

Twentieth Century Reformed Thinking Analysed And Evaluated

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PART ONE: REFORMED-LUTHERAN DIALOG TODAY

On October 1, 1974, some measure of fellowship between European Reformed, United, and Lutheran churches went into effect. This is what fifty-one representatives of their churches in sixteen countries decided at a meeting held from March 12 to March 16 in 1973, at Leuenberg. A seventh draft of a fellowship document was at that time distributed to participating church bodies with the request that they give their approval to this text by September 30, 1974. On the next day church fellowship in the sense intended in the so-called Leuenberg Agreement was to go into effect for "those churches from whom an official acceptance has been received by the World Council of Churches with copies to the two world confessional bodies, the Lutheran World Federation and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches."¹ By the end of the year 80 church bodies had subscribed to the Leuenberg Agreement.

The date, October 1, 1974, and its significance is mentioned at the outset of this discussion of current Reformed thinking as a *captatio benevolentiae* device to underscore the timeliness and relevancy of the assigned topic. The Leuenberg event occurring less than two decades ago certainly indicates that, much as the roots of our subject tap the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, the complications and applications are very much a *hic et nunc* and also a *cras et intra annum* matter, the significance of which can hardly be sufficiently appreciated by us in this time of rapid development and startling change.

As earlier Reformed-Lutheran union effort in 1817, with much more modest ecumenical intentions and with much shorter geographical extensions, profoundly affected our own synod's beginnings a third of a century later and to this day involves 14,000,000 Lutherans in Union churches. *Leuenberg, October 1, 1974*, is a dateline that is by no means a household word, but it may well become a part of a most significant chapter in the church history that interests us most. Whatever, the future outcome, *Leuenberg, October 1, 1974*, makes it obvious that we could do worse at this time than to endeavor to analyze and evaluate current Reformed thinking.

The thoroughly practical minded among us may raise the objection at this point that Leuenberg is limited to European churches and that good Americans and good American theologians by now know better than to get involved in European affairs and their entangling alliances. It must be remembered, however, that Europe's ecclesiastical developments and theological innovations have a way of crossing the Atlantic and becoming our problems in about five or ten years. What is even more to the point, however, in this connection is an American counterpart of Leuenberg. From February 1962 to February 1966 members of the North American Area of the World Alliance of Reformed and Presbyterian Churches and of the U.S.A. National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation and some non-members, notably the Christian Reformed Church, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, held doctrinal consultations which culminated in their "Report to the Sponsoring Confessional Organizations" and its startling concluding paragraph:

As a result of our studies and discussions we see no insuperable obstacles to

pulpit and altar fellowship and, therefore, we recommend to our parent bodies that they encourage their constituent churches to enter into discussions looking forward to intercommunion and the fuller recognition of one another's ministries.²

From 1966 to 1971 neither the "Report" nor the essays and summaries of the 1962-1966 discussions, published in *Marburg Revisited*, had evoked any significant attention or implementation at either the grassroots or ivory tower levels. Then news of the "Leuenberg Concord," adopted at Leuenberg in the fall of 1971, revived interest in Reformed Lutheran dialog, and conversations were resumed at Princeton in April 1972. One of the Missouri theologians at Princeton, Dr. Eugene Klug then of Springfield, has supplied an extensive account of the two-day discussions in the September 1972 *Springfielder* from which much of the subsequent material is drawn.³

The mood at Princeton favored moving on from *Marburg Revisited* to altar and pulpit fellowship and either endorsing the "Leuenberg Concord" or producing an American version or adaptation. Prof. Weiblen's paper on "The Church in Dialogue in 1972" pushed for negotiations revolving around working together rather than involving the removal of doctrinal differences. The unity to be sought and achieved should be in terms of wide pluralism, including differences in doctrine.

This nominally Lutheran paper was far outdistanced in the race for Lutheran-Reformed union by a treatment of "Beyond Leuenberg" by Princeton's Doctor Migliore in which it was contended that "Leuenberg" had not gone far enough in areas of the "Gospel-in-action," or in the ethical thrust of the Gospel in the social, economic and political spheres and in problems of racism, militarism, poverty and sex. Lutheran objections were raised to this typically modern Reformed perversion of the church's mission and of the Gospel's function, but the general feeling was that such differences are no barrier for altar and pulpit fellowship.

A third paper, "Marburg Revisited in the Light of 1972," by the Missouri Synod's Doctor Ralph Bohlmann confronted the Princeton gathering with the reaction of confessional Lutheranism to previous, present, and future Reformed-Lutheran dialog. It emphasized the principle that doctrinal consensus was the necessary basis for church fellowship and insisted that to claim that "no insuperable obstacles" to altar and pulpit fellowship remained was to fly in the face of the obvious fact that there still were very basic theological differences in the doctrines of Lord's Supper, Creation and Redemption, Justification and Sanctification, and even in the meaning of Confessional subscription.

Reaction was predictable and typical. Both the Reformed, who insisted that they had never had any problems about inter-communion, and the other Lutherans, who were rapidly learning from them, equated the position that doctrinal agreement is the necessary basis for fellowship with the impossible mission of "trying to nail down or box the eternal truth" or "absolutizing the language of Jesus." Even though a seeming impasse had been reached, a compromise arrangement was worked out, chiefly by Reformed conservatives, whereby Missouri would continue to take part in the discussions so long as the impression would not be given in publicity and press releases and the attitude would not prevail in the conversations that either *Marburg Revisited* or the "Leuenberg Concord" was a sufficient basis for fellowship.

Not too much publicity attended subsequent American Reformed-Lutheran conversations, no doubt because the situation called for more realism in the reports than the usual ecumenical optimism, but the projected second round of talks extending over a three-year period ran on schedule.

In mid-November of 1972 in Chicago dialog participants developed a critique of the

“Leuenberg Concord” in which strengths and weaknesses were given attention. It was stated that the group would also continue to explore other sources for a possible consensus statement which aims at effecting fuller expressions of church fellowship.” This proposed statement, it was asserted, might include an explanation of “how we as American Lutheran and Reformed Christians have come to a point of wanting to bring to expression our common affirmation of the gospel” and an exploration of what “the meaning of the gospel - so experienced and expressed - is for fuller expression of church fellowship, witness and service.”⁴

At the New York meeting from March 8 to March 10, 1973, a beginning was made in discussing the critical subject of the Lord’s Supper. Among the papers was one by Doctor Robert Paul of the United Church of Christ, then teaching at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, on the general subject of “The Table of the Lord.” At this meeting the agenda was set for the fall meeting in Grand Rapids on October 26-27. At Grand Rapids discussions centered on requirements for admitting communicants to Holy Communion, on the role of the Sacrament in the life of the Church, on the disciplinary functions of Holy Communion and its relation to other doctrines, and on ways to overcome present obstacles to full church fellowship. Papers giving the official church body positions on these subjects were presented at the October meeting.⁵

Two dialogs in 1974 completed this second round of discussions. As could be assumed, the final outcomes reflected the enlarged participation of conservatives on both sides in this series of talks as compared to the representation at earlier conversations completed in 1966. As will be recalled, the 1966 premise was that there were “no insuperable obstacles” to Reformed-Lutheran altar and pulpit fellowship and the conclusion that the church bodies involved should get at “discussions looking forward to inter-communion and the fuller recognition of one another’s ministries.”⁶

In 1974, however, no joint report of the Lutheran-Reformed Dialogue participants could be issued. Missouri participants, Doctors Bohlmann, Tepker, and Klug, refused to sign the report because, as Dr. Klug reported in the June 1975 *Springfielder*, the report “included statements of consensus in regard to doctrinal points which had not in fact been resolved.”

