combination of scholarship and churchmanship. Not only is he the author of a number of wide-ranging studies in the New Testament scholarship, but he is also an Anglican divine who is deeply committed to the ministry of the gospel within the church.³ In addition to his advocacy of a new reading of the apostle Paul, Wright is known for his contributions to New Testament studies generally, and to the contemporary “third quest” for the historical Jesus. One reason Wright is regarded highly by many evangelicals is his defense of such things as the physical resurrection of Christ, and the historical reliability of the main lines of the New Testament witness concerning Christ. Due to Wright’s scholarly reputation and success in advocating positions that are relatively conservative by the standards of critical scholarship, he enjoys considerable favor among evangelicals. Wright’s views re-

Wright regards himself as an evangelical whose commitment to the great tenets of Christian orthodoxy is unswerving.

garding Paul's gospel and the doctrine of justification, therefore, are especially appealing even within the evangelical and Reformed community.

Wright and the "New Perspective"

Despite Wright's reluctance to identify himself with anything so monolithic as "the new perspective on Paul," he is persuaded that the writings of Sanders and other advocates of a new perspective require a fresh reading of Paul. The contributions of Sanders and Dunn to a new view of Judaism and the historical context for reading the New Testament and the writings of the apostle Paul, have altered irrevocably the landscape of biblical studies. Consequently, any simple return to the past, particularly to the debates and positions of the sixteenth century Reformation, would be an irresponsible approach for contemporary New Testament studies. So far as Wright is concerned, the new approach to Pauline studies is here to stay. This is true in at least two crucial respects.

First, Wright fully agrees with the position of E. P. Sanders, James D. G. Dunn, and other authors identified with the new perspective, that Judaism at the time of the writing of the New Testament was not a form of legalism. The idea, which played such an important, even decisive role in the Reformation understanding of the apostle Paul, that the Judaizers taught salvation on the basis of works righteousness, is largely a fiction. Sanders and others have conclusively demonstrated that Judaism emphasized the grace of God as the basis for his covenant with Israel. The role of works in Ju-

daism was merely one of "maintaining" the covenant relationship, and not one of establishing the basis for "entrance into" fellowship with God. This means that, whatever the apostle Paul's problems with Judaism were, they could not be directed to legalism, since we know that no such legalism was advocated by Judaism in Paul's day.

Wright's endorsement of Sanders' new view of Judaism and its importance for understanding Paul's gospel is unmistakable. As he puts it, "the tradition of Pauline interpretation has manufactured a false Paul by manufacturing a false Judaism

The problem with the Judaizer's appeal to the "works of the law" was not its legalism, Wright insists, but its perverted nationalism.

for him to oppose."⁴ This tradition of Pauline interpretation, because it identifies Judaism as a form of legalism that anticipated the Medieval Roman Catholic teaching of salvation by faith plus works, fails to identify properly the true target of Paul's polemic in his presentation of the doctrine of justification. Indeed, the Reformation's understanding of the gospel of free justification amounts to what Wright terms "the retrojection of the Protestant Catholic debate into ancient history, with Judaism taking the role of Catholicism and Christianity the

role of Lutheranism."⁵ Because the Reformation misunderstood the problem to which Paul was actually responding, it failed to grasp the real meaning of Paul's teaching on justification by faith.

Second, in addition to his agreement with Sanders' general description of Judaism as a non-legalistic religion, Wright also makes considerable use of Dunn's interpretation of Paul's dispute with the Judaizers and their understanding of the "works of the law." The problem with the Judaizer's appeal to the "works of the law" was not its legalism, Wright insists, but its *perverted nationalism*. The Pauline expression, "the works of the law," does not refer to a legalistic claim regarding how sinners can find favor with God by obeying the law, but to the nationalistic Jewish claim that God's covenant promise only extends to the Jews. The "works of the law" are what Dunn calls "boundary markers," those acts of conformity to the law that served to distinguish the Jewish community from the Gentiles.