The separate report of the Missouri men, attached to the report just mentioned, insisted that the Dialogue “conferees had not:”

- attained a genuine basis for fellowship;
- reconciled any existing doctrinal differences, even though they have somewhat inconsistently admitted “serious errors;”
- demonstrated valid grounds for accepting the Leuenberg Agreement of 1973;
- shown *de facto* adherence to their respective Confessions, but have set them aside as viable instruments for the sake of declaring fellowship without formal agreement;
- recognized the seriousness of divergent methods of Scriptural interpretation, but merely profess that there is need for fresh hearing of the Gospel in the light of their [each of the conferees] understanding of Holy Scripture;”
- stated clearly the nature and content of the Gospel itself, but have sometimes obfuscated it with ambiguous references to contemporary issues.

Despite any temporary setback to Reformed-Lutheran cooperation that a conservative minority might effect in this instance or others, however, the realistic view would indicate that more and closer Reformed-Lutheran ties are a distinct possibility in the future. The whole trend of events suggests that an examination of these likely candidates for fellowship with Lutherans and of their current thinking is much more than an academic exercise without practical

implications or consequences.

The Autumn 1989 issue of the ECLA's *Lutheran Quarterly* provides a six-page article on "Lutheran-Methodists Relations" that carries this instance of Lutheran-Reformed dialog right up to the end of the previous decade. The summary simply substantiates the points made about earlier discussions.

This description of recent Reformed-Lutheran dialog in Europe and in our land is not offered in the interests of providing specific instances of Reformed thinking on definite points of doctrine for our critical analysis. After all, it would be unfair to blame the Reformed for everything that is produced by Leuenberg and its American counterpart since Lutherans are partners in the discussions and the conclusions. Rather, this lengthy introduction on recent Reformed-Lutheran dialog is to serve as an interest stimulant by underscoring the relevancy of the topic and is also to sketch a broad background of Reformed dialog participation against which to view specific stances on specific subjects to be treated later.

This overview of Reformed-Lutheran dialogs in recent times can also at the outset serve to suggest certain guidelines and ground rules for our discussion, to point out special difficulties and delimitations to be observed, and to call for definitions and distinctions to be made. These are matters that we will give attention to at this point.

Under thinking that is "Reformed" is included a wide range of doctrinal opinion and teaching. We are dealing with dozens of denominations. Within the larger of them are included a variety of schools of thought. A quarter century ago at Hoechst-Odenwald, Germany, at a meeting of Reformed systematic theologians called by the Department of Theology of the World Presbyterian Alliance an inventory of the current state of Reformed systematic theology was attempted. A Princeton participant reports on the results:

First and supremely, it [contemporary Reformed theology] was found to be characterized by diversity and variety. There is no longer one school of theological thought which can be said to dominate the scene. Barth's name was the most mentioned; but his shadow was across the consultation as that of one who had in large measure set the stage for the present theological task and yet as that of one beyond whom (and with whose encouragement) we must go toward routes still to be discovered.⁷

In this situation there will be exceptions to every generalization on "Reformed" thinking. Likewise, there will be exceptions to any generalization on the thinking in one of the larger of the Reformed denominations. The Scotch Presbyterian is not the United Presbyterian, nor the PCA Presbyterian, nor the Orthodox Presbyterian.

These difficulties will be minimized to an extent if we in our discussions concentrate more on the traditional Reformed bodies and their more typical theologies and less on the far left wings and schools. But even with these intended limitations, it will be difficult enough to cope with the broad scope of the topic that takes us into all churches that have roots running back to the reformers of the Sixteenth Century other than Luther and confronts us with their varied teachings in this current era of theological variety. It would appear to be a valid presupposition that this gathering will show special interest for and derive special benefit from a rather elaborate discussion of the more conservative Reformed wing, often termed "evangelical". Devoting the full fifth lecture to this conservatism in Reformed circles, its background and future, its strengths and weaknesses, its relations to us and ours to it, should prove to be a useful allocation of our time and thought. A more complete outline of the topic may well be introduced at this point. It is not any acme of logic or model of division, but rather a practical method of procedure, with main subjects suggested by a combination of familiar topics in systematic and comparative theology

and special highlights from recent dialogs conducted by Reformed and Lutheran Christians here and abroad.

At our five sessions we will divide the larger heading, “Twentieth Century Reformed Thinking Analyzed and Evaluated,” into these parts:

First Session: Recent Reformed-Lutheran Dialogs

- I. The Dialogs Described
 - A. “Leuenberg Concord”
 - B. American Variety
- II. Our Own Dialog on These Dialogs
 - A. Our Approach at These Discussions
 - B. Evaluating the Recent Dialogs

- III. The Reformed Confessional Stance Behind the Dialogs
 - A. Current Reformed Approach to Confessions
 - B. The 1967 Presbyterian Confession

Second Session: Revelation

- I. Two Erring Schools
 - A. Barthianism and Neo-orthodoxy
 - B. Liberals and Revelation

- II. Bible Attributes
 - A. Inspiration
 - B. Inerrancy

- III. Bible Interpretation
 - A. A General Description
 - B. A Specific Instance

Third Session: Salvation

- I. The Basis of Salvation
 - A. The Savior
 - B. Justification

- II. The Bestowal of Salvation
 - A. Faith
 - B. Conversion and Election

- III. The Means of Salvation
 - A. Gospel
 - B. Sacraments

Fourth Session: Church and Believer in the World

- I. The Churches’ Boundaries
 - A. Vanishing Denominational Lines
 - B. Regroupings

II. The Churches' Mission

- A. Social Gospel
- B. Missions

III. The Believer's Sanctification

- A. General Considerations
- B. Special Ethical Issues

Fifth Session: The Conservative Elements Among the Reformed

I. Description

- A. Fundamentalist Ancestry
- B. Two Schools

II. Evaluation

- A. Words of Praise
- B. Words of Blame

III. Relations

- A. What To Do
- B. What Not To Do

There will obviously have to be more extensive outlines for each topic; these sketches, however, can suffice at this time to indicate the general trend of thought from session to session and to set limits for discussions and questions.

In this preliminary section some bibliographical remarks are no doubt expected. Few will be given. So far as books are concerned there are few, if any that treat our whole subject matter directly and many, too many to mention, that deal with smaller isolated aspects. Instead of handing out a long list of such books at this time, the lecturer will at specific places in the readings mention books of special significance for the point at issue.