If we ask how it is that Israel has missed her vocation, Paul's answer is that she is guilty not of 'legalism' or 'works-righteousness' but of what I call 'national righteousness', the belief that fleshly Jewish descent guarantees membership of God's true covenant people. ... Within this 'national righteousness', the law functions not as a legalist's ladder but as a charter of national privilege, so that, for the Jew, possession of the law is three parts of



salvation: and circumcision functions not as a ritualist's outward show but as a badge of national privilege.⁶

The problem Paul confronted in his dispute with the Judaizers was a "boasting" in national privilege, and an unwillingness to acknowledge that the covenant promise extends to Gentile as well as Jew.⁷ The Reformation claim, therefore, that Paul was opposing legalism when he articulated his doctrine of justification misses the mark rather widely. Paul was not opposing legalism, but nationalism. Consequently, the Reformation's reading of Paul transposes his understanding into a radically different key, when it treats the Judaizers as prototypes of a Roman Catholic doctrine of justification by (grace plus) works.

Wright's View of Justification by Faith

Wright's understanding of Paul's doctrine of justification by faith assumes these two pillars of the new perspective. Whatever the apostle Paul might mean by his insistence that justification is by faith and not by works of the law, it cannot be that sinners (whether Jew or Gentile) are unable to obtain favor with God on the basis of their obedience to the law. Though this may well be true, no one in Paul's day would have thought otherwise. Paul's doctrine of justification must be read in the historical context of the first century, and in the light of the Old Testament's teaching regarding the promise of the covenant. When Paul's gospel is read in this way, which requires that we set aside the mistaken approach of the Reformation, we will find that "what

Saint Paul really said" was rather different than what many have historically claimed.

The "gospel" according to Wright

Before taking up directly Wright's view of justification, it is important to note that he regards the doctrine of justification to be a subordinate theme in Paul's understanding of the gospel. Though it is often assumed that the gospel is a "system of how people get saved," Wright insists that this seriously misrepresents the real meaning of the gospel (p. 45). The gospel does not answer

Though it is often assumed that the gospel is a "system of how people get saved," Wright insists that this seriously misrepresents the real meaning of the gospel.

the question of the guilty sinner, "how can I find favor with God?" (compare, e.g., Luther), but rather it answers the question, "who is Lord?" One of the unfortunate features of the Reformation and much evangelical thinking is that it reduces the gospel to "a message about 'how one gets saved,' in an individual and ahistorical sense" (p. 60). In this kind of thinking, the focus of attention, so far as the gospel is concerned, is upon "something that in older theology would be called an *ordo salutis*, an order of salvation" (pp. 40-1). According to

Wright, this kind of an approach can only distort Paul's gospel and fails to do justice to the broader historical background and significance of Christ's saving work. All of the focus in this approach to the gospel is narrowly fixed upon the issue of the individual's relationship with God, and not upon the reach of God's world-transforming power proclaimed in the gospel concerning Jesus Christ. Because of this inappropriate focus upon the salvation of individual sinners, the older Reformation tradition was bound to exaggerate the importance of the doctrine of justification. Even were its understanding of justification correct (which it is not), it tends to focus upon what is only a subordinate theme in Paul's proclamation of the gospel.

If the gospel according to Wright is not primarily about how people get saved, then what is its primary focus? Wright answers this question by insisting that the basic message of the gospel focuses upon *the lordship of Jesus Christ*.

Paul's new vocation involved him not so much in the enjoyment and propagation of a new religious experience, as in the announcement of what he saw as a public fact: that the crucified Jesus of Nazareth had been raised from the dead by Israel's God; that he had thereby been vindicated as Israel's Messiah; that, surprising though it might seem, he was therefore the Lord of the whole world. (P. 40)

We will have occasion to return to the question of what Wright means

by the cross of Christ, especially in terms of its importance for justification. Here it only needs to be noted that Wright insists that the principal message of the gospel is that *Jesus is Lord and king*. Through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the one true God, who is the creator of the world, has won a “liberating victory . . . over all the enslaving powers that have usurped his authority” (p. 47). Though Wright does not often clearly define what he means by the lordship of Jesus Christ, he does offer the following summary description:

Paul discovered, at the heart of his missionary practice, that when he announced the lordship of Jesus Christ, the sovereignty of King Jesus, the very announcement was the means by which the living God reached out with love and changed the hearts and lives of men and women, forming them into a community of love across traditional barriers, liberating them from paganism which had held them captive, enabling them to become, for the first time, the truly human beings they were meant to be.” (P. 61).

The great theme of the gospel is this message of Jesus’ lordship and its life- and world-transforming significance. This, rather than the salvation of individual sinners, is the real interest of Paul’s preaching.