A mention of the main Reformed periodicals that are available at our school's library may be helpful to indicate the kind of reading on which these lectures are based, especially for those desiring to do some research and/or writing on the Contemporary Reformed scene. The list of interdenominational periodicals includes:

Christianity Today, from Vol. I (1956) to the present.

Christian Century, from Vol. 59 (1942) to the present.

These two well-known periodicals make a pair, with the former representative of the more conservative wing of the Reformed and the latter espousing a liberal brand of theology.

Christian Herald, more popular and less theological than *Christianity Today*, but also conservative, is an off-again, on-again item in our library with Volumes 5-66 (1927-1943) and Volumes 95 to the present available.

Eternity is another conservative periodical on the popular side, available from Vol. 20 (1969) on to its recent demise.

Moody Monthly's Volumes 21-50 (1920-1949) are on the shelves as are the most recent volumes.

The Churchman is a venerable interdenominational periodical with a highbrow accent. It is available from Volume 182 (1968) on.

The former *Present Truth*, today's *Verdict* is conservative in spots, radical in others. We have Vol. 1 (1972) and the others.

Denominational periodicals for general readers are:

A.D., serving the WCC and the United Presbyterians with Vol. 1 (1972) and all others available.

Presbyterian Guardian, the Orthodox periodical, available from Vol. 1 (1935) to the present.

Reformed Journal, more periodical than journal, from Grand Rapids is available from Vol. 17 (1967) to the present.

Main scholarly Reformed journals of an interdenominational character are:

From the British Isles-

Expository Times, available are the current volumes and a set of Volumes 15-30 (1904-1918).

Evangelical Quarterly, Vol. 1 (1929) to the present is available but with the usual gaps in the 40's and early 50's.

Scottish Journal of Theology, current volumes covering the last few years are on the shelves.

From interdenominational seminaries-

Journal of Religion, from University of Chicago Divinity School is available from Vol. 1 (1921) to the present.

Bibliotheca Sacra, from Dallas Seminary at this time. We have Vols. 23-27 (1866-1870), 70-73 (1913-1916), and Vol. 87 (1930) to present.

Union Seminary Quarterly Review. Most recent volumes are on our shelves.

Grace Theological Journal, from Winona Lake, Indiana, is a newer periodical that we have.

Denominational journals available include:

Theology Today, from Princeton, Vol. 1 (1944) to the present.

Interpretation, put out by Virginia Presbyterians, Vol. 1 (1947) to the present.

Westminster Theological Journal, by Orthodox Presbyterians, Vol. 28 (1965) to the present.

Journal of Presbyterian History, most recent volumes.

Calvin Theological Journal, from Grand Rapids, Vol. 1 (1966) to the present.

Reformed Review, by the Reformed Church in America, most recent volumes.

Seminary Studies, from the Seventh Day Adventist Andrews University Seminary, Vol. 1 (1963) to the present.

Evangelica, put out by Berrien Springs and promoting the sufficiency of Christ's atonement and Word. (cf Quarterly review)

Anglican Theological Review, with some Reformed thinking, most recent volumes.

Completing this section set aside for some attention to preliminaries and procedures, we return to this session's main topic, current Reformed-Lutheran dialog. On the basis of the previous descriptive sketch it should be possible for us to do some analyzing and evaluating of the dialogs and thus derive some indication of current Reformed thinking about dialogs in general and dialogs with Lutherans in particular.

Even though the American dialogs of 1962-1966 and 1972-1974 may be for this part of

the globe a first as far as elaborate Reformed-Lutheran consultations are concerned, such consultations are not new for Europe. In a sense, Leuenberg is but another of a series of efforts in this century to bring Reformed and Lutherans into fellowship. Leuenberg is preceded and produced by:

- 1."The Barmen Declaration of 1934," which drew together in opposition to Hitler's religious program parts of all of the German Protestant churches and which in 1967 became a part of the United Presbyterian Confessional Corpus.
- 2."The Holy Communion Consensus of 1956," in which Reformed and Lutheran churches in the Netherlands joined. Actually, since then Lutheran-Reformed relations in the Netherlands have worsened, rather than improved.⁸
- 3."The Arnoldshain Theses on the Lord's Supper," setting forth the extent of agreement between Lutherans and the Reformed in the German area in 1957.
- 4.The establishment of intercommunion between the Church of Scotland and the Churches of Sweden and Denmark at about the same time.
- 5.And finally an agreement on ordination achieved by several Reformed and Lutheran churches, also about the same time.

This list of Reformed-Lutheran accords can find precedents in earlier centuries. To name but a few major undertakings, there was in 1817 the famed Prussian Union that spawned various other union endeavors in neighboring areas. In 1645 at Thorn Reformed and Romans and Lutherans sought to achieve some agreements. A Roman priest, converted from the ranks of the Reformed urged the meeting and the ecumenical Lutheran, Calixtus, filled the role of Reformed advisor. The Syncretistic strife resulted. What happened at Wittenberg in 1536 and at Marburg in 1529 is well known and needs no elaboration here.

While the paragraph just completed makes it obvious that Reformed enthusiasm for dialog in the interest of widening fellowship is not unique to our century, the conclusion is warranted that such thinking has intensified in the last generation. Apart from agreements previously mentioned, the Reformed are busily engaged among themselves in the Consultation on Church Union. A Presbyterian set the Consultation in motion and the 10 churches involved are in the Reformed tradition wholly or in good part.

When COCU in 1973 shelved its merger plan and called for local union endeavors, it did not have to wait too long for responses. Soon thereafter it was announced that in Reston, Virginia, the United Christian Parish was born, with an ecumenical congregation of 750 members from five major denominations. Its structure is patterned after the parish plan proposed by COCU.

Reformed thinking that favors enlarged fellowship is observable also in the large number of intradenominational merger moves in recent years. The big Presbyterian endeavor achieved a reunion of the Northern and Southern Presbyterians, separated since the Civil War. At the same time the smaller Presbyterian bodies, the Orthodox and Reformed and the PCA are in the process of merging or have done so already. These are recent efforts in a Reformed camp that in recent memory also produced a United Methodist Church, and a United Church of Christ. All this is evidence of a strong inclination, produced in part by the current stream of things but also a part of an ancient heritage, tending toward the ecumenical and away from the confessional. The Reformed themselves would assent to this evaluation by a Lutheran. In 1951 at Basle the Executive Committee of the World Presbyterian Alliance declared in a long quotation:

The Reformed tradition in post-Reformation Christianity is by nature ecumenical, that is to say, it is committed to the pursuit of Christian unity on the basis of loyal

commitment to the essential verities of the Christian faith. It must be so if it would be loyal to its own spiritual genius and to the thinking and spirit of John Calvin. Just as it is the true nature of the Christian Church to be an instrument of God's glory, it is the true nature of Presbyterianism never to be merely an end in itself, but to serve the Church Universal of Jesus Christ, the Church which is his Body.

In this spirit the Executive Council of the Alliance at its meeting at Cambridge, England, in July 1949, affirmed that the supreme purpose of the Alliance is not to promote World-Presbyterianism and an end in itself, but to make the Reformed tradition the servant of God's redemptive purpose through the wider agency of the Church Universal. We thus confront the following paradox. There are Presbyterians today who are both more Presbyterian and less Presbyterian than ever before. They are **more** Presbyterian because they believe that in their religious heritage there are treasures of thought and life which are important for the Church Universal. They are **less** Presbyterian than ever before because they recognize that what God has said and done through the medium of other Christian Communion is also needed to enrich the Church Universal. They believe, therefore, that it is the highest glory of the Reformed tradition to maintain the vision and viewpoint of the Church Universal, seeking continually its welfare and unity in accordance with the mind of Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, the head of the Church.

In the judgment of the Committee we are charged by God to see to it that the resurgence of denominationalism, which is manifest around the globe, shall not become sectarian but shall remain ecumenical in character. If the great world denominations, the Reformed Churches among them, pursue denominational preeminence and make their great world bodies ends in themselves they will betray Jesus Christ. But if they desire, and succeed in their desire to make denominational emphasis an enrichment of the common evangelical heritage, they will, by so doing, fulfill the design of the one Head of the Church and be true organs of the Holy Spirit. Let Presbyterians be, in the best sense, ecumenical Presbyterians, grasped afresh by Jesus Christ himself, let us dedicate ourselves to propagating the one holy faith throughout the world and to seek the unity of the one Church of Jesus Christ.⁹

The lengthy Reformed statement quoted seems to breathe a spirit of love for Christ and his Church. Actually it demonstrates the old Reform inclination to join hands and hearts in spite of differences in doctrine. The commitment is to "the essential verities of the Christian faith" and the term "essential" does not, we know, describe all the verities but rather limits the number of them. This is the thinking that inhibits confession but is conducive to dialog where many with half-truths will pool resources and somehow hope to come up with the whole truth. This is not commitment to and by confession but consensus to and by compromise. This is the hand outstretched in spite of disagreement in doctrine. At Marburg long ago the Reformed hand was outstretched. At Leuenberg it was also outstretched.

Now it would not be fair to blame the Reformed for all that is wrong with Leuenberg. After all, Lutherans sat across the table, shared in the discussions, and issued the joint report. Yet a critique of the "Leuenberg Concord" will demonstrate that just where this alleged representation of today's Reformed and Lutheran thinking most definitely breaks away from the Lutheran heritage and becomes the more Reformed, there its most objectionable features are to be found.

One of the sharpest criticism of the "Leuenberg Concord" is embodied in a document

known as the “Theses of the Ratzeburg Conference to the ‘Leuenberg Concord.’” At Ratzeburg from May 24 to May 28, 1972, over one hundred gathered for a German-Scandinavian Theological Conference. The main topic of discussion was the “Leuenberg Concord.” Nearly unanimously, the confessional-minded theologians from state and free churches within and outside of Germany rejected what the “Concord” proposed. Bishop Bo Giertz of Goteborg and Doctor J. Preus addressed the conference. The resultant “Ratzeburg Theses” are worth noting and quoting as rebuke of the Reformed thinking in the “Leuenberg Concord” and a warning against fellowship on its basis.

The “Ratzeburg Theses” begin:

Just as Christianity cannot settle its controversies by dividing into all sorts of sects, so it must not permit the truth of the Gospel to be sacrificed to forces demanding more fellowship among the churches.

The Leuenberg Concord attempts to prepare the way for a possible wider church fellowship between Lutheran and Reformed denominations. The task is accomplished not by making corrections that would make such a document acceptable, but by disposing with the normative quality of the Lutheran Confessions. Thus the document is not acceptable. Four points sum up the reason for rejecting the Leuenberg Concord.

1. The Leuenberg Concord falsifies the concept of the holy church.
2. The Leuenberg Concord annuls the validity of the Lutheran Confessions.
3. The Leuenberg Concord abridges the Gospel.
4. The Leuenberg Concord does away with a theology of the Sacraments.¹⁰

While such issues as Church, Confessions, Gospel, and Sacraments will receive more elaborate treatment in the next three discussions to follow, we can briefly indicate some current thinking of the Reformed on these points, errors in the “Concord” that resulted and dangers involved in a false fellowship based on the “Concord.” The main line of thought is supplied by the “Ratzeburg Theses” themselves.

The first of their four main objections, falsifying the concept of the holy church, is aimed at some familiar manhandling of Augustana_VII’s *satis est* and on the whole Leuenberg approach which replaces the true catholicity of the church with a common Sixteenth Century origin as a protest to Rome. Furthermore, a denominational fellowship is urged that does not at all accord with the Lutheran and Biblical concept of church unity and fellowship.

This leads into the next point, the objection that the “Leuenberg Concord” annuls the validity of the Lutheran Confessions. The “Concord,” much like the old 1817 Union, wants the older Confessions to stand but still requires a subscription to the newer “Concord.” This would seem to mean, for a *quia* Lutheran subscriber, either one or the other of two unacceptable situations—either a substitution of a new pledge for the old or a double standard in which there are two *normae normatae* in competition. Only the Reformed view that regards confessional subscription as somehow only partial, or as involving nothing more than assent to a historical fact can face the prospect of subscribing to the “Leuenberg Concord” with equanimity and enthusiasm.

The third “Leuenberg Concord” deficiency scored by the “Ratzeburg Theses,” and no doubt the most serious of all, is an abridgment of the Gospel. The “Concord” which calls for enlarged fellowship because there is a “common understanding of the Gospel” itself relegates for subsequent doctrinal discussions what it calls the unresolved issue of the Law and Gospel, an issue fundamental for true Lutherans, but one that has time and again revealed the Reformed

Achilles' heel. It is interesting that the *Marburg Revisited* summary of the Reformed-Lutheran dialog in our land also pointed to the same unresolved issue of the Law-Gospel theme when it declared: "We are agreed that the new life of faith in Christ involves obedience, but there is some question concerning the place and meaning of law in the new life."¹¹

It is easy for the Reformed to endorse the Augustana's *satis est* if there is so much unclarity about what the Gospel is. In the "Concord" justification is consistently identified as the "message of justification" and objective justification and vicarious atonement do not get the emphasis deserved by the truths and desired by Lutherans that hold them dear.

Problems in the area of the gospel imply and foreshadow problems in the area of the sacraments. This has been a divisive issue for Lutherans and Reformed for 450 years and has not been settled by the "Leuenberg Concord" any more than it was settled by the Reformed-Lutheran discussions that produced *Marburg Revisited* in 1966 or by the second round of talks completed in 1974.

Most of the key issues that the American Reformed-Lutheran dialog and *Marburg Revisited* raised fall into the subject areas assigned to subsequent sessions with their themes of Revelation, Salvation, Church and Sanctification, and need not be treated at this point.