Justification is about who belongs to God’s family

If the gospel, according to Wright, is not about how people get saved, but the proclamation that Jesus is

Lord, this has implications for our understanding of what Paul means by justification. This doctrine, though an essential, albeit subordinate theme in Paul’s preaching, does not address the issue of how guilty sinners can find favor or standing with God. This would be to assume that Paul’s gospel focuses upon the salvation of the individual rather than upon the lordship of Jesus Christ and the consequences of that lordship for the realization of God’s covenant promises. However, when we view the gospel in terms of the lordship of Jesus Christ, the proper meaning and place of the doctrine of justification

When we view the gospel in terms of the lordship of Jesus Christ, the proper meaning and place of the doctrine of justification becomes apparent.

becomes apparent. “Let us,” says Wright, “be quite clear. ‘The gospel’ is the announcement of Jesus’ lordship, which works with power to bring people into the family of Abraham, now redefined around Jesus Christ and characterized solely by faith in him. ‘Justification’ is the doctrine which insists that all those who have this faith belong as full members of this family, on this basis and no other” (p. 133). As this statement suggests, justification has to do with the question, how does the work of Christ confirm that all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, belong to the one family of God?

Endnotes

¹ “A Reformation & Revival Journal Interview with N. T. Wright: Part One,” *Reformation & Revival Journal* 11/1 (Winter, 2002): 117-39. The language, “turning back the clock,” is Wright’s (p. 128).

² *Christianity Today* (Feb. 8, 1999), p. 43.

³ Among Wright’s substantial volumes in New Testament studies and in the contemporary “third quest” for the historical Jesus, are the following: *Jesus and the Victory of God*, vol. 2 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996); *The New Testament and the People of God*, vol. 1 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); and *Who Was Jesus?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).

⁴ “The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith,” *Tyndale Bulletin* (1978): p. 78.

⁵ “The Paul of History,” p. 80.

⁶ “The Paul of History,” p. 65.

⁷ *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 128-9. Cf. N. T. Wright, “The Law in Romans 2,” in *Paul and the Mosaic Law*, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 139-43. In the following, references to *What Saint Paul Really Said* will normally be cited in parentheses in the text of my article.

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How It Was

And How It Is

The clock in the belfry of the small church across the pond sounded loud and clear. It had just struck the midnight hour.

The midnight concert was in full swing. Katydid in the trees were serenading the insects below, the violin section of crickets sounding off on the high notes. The cymbals of cow bells in the meadow, the barking dog in the distance all join in the harmony. The back ground music furnished by the hoot owl, and not to forget, nature's own boom box, the bull frog in the pond completed nature's midnight choir. Unknowingly, the creatures were praising their Creator

Rocking alone in that old creaking rocking chair I gazed out on what seemed to be a world at peace. The psalmist, years ago, remembered and thought on the days of Old — Psalm 143. Many thoughts went through my mind of days long gone by, which brings me to

How It Was

Sunday mornings, very warm and sticky. O'le Ed'ard is pulling the bell rope calling the faithful to worship. Those were days when worshipers arrived at church under their own power - strong and sturdy foot-mobiles. Oldsmobiles were still in the future.

No narthex, we went right into the Sanctuary. Silence prevailed. Some early comers were praying, some reading the Canons of Dort, Bibles or what ever. You could hear a pin drop. If any Civil War Veteran were

there he would have been reminded of "The stillness at Appomattox." It was an atmosphere of reverence in the house of prayer.

The service is about to begin, the congregation is comfortably seated on the hard wooden slide easy benches. No padded seats in those days, except for a few ladies who preferred to carry pillows from home.

The sermon was an hour, more or less, mostly a little less. This proved to be a grueling and uncomfortable experience for the restless and weary ones on those hot summer days. Sit still or else, while the man on the platform kept throwing his bait across that sea of humanity before him. After all, ministers are fishers of men. We kids sat through all this.

The cooling system was hand powered by those who felt the need. Fans were furnished free through the generosity and courtesy of the funeral directors, Joldersma and Klein and the Langeland Brothers. On one side of the fan was a beautiful picture of the Good Shepherd, the other side a picture of the funeral parlor plus their ad. That created a little stir among some of the oldsters. Advertising on the Sabbath and of all things in the house of prayer! This was competition with the *Kalamazoo Gazette* and the *Hollandsche Amerikaan*. It soon blew over by a non spiritual wind. The fans remained in the pews, and the funeral directors are still with us, doing business as usual.