However, *Marburg Revisited* does present a treatment of confessions and confessional subscription that should command our attention in this first gathering, and that is decisive in evaluating dialog results and, for that matter, is basic to the whole approach to current Reformed thinking.

One of the agreements reached by those who put out *Marburg Revisited* reads:

We have come to see that the unity of the Lutheran Confessions has given them a place of such importance in the interpretation of scripture and in the determination of a theological position, that at times they have dominated scripture and led Lutherans into a false confessionalism. On the other hand, the multiplicity of the Reformed confessions has tended to relativize all of them with respect to their role as exegetical and theological guides and has in some cases led Reformed churches into a false biblicism.¹²

While we might like to ask what exactly is meant by "false biblicism" and while we do not share the fear that sound confessionalism threatens Scripture we will most likely agree to the general thought that Confessions have in the main meant more to Lutherans than to the Reformed.

A Reformed essayist in *Marburg Revisited* can be quoted to offer one explanation for this development. Without any hedging he declares:

It remains true that the Reformed confessions have more the character of constitutional documents by which the confessional position of the church is defined, than instruments with which they actually confess their faith. The crowning example of this type of document is the "Westminster Confession of Faith" which originated, not in a confessional situation at all, but in the context of a politico-ecclesiastical scheme (English Civil War—Presbyterian Bodies of England, Scotland, Ireland and U. S.) which was the price of a military alliance. It is a miracle of grace that the Westminster Confession, considering the circumstances of its origin, is not a great deal worse than it is.¹³

The same writer, Princeton's George S. Hendry, in the introduction to his *The Westminster Confession for Today*, published in 1968, clearly delineates a characteristic modern Reformed approach to Confessions when he explains:

The propriety of using the Confessions as a basis for an exposition of the church's

faith at the present day, however, raises a number of questions which demand further consideration. The fact cannot be ignored that the Confession no longer holds the same place in the mind of the church as it did in the past. While most Presbyterian Churches on both sides of the Atlantic continue formally to accept the Confessions, they do so with certain expressed and inexpressed qualifications and reservations. Some have introduced changes in the text of the Confession itself, by altering certain passages, by eliminating others, and by adding new chapters. Some have taken formal action to define the sense in which they interpret certain passages or to preclude certain inferences that might be drawn from them. Several churches have adopted brief statements of faith, which, while “they are not to be regarded as substitutes for, but rather as interpretations of, and supplements to, the Westminster Confession” [quoted from the 1958 Plan of Union of UPC of A and PC in USA] do in fact constitute implicit revisions to it. Individual members of the churches have called for a thorough revision of the Confession and some have proposed the preparation of an entirely new Confession which would in effect supersede the old.¹⁴

An instance of specific reservations is the treatment given double predestination. Although this has been and even now is regarded as the distinctive feature of Reformed theology, it is a teaching no longer held by the Presbyterian Churches in the form in which it is set forth in older Confessions. Several of these churches have adopted special declaratory statements that show with what limitations they accept the formulation of this unpopular part of the Confession.

The approach to Confessions outlined in the previous paragraph carries with it problems regarding confessional subscription. Hendry explains:

This, [placing Scripture above all Confessions] of course, does not answer the practical question of how acceptance of the Confession of Faith can be combined with exception to some of its statements, or how the line between acceptance and exception is to be drawn. To this question various answers have been offered. One is suggested in the formula of subscription required of ministers in the United Presbyterian Church in the USA, who are asked whether they accept the Confession of Faith “as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures”; it has been held that acceptance of the system does not imply acceptance of every individual doctrine in it. But it would be difficult to say precisely how the distinction between the system and the doctrines is to be drawn, and perhaps this is only a restatement of the problem rather than a solution to it. A similar distinction is indicated in the ordination formula of the Church of Scotland, which requires acceptance of “the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith contained in the Confession of Faith of this Church” and it is explained that this is compatible with “recognizing liberty of opinion on such points of doctrine as do not enter into the substance of the faith.” It may be granted that the distinction suggested here is workable up to a point, but difficulty is likely to arise when there is a difference of opinion as to whether a specific point of doctrine does or does not “enter into the substance of the faith”—or as to what precisely this phrase means.¹⁵

While there is no unanimity on this point among the various Reformed bodies, it can be stated that most of them, excluding now some of the smaller conservative groups, are weak when it comes to confessional stance. The Presbyterian position that has been quoted is fairly representative, less loose than some Reformed bodies, and less conservative than others. If it is not an average position, it is one that leans to the right when compared with the stance of other

Reformed bodies. In this section on confessional stance mention can be made of a fairly new Reformed Confession which itself quite clearly shows what kind of confessional thinking produced it. This is the United Presbyterian Confession of 1967. In a sermon preached at Westminster Seminary's 44th commencement in 1973, Cornelius Van Til refers to the new Confession in these unflattering words:

The Confession of 1967, largely constructed under the leadership of faculty members of Princeton Seminary and officially adopted by the United Presbyterian Church, is calculated to erase "the merit of the blood of Jesus Christ" from men's hearts as surely as Rome ever tried to stifle the gospel of God's sovereign grace to man.¹⁶

As will be indicated clearly when we at the next session treat Reformed thinking about revelation and examine the new Confession's statement on Scripture, the Confession of 1967 has a way of finding the phrase that can seemingly endorse both sides of a doctrinal controversy. The document also characterizes itself by the total absence of antithetical statements. New and altered opinions are embraced while at the same time no older Confessions are repudiated. The new Confession of 1967 therefore does not represent a step forward but is further evidence of a decline in current Reformed thinking on confessionalism.

PART TWO: CURRENT REFORMED THINKING ABOUT REVELATION

Reserving the fifth session for a specific study of the more conservative Reformed bodies and wings within the bodies, we devote this hour and the next two to definite doctrinal areas, especially such as have been traditional battlegrounds for Lutherans and the Reformed. The fourth session will concern itself with current Reformed thinking about the church and the believer in the world. Salvation will be the broad subject for the next hour, with attention being given to the Savior, objective justification, the justification of the individual sinner, and the means of grace.

At this session the doctrinal area to be treated can be given the broad title, "Revelation." The first subdivision will describe the view of revelation held by the Reformed members of two erring schools of theology—the liberal and the neo-orthodox. The second subdivision will deal with specifics relating to the Bible attributes of inspiration and inerrancy. A third section will concern itself with the Reformed approach to Bible interpretation, giving attention first to general characteristics and then concentrating on specific example.

The topic before us is one of supreme importance. In any age and under all circumstances, for churches and for individual believers, the matter of source of religious truth and the authority of that source is a fundamental concern. On this issue finally hinge all other issues. Error, or even unclarity, here can lead to a host of faith-endangering, soul-destroying errors. Correctness and clarity here is our best assurance of avoiding or combating any error that might rise to threaten us in other doctrinal areas.

What holds true at all times and under all circumstances is doubly true in our own age. We don't have to be prophets or prophets' sons, we need only a minimum of effort and ability in discerning these times to arrive at the conclusion that the cause of the saving Gospel of Christ Jesus in our lifetime has suffered immeasurably from the erosion of Biblical authority.

This erosion was well under way at the beginning of this century when liberal theology held sway in many Reformed and some Lutheran pulpits and cathedral. This erosion was supposed to have been checked by a "neo-orthodox" return to a recognition of special divine revelation and the uniqueness of the Biblical witness. Actually, the erosion continued and, instead of slackening, intensified as the firm ground of Bible truth was undermined by a second

current of theological aberration, less hostile only in name, but not in fact. For a Bible believer, neo-orthodoxy was cold comfort indeed, compensating for familiar, easily recognized liberal ills with a variety of deceptive cures, the eventual effect of which was much worse than the harm done by the original bite.

The deterioration has continued apace into this year of our Lord. That familiar and firm foundation ground for our Christian faith and Christian life, the ground of Bible truth on which we want to take our stand now and always, that ground has become a lonely place. It sometimes seems in the shade of our own juniper tree that we, even we only, are left of those who declare, “*Sola Scriptura*.” Even those from whom we parted company some thirty years ago over one doctrine of the Word of God have had their battle over the authority of all of the Word. The battles are drawing closer. Sooner than we may now think, we may be sounding the alarm, “*Hostes ante portal*.”

What has gone wrong? One of the main things that went wrong was the emergence of Karl Barth, apostle of neo-orthodoxy or, if you prefer a pet Reformed designation, neo-supernaturalism.

Someone may want to raise the objection, “Neo-orthodoxy, Barth—that’s old hat and almost ancient history. This is supposed to deal with ‘current’ Reformed thinking.” There is a ready response. It may well be that almost seventy years have passed since the appearance of Barth’s *Romerbrief* and *Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie* and that fifty some have passed since *Kirchliche Dogmatik I.1* on Scripture was published.

It is to be remembered however, that it took some time for impact to become apparent, for translations to be made, and for Channel and Ocean to be crossed. The result is, at least for this land, that Barthianism is a fairly recent innovation on the theological scene. Just two decades have passed since Barth published his swansong in the form of a final *Church Dogmatics* volume and just twenty-two years since he died. Some years ago an issue of *Scottish Journal of Theology* presented a Barth scoop, an article titled “Last Thoughts of Karl Barth,” describing the five final communications contained in Busch’s *Letzte Zeugnisse*.¹⁷ An inclusion of Barthian thinking, it would seem, can justifiably be made in a discussion of “current” Reformed thinking.

In 1962, after asserting that “hardly any Christian doctrine is discussed as much today as the doctrine of Holy Scripture,” Klass Runia, then Professor of Theology at the Reformed Theological College in Geelong, Victoria, Australia, continued:

We may add that the doctrine of Karl Barth plays a great part, whether positively or negatively, in all of these discussions and reports. So great is his stature that no one can deal with the problem of Holy Scripture without considering Barth’s view and defining his own positions over against it. Indeed, many aspects of Barth’s view have come to be generally accepted as beyond criticism. We refer, e.g., to his teaching that there is an indirect identity between the Bible and the Word of God, that the Bible is a fallible human book subject to higher criticism, and that the Bible becomes the Word of God in the act of revelation.

Such uncritical acceptance is itself a good reason to devote a special study to Barth’s doctrine of Holy Scripture even though the latter was published over twenty years ago. At the same time we must admit that such a study is a difficult task. Barth’s thought is, on the one hand, wide-ranging and deep, and on the other hand, sensitive to nuances and details. Frequently he expresses himself paradoxically, in the dialectical mode. Hence it is no wonder that Barth is so often misinterpreted.¹⁸

It may be appropriate to this point to quote the observation of a participant in the 1964

global gathering of Reformed systematic theologians as demonstration of Barth's influence, not only on the past but also the present and future, not only as finalizer of a theological system but also as pathfinder and trailblazer. This participant stated:

Barth's name was the most mentioned; but his shadow was across the Consulation as that of one who had in large measure set the stage for the present theological task and yet as that of one beyond whom (and with whose encouragement) we must go toward routes still to be discovered.¹⁹

In Central Europe conservative theologians, both Lutheran and Reformed, at first welcomed with open arms as a potential ally against liberal theology this prophet who seemed to be calling, "Back to the Bible" and who began his first book with this first sentence, "Paul, as child of his age, addressed his contemporaries. It is, however, far more important that, as Prophet and Apostle of the Kingdom of God, he veritably speaks to all men of every age." Barth's reservations about Scripture, which kept him from the total commitment required, were at first optimistically viewed as idiosyncrasies and inconsistencies that would eventually be clarified and rectified.

The major emphases of Barth seemed to tend in the right direction, the direction of the Bible. In place of the liberal's immanent God so close to man, so near his level that no revelation was really necessary since man could discover or create God, Barth stressed the transcendence of the "wholly other" who could only be known through his own revelation.

In place of the liberal's good man who was on his own wise enough and virtuous enough to preclude the necessity of any Heaven-packaged, God-given salvation or revelation, there was the emphasis that man is sinful at the center of his being and that therefore a Christ as Savior and as Word was absolutely essential if there was to be any true theology and actual liberation. In his strong stress on the limitations of human reason Barth is not only saying an emphatic and a lengthy *Nein* to any suggestion that there is some room for a natural theology, but seems even to be subscribing in our sense to Paul's declaration:

We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Co 2:12-14).²⁰

A third sharp break of Barth with old-line liberalism is actually an extension and amplification of the two previously mentioned. Given the "wholly other" God and an inferior man on a wholly different plane and in a wholly different world and the great gulf between them, then a God-built bridge of revelation is an indispensable part of the scheme. The bridge cannot be built by resort to the psychology of general religion supposedly at work to a greater or lesser degree in all religions. What is needed and what Barth insists on is the unique revelation of God that is Christianity's benchmark and the saving encounter with that revelation which is the distinctive Christian experience.

Such a stirring appeal to "Let God be God," to "Let man be man," to "Let Christianity be Christianity" was music to the ears of embattled conservative Bible-believers in their long and difficult struggles with liberalism in theology. The music soon revealed itself as a siren song that lured to perdition as easily on the rocks of neo-orthodoxy as in the whirlpool of liberalism. Behind the fine-sounding phrases were presuppositions that were not sound. Following Kirkegaard, who had first tried to incorporate Hegel seriously into Christianity, Barth built his

theology on the tension induced by the interaction between the thesis of God and eternity and the antithesis of man and time and resolved alone by the miracle of faith. So much emphasis was placed on the tension and the miraculous faith needed to synthesize it, that often historicity had to be sacrificed and doctrines had to be recast. What emerged was a Bible different than the one held dear by us.

First of all, Barth and neo-orthodoxy shrank the Bible as God's written revelation to the formula of "record of revelation" or "witness to revelation." A limitation is implicit in the terminology. The revelation "event" (*Ereigniss*) may take place through the working of the Spirit by means of the Bible but the Bible itself is not the revelation. Barth may have claimed it was his intention in this to safeguard the freedom of God's grace by not chaining it to a book and to give all glory to God and none to man in the revelation event. But such good ends of magnifying God's glory can not justify the bad means of minifying Scripture.