How It Is

The difference is as great as night is from day. What's this I hear? "Just an old Fogey" You are right. The 20th century was only eight years and eight days old when I arrived.

How times have changed. The beautiful new church buildings of today have under one roof, what is known as the narthex, a sort of outer court, where people gather in groups to tell one another about their experiences of the past week. Just stand still and listen. It's Tom, Dick and Harry trying hard to out do Sue, Liz, and Mary. With everyone talking through each other it sounds like an "after wedding" party celebration, or sad to say, like a county fair. All this shatters the silence and the stillness of the sanctuary. Conducive to worship? You are the answer.

*Keep silence friend,
in reverence meet
We gather here,
God's face to seek.
Keep silence friends
for some have come
This day to pray,
"Thy will be done."
And some from
thankful hearts of praise
Their voice in
gratitude to raise.
Keep silence friend,
let Him speak anew
To every heart
- perhaps to you.*

At 94, **Mr. Janus Vaar** is the second oldest member of the Covenant United Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Reading Psalm 2

Happy New Year! Great words—another year past and another day closer to the Day when the Lord will descend with glory. Yet events of the day do not always make us feel so happy. Muslim legalism and the terrorist threat on the one side, post-modernistic relativism and the slavery of ignorance on the other, along with the storm clouds of economic gloom seem more than just threatening. Christ said the gates of Hades will not prevail against the church (Matt.16:18). Yet it is easy to become unsettled. What will the year bring?

Psalm 2 gives us Words of confidence for the coming year and the coming Day! Through the inspired poet's words we get a glimpse into the courts of the worldly kings. The royal courts of these enemy kings and nations are the places of scheming rage and commotion. The nations are worked up for they must acknowledge God. They are upset because they refuse to acknowledge God. They set themselves up against the Anointed One.

Looking in at the scene the church sings, "Wherefore do the nations rage?" What are these enemy kings thinking? They will defeat our God? Don't they know what God has done to a faithless Pharaoh and his armies? King Saul raged against God's anointed David to no avail. When God chose Solomon, Absalom and Sheba raged against God and tried to take over the kingdom and met failure. Why do they plot futility?

We know that our King is God's

King, and He will defeat all the enemies. So why do they bother? They cannot escape the power of God. Even as they confederate together against the one God they are no match for His power. They tried with their tower of Babel too and the LORD divided them!

The church sings of her confidence in God and His Anointed, the Messiah or the Christ. Christ must reign until all enemies have been

***Far from earth's
commotion it is
the place of a
confident peace!***

placed under His feet (I Cor.15:25). In Rev. 12:1-5 we read of the woman who gives birth to the child who was to rule the nations with a rod of iron. The red dragon seeks to devour the child but the child ascends to heaven and the church is given a place of safety. Even Satan cannot halt the domination of the Almighty!

The Pharisees and Sadducees plotted in vain when they put the Christ to death. Our Father was victorious and Christ won the victory. As Hades rages and the enemies of the cross seek our destruction, they, too, plot in vain. Though the U. S. and Canadian governments and public education systems do all they

can to stop even the mention of God, His Son, and the Word, theirs is an exercise in futility. They cannot stop God. They cannot defeat him.

See heaven! Far from earth's commotion it is the place of a confident peace! God sits in the heavens and He laughs (verse 4). God will further increase the agitation of the nations. When he speaks they will listen and they will be afraid. They will be further agitated and terrified of the Most High! God speaks and He says, "I have installed my king on the holy mountain of Zion." The created son of God, Adam, failed. The only begotten Son of God has been given dominion over the earth forever!

In the courtroom of God the Anointed speaks. The Anointed tells all through this song of the church that He is the Son of God. God has said to Him, "You are my Son today I have begotten you." He directs our attention to His Father who is in heaven. He tells the world that now all power has been given to Him even before He came to earth. He will rule and He does rule with an iron rod with might and judgment. He speaks in terms of the covenant made to David recorded in II Sam 7 where obedience to the Father would ensure a successful reign for David's son. And so Christ prayed in John 17:5, "Not my will but yours be done." Executing His Father's will by dying on the cross He took on the forces of darkness and drove them away. Christ tells how the Father has promised to give Him the nations of the earth for an inheritance. Now, Christ has all the nations in His hand. He has ascended to the right hand of the Father. His Kingdom shall never end. Who will



oppose Him? Like a child smashing a vase made of clay to pieces so Christ can do to all the nations. No one can withstand His power! It is the year of our Lord 2003! Be of good cheer!