An inevitable outcome of this erroneous approach is the view that the Bible is fallible, not only *is* fallible, but actually *must* be fallible. For if the Bible actually were infallible, so goes the argument, man by possessing the Bible would actually have the Word of God and, according to Barth, that can't be. God must time and time again make the Bible His Word. If we make the Bible infallible, Barth says, "we resist the sovereignty of grace in which God Himself became man in Christ to glorify Himself in His humanity."²¹ Barth insists: "The prophets and apostles as such, even in their office, even in their function as witnesses, even in the act of writing down their witness, were real, historical men as we are, and therefore sinful in their action and capable and actually guilty of error in their spoken and written word."²²

As proof of the Bible's fallibility Barth points especially to four sources of error. There is the Biblical view of the world and of man in which, so says Barth, "we are constantly coming up against presuppositions which are not ours, and statements and judgments we cannot accept."²³ Here is a "capacity for errors," if not errors themselves.

Barth next points to the problem of the understanding of history possessed by the Bible writers. They are accused of failing to distinguish between saga and straight narrative. Bultmann had his myths and Barth objected to them but since the saga and legend centered on an actual event, even though cloaked with fancy, Barth felt they had a place in the Bible.

In the third place Barth alleges a Bible vulnerability, a capacity for error, even in "its religious or theological content."²⁴ Either Paul or James err. Either John or the synoptists are wrong.

Finally the human form of the Bible gives room in it to a discernible "Jewish spirit."²⁵

Implicit in the approach described above are other erroneous views of the Bible. Any inspiration that might be associated with the Bible will not be the granting of intention, thoughts, and words with guaranteed infallibility, but rather a matter of the Spirit's work in the present. It is also obvious that true authority will not lodge in a book that has such marked capacity for error but will have to be found in the Spirit. The distinction between revelation and witness to revelation, as far as the Bible is concerned, will easily and automatically result in the conviction that the Bible presents us with human and subjective reactions to God's revelation, but not with objective propositional truths about Him.

Finally, Barth's Bible is subject to higher criticism and to the historical-critical interpretation process. Sections and passages can be rejected or, preferably, recast into acceptable form.

At this point in the proceedings, the writer finds himself in a conflicting set of circumstances. There is the realization that there is much more to Barth's view of Scripture than

has thus far been presented. There is also an awareness that this is to be a general discussion of current Reformed views, not just a critique of Barthianism. This forces us to move from the one to the many, but yet without apology for tarrying so long with Barth. He has founded a school of followers. He has spawned a host of revisers. He has also sparked a revision in the positions of his old foes, the liberals.

Both the times and the man tended to react against liberal theology and its major premises that have been summed up in the following points:

- 1) respect for the scientific method in theological study
- 2) skepticism about the possibility of attaining absolute knowledge about ultimate reality
- 3) emphasis of unity and continuity that held Christianity to be one of many similar religions all moving forward together
- 4) the resultant confidence in man and his future
- 5) respect for the authority of Christian experience
- 6) criticism of the traditions of Christianity from within that tradition
- 7) social idealism resting its hopes on a social gospel.

Out of the neo-orthodox challenge to liberal theology came what could be called a “post-liberal” theology, arising in the midst of the old liberalism but with viewpoints shaped to meet the challenges to its positions. While a whole range of theological positions were affected, we are considering here especially the matter of Scripture and revelation. While some similar developments can be found also in Lutheran circles, we will endeavor to concentrate on the Reformed story and sector.

The old liberal emphasis on the religious experience in which man discovers God could accommodate itself to the view that the Bible becomes revelation when in a given encounter God makes it so in the confrontation with man. Plainly, experience is involved, but an experience in which God confronts man, God reveals himself. The emphasis is not so much on the human discovery of God but on God’s appearance to man, not on the closeness of man to God, which makes for an easy climb to God by man, but on the separation and estrangement of man from God which makes God’s descent to man in revelation so radical a paradox that it can only be resolved by the miracle of faith.

Despite all this emphasis on revelation and faith, however, there are definite deficiencies in this approach. Revisionist liberal theology would never agree with us that God has revealed propositional truths that can be regarded as ultimate and absolute and can be equated with the words of the Bible and set down in the statements of the creeds. The ravages of historical criticism remain. In this circumstance the concept of an inerrant Bible is not only an untenable and unscientific view, but even an idolatrous transgression of the First Commandment in that God’s glory is given to a book. Neo-liberalism, like neo-orthodoxy, insists that it isn’t creed or Scripture that is revealed, but God and that he is revealed not in word and truth and proposition, but in act and deed and event.

To be sure, the Barthian stress on revelation has given the Bible a more honored place in liberal circles today than it had several generations ago. Then the Bible had little value except as a record of developing religious experience, especially as a record of the religious experience of the earliest Christians. Under all circumstances, however, the early experience had to be judged and refined in the light of the reason and experience of the modern believer. What has been achieved is that the new approach will concede that the experience recorded in the Bible, if it can be taken at face value, has a validity equal to today’s experience. This, it must be noted, is still miles from the truth so far as an inerrant Bible is concerned.

The Bible in this scheme is given no absolute authority, only a relative authority over what churches say and men feel today, providing norms by which the latter can be evaluated in the shape of biblical “symbols.” As one writer sums it up, “Such symbols as the creation story, the story of the Fall and the last judgment are not to be taken literally, as simple historical accounts, but they must be taken seriously for they point to realities which can be described only in symbolical language.”²⁶

The previous quotation provides a transition into the next sections that concern themselves with current Reformed thinking about Bible attributes and Bible interpretation. There have been scattered and unavoidable references to these matters in previous sections describing two influential schools of thought, but in this section there is to be a more systematic and complete treatment.

A reminder may be in place. The intention is to deal with the most conservative wing in the Reformed churches and their views of the Bible in a separate discussion. Here we deal with the other Reformed tradition and its much less satisfactory treatment of the Scriptures. The question to be considered is this: What is current Reformed thinking about inspiration? To supply the answer we draw extensively on R. A. Finlayson of the Free Church of Scotland and his article, “Contemporary Ideas of Inspirations,” included in the volume *Revelation and the Bible*.²⁷

One way of explaining what the modern view of inspiration is would be to declare that it involves a commingling and confusion of the familiar concepts of revelation, inspiration, and enlightenment or illumination. Another way of approach would be to say that much of current Reformed thinking about inspiration is—whether deliberate or unintentional is not now of moment—result of straw-man thinking or of Jesuit casuistry whereby a false use, to which a true teaching is put, is turned into a reason for declaring what is true false.