One more time in Psalm 2, the scene changes and we see that God from His court speaks to the kings of the earth. "Be wise," He says, "O Kings, be instructed. You judges serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling." Here God, by our singing, speaks to the wicked kings and nations. So we with Psalm 2 sing to the nations, "Wizen up! Look around you! There is no hope for your plans so bend the knee and listen now. Be instructed. Kiss the Son, (that is to show honor to Him) and there will still be hope for you. If you seek to please God and escape the horrible judgment then you must worship the Son." Christ said in John 5:23b, "He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him." Paul wrote, "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11).

So Psalm 2 sings of assurance but we also sing a warning to the world for God's glory. Woe to the man, a king or not, who rejects the Anointed! He will be destroyed. And this happens when his wrath is kindled only a little. Imagine the horror for the one who will have to confront the full brunt of His fury! It is our calling to warn them and call them into our confidence! Psalm 2 helps us to do that. And Psalm 2

reminds us that we can move into the battle knowing that our King will not be defeated and so we shall be more than conquerors!

Happy New Year! Blessed are they who put their trust in Him! The world needs to hear that they have no hope if they would oppose our God and His Son. There is only one safe place and that is in the arms of our Father who has saved us through the Son's death on the cross. He is the risen and Ascended Lord. The nations will fail but God will not. Adam failed, Jesus Christ did not.

Let us finish now with Matthew 28:18-20, Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all

nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

May God prosper us all for His Kingdom in 2003! Trust and be confident. Happy New Year - He's coming soon!

Rev. Al Bezuyen is the pastor of the Trinity Orthodox Reformed Church in St. Catharines, Ontario.

Arthur Besteman

God's People, My Parish

Hattie was an ardent supporter of Christian education. Her husband had been a Christian School administrator. On a regular basis we saw her come to the church basement to join the ladies who were quilting on behalf of the local Christian School. One year Hattie suffered a heart attack. After a prolonged hospitalization and convalescence she was able to return home. Not long afterward it was time for the annual Christian School bazaar, a major fundraiser for the cause of Christian education. We found Hattie staffing one of the sales tables in the school gymnasium. When I expressed concern about the hours she was putting in at the bazaar so soon after her heart attack she simply said, "This is

where I want to be."

Hattie's husband had died some years before we met her. At the time that I became her pastor she had also experienced the deaths of three adult children who had succumbed to the same disease which had been the cause of her husband's death. She was grateful that she still had a son and a daughter. During the years of our ministry her son submitted to surgery and after some months of suffering died having also been diagnosed with the same illness that had claimed his father and his older siblings. Hattie was comforted in knowing that her son was ready to die and had been delivered from his suffering.



Book Reviews

And then the phone call came that her daughter whom Hattie had assisted a great deal during the years of her terminable illness had died. I quickly prepared to call on Hattie. As I passed through the kitchen on the way out of the parsonage I said to my wife, "Pray for me, I don't know what I can say to Hattie." When I walked into Hattie's home this white haired mother who had already experienced so much sorrow in her life and who had just been bereaved of her last child was standing near the door waiting to greet me. I embraced her and with emotion choked voice said, "Hattie, I am so sorry, I don't know what to say." She calmly replied, "It's alright, Pastor, Janet is with the Lord, she is in glory now." And I was filled with awe as I was reminded again so forcefully that God's grace is sufficient, that Christians do not mourn without hope, that the truth of the resurrection does take the sting out of death, that the comfort of the Christian life is real.

Rev. Arthur Besteman is an emeritus minister who lives in Caledonia, Michigan. He is a member of the Bethany URC of Wyoming, Michigan.

Van der Jagt, Anton, *The Secret Mission: A Huguenot's Dangerous Adventures in the Land of Persecution* (based on historical facts). Neerlandia, AB / Pella, IA: Inheritance Publications, 2000. 187 pp. \$14.95 CN, \$10.95, paperback.

Thanks to the interest and ingenuity of the publisher and his wife, the Janssens, a fine series of novels called the *Huguenot Inheritance Series* is being put together. The volume we look at this month is number two.

At present, two volumes are yet to be published. The first two are more recent writings; the rest are reprints of books about one hundred years old. Thus the writing style does vary.

At the end of Van der Jagt's volume there is a short and helpful history of the French Reformed Church. The French Protestants were called "Huguenots". Many Dutch people have their roots in those staunch but persecuted families. The reading of this short essay is a must for all who claim to be Reformed.

Van der Jagt's story is about a young man, a Huguenot, who escaped to Holland from France. He returns on an official, but secret, mission of the Dutch government. Besides, he has a personal mission: to locate his father who is serving as a galley slave - the lot of many a Huguenot. The story lays before the reader his spiritual courage as

he accomplishes both of his missions.

While this volume is historical fiction, it is based upon facts. Even some real names are used and the references to them are actually true. There is no better way to get introduced to historical events than by means of historical fiction. Of course, our interest should go beyond the fiction; but our interest in what is beyond should be piqued by it. It might do us and our youth some good to know something of the human fear, the sufferings, and the deep trust these Reformed people experienced. Will we one day experience the same?

This is certainly an important book for young people and adults, alike.

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This Is My Outlook

Recently the *Grand Rapids Press* and the *Kalamazoo Gazette* reported that a major supermarket chain, Meijers, is being sued for firing a member of the Christian Reformed Church who refused to work on Sundays for religious reasons. The federal government accused Meijer Inc. of violating the civil rights of a cake decorator claiming that the mega store “failed to provide a reasonable accommodation to the known religious practice” of the individual who filed the suit.

Excellent, I thought. Too many times people from our churches have been denied jobs because they would rather be in church on the Lord’s Day. Again and again, people have applied to EOE [equal opportunity employer] jobs only to find out that the “equal” did not include those who seek to honor God on His day.

It was high time that somebody challenged the system! After all EOE was meant to refer to religion as well as race. How nice to see the federal government take the side of the dedicated Christian.

Then I read the rest of the article. While it seemed the federal government was ready to support the young lady for her religious convictions, her church was not. Both newspapers included an interview with Dr. Henry De Moor of Calvin Theological Seminary. Dr. De Moor was cited as being a man who “trains CRC ministers” and an “expert on church polity.”

Let me quote what Dr. De Moor said:

“In view of current society, it’s hard for me to embrace that principle [not working on Sunday]. If every Christian insisted that we’re not going to work on Sunday, I suspect there wouldn’t be enough people to do the work.”

Would that be so bad? Some of those stores that are open on Sunday might actually have to close if there weren’t enough people to work. Didn’t the Lord give us six days to buy groceries? Do I really need to buy those King Peppermints on Sunday or could I wait until Monday? I grew up learning that works of worship, mercy, and necessity were permitted on the Lord’s Day and none other. Can decorating a cake be compared to pulling an ox out of a pit?

If every Christian insisted on not working on Sunday, maybe there would also be a lot of Christians who wouldn’t shop on Sunday. Maybe instead of keeping the Sabbath **H**oly, they all could, as God commands, keep the Sabbath **D**ay holy instead.

Dr. De Moor goes on to say in the interview: “Ethically, a better position might be to tell church elders they work one Sunday a month. If they say they are conscious of the Fourth Commandment and honor it as much as they can, I’m sure the elders would be satisfied.”

My prayer is that both the *Grand Rapids Press* and the *Kalamazoo Gazette* misquoted Dr. De Moor. After all, couldn’t the Israelites have used that same logic to justify worshipping Baal and basically doing whatever was right in their own eyes as long as those around them were doing it too? Couldn’t I use the very same logic and say: “In view of current society, where marriage is ridiculed, fidelity mocked, and virginity scorned, I have told my church elders that I am conscious of the Seventh Commandment and honor it as much as I can, only transgressing it once a month”?

As quoted earlier in this issue, God said: “I am the Lord; I change not.” We are called to witness to the current society, not adjust our lives to it.

The picture on page twenty seems to sum up the thinking of our so-called Christian society. It says “God Bless America” and right underneath it the words: “Now Open on Sunday”. We seek His blessing, but not His face.

Rev. Wybren Oord is the pastor of the Covenant United Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan and editor of *The Outlook*.

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(continued from page 9)

midst of the kingdoms of this world. When that is being done, I believe the Lord will add to the church such as are being saved (Howard G. Hageman in *Reformed Journal*).

Rev. Jelle Tuininga is an emeritus pastor in the URC living in Lethbridge, Alberta.

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