An instance of the commingling and confusion of inspiration and illumination is Barth’s statement, “The *theopneustia* is the act of revelation in which the prophets and apostles in their humanity became what they were, and in which alone in their humanity they can become to us what they are.”²⁸ We all agree that without the continuing operation of the Holy Spirit in and through the Word that enlightens the darkened minds and blackened hearts of sinners there could be no faith and forgiveness. However, this is never a reason to ignore or deny the inspiration of the writing of the apostles and prophets as Barth does when his “revelation” approach makes room for an inspiration and inerrancy of the revelation of God to the prophet or apostle, but not of the record of that revelation in the book written so as to provide plenary inspiration and inerrant authority.

Plenary inspiration is also rejected by some because of a dread for a “dictated” Bible or one in which somehow mere humans were allowed to control God and his Word. In unbelief, the miracle and mystery of inspiration is rejected out of hand and straw-men “dictation” Bibles are invented which are then vigorously assaulted. The endeavor to maintain God’s sovereignty need not and dare not lead to a denial of that sovereign God’s right to give up an inspired written Bible. It may well be that Christians and Christian teachers have so concerned themselves about the inspiration that occurred two millennia ago that they have not reserved time and thought for the glorious working of the enlightening Holy Spirit at the present time. But that wrong does not make right a second wrong of becoming so concerned about the present working of the Spirit as to deny his direct involvement when the Bible was written centuries ago.

Both the post-liberals and the neo-orthodox Reformed theologians with dialectical or existential presuppositions fall into errors about inspiration because they insist on separating the

original divine revelation to the writer and the written record witnessing to this revelation, the revelation involved in encounter and the revelation involved in communication about the encounter, and finally the Word of God and the text of Scripture.

Neo-orthodoxy piously insists that the Spirit of God dare not be imprisoned within the covers of the written Word and that therefore one must not assume any inspiration or, to use the favorite term of the errorists, inspiredness of the written books of the Bible. A distinction is drawn between ordinary conceptual knowledge and existential knowledge. Then the claim is made that in the case of God-knowledge only the I-Thou encounter, only the existential approach is possible. Finally the conclusion is drawn that revelation and actual inspiration can never apply to knowledge about God or a witness about God but must be reserved for God himself.

Our reaction to such flights of fancy is obvious. We reject out of hand the contention that somehow the revelation of God is divine and divinely inspired but that the record or witness of the revelation must remain human and subject to human error. We ask why the Spirit who inspired the original revelation could not also in the same way and sense inspire a record of that revelation? By the same token, we ask why God who can reveal himself in an existential encounter with mere man can't somehow find a way to provide that man with conceptual knowledge and propositional truth about himself. But there is no common ground when modern views of inspiration are approached from a standpoint of obedience to what God himself says on the matter.

The veracity and authority and inerrancy of the Scriptures are obviously threatened when the Bible doctrine of inspiration is denied. Because the Bible is actually inspired it is true, it is authoritative, it is inerrant. We have had statements of Barth revealing how errant he claimed the Bible to be, asserting that this capacity for error extended beyond matters of fact to religious and theological subjects. Emil Brunner says scoffingly that there are only two things that can be known about the infallible original Bible: first that it is infallible and second, that although it is different from our Bibles it is the same. Brunner insists, "At some point the variety of apostolic doctrine, regarded purely from the theological and intellectual point of view, is an irreconcilable contradiction."²⁹

Congregationalist C. H. Dodd writes, "In the literal sense the Bible consists of the 'words' of men—or rather of their visible symbols in writing....God is the author not of the Bible but of the life in which the authors of the Bible partake, and of which they tell us in such imperfect human words as they could command."³⁰

K. S. Reid of the Church of Scotland is among the Reformed neo-orthodoxists who sees authority in a fallible Bible because it is our best and oldest witness to Christ. A Reid quotation reads: "The authority of the Bible reposes in the fact that, in statements, some right and some wrong, and in practical application some of which is disputable and some even more dubious, a unified witness is borne to him who is at the center of the Gospel."³¹

Baillie, a Presbyterian, insists on Bible fallibility by reasoning, "In what is given of God then can be no imperfections of any kind; but there is always imperfection in what we may be allowed to call the receiving apparatus."³² Bishop Temple says of Christ, "It is of supreme importance that he wrote no book. It is of even greater importance that there is no single deed or saying of his of which we can be perfectly sure that he said or did precisely this or that" and concerning the Bible he declares, "No single sentence can be quoted as having the authority of a distinct utterance of the All-Holy God."³³

When such erroneous views regarding inspiration and inerrancy, veracity and authority are held, it follows that Bible interpretation and hermeneutics cannot be what God wants them to

be. Leaving now out of consideration that conservative element among the Reformed that calls itself evangelical and claims at least in part to stand for the Bible's own declaration of inspiration and inerrancy, it can be stated that amid a variety of Reformed denominations and despite differences among the liberal, neo-liberal, neo-orthodox, and other schools, there is a continuing united effort to take the Bible apart and to avoid hearing or heeding its message. In Bible interpretation there are distinctions and differences that can be noted, but they are basically differences in degree, not in kind.

Sometimes a seemingly worthwhile point is made, as when Barth denounces those who selected among the many Bible sections those few that they are willing to regard as God's Word. Barth says to such Bible text pickers: "We are absolved from differentiating the Word of God in the Bible from other contents, infallible portions and expressions from the erroneous ones, the infallible from the fallible, and from imagining that by means of such discoveries we can create for ourselves encounters with the genuine Word of God in the Bible."³⁴ But this is the Barth who in the interest of retaining intellectual respectability invited critics to perform a preliminary judgment of the text and who, even while objecting to the myth erasers, takes it upon himself to inject the saga approach in interpreting Genesis 3.

Through general adoption of the principles of form criticism by the main Reformed denominations, this approach to Bible interpretation has provided a shrunken Bible. What is assumed to be late interpolation can, of course, be easily dismissed. What remains then can be viewed as figure or legend or false impression or almost anything but a plain old text that means what it says. Claiming that the great growth of scientific knowledge and of man's understanding of himself and his history has created gulfs between the language and concepts of the Bible and of those of come-of-age modern man, the Bible interpreter finds some message he deems suitable and useful in this era.

The neo-liberals among today's Reformed interpreters, such as Ogden and Ott and Buri, go the limit in these matters. Easter is not a Jesus' event but a disciples' event, not a resurrection of his body but a rise of faith in those who in a decisive encounter opted for the meaningfulness of their existence, all appearances to the contrary. "The only final condition for sharing in authentic life that the New Testament lays down is a condition that can be formulated in complete abstraction from the event of Jesus of Nazareth and all that it specifically imports," says an exponent of this view. He continues, "Not only is it possible to affirm that authentic existence can be realized apart from faith in Jesus Christ or in the Christian proclamation; it is in fact necessary that this affirmation be made."³⁵ Obviously this is an extreme statement of a radical interpreter that one might be tempted to shrug off as untypical and unofficial. Unfortunately it could soon easily become, if it is not already, a commonplace, given the current interpretation climate in mainline Reformed denominations. The United Presbyterians, with whom the Southern Presbyterians were in the past decade reunited, recently adopted a new official symbol, the Confession of 1967. In Part I, Section C, 2 a statement regarding Bible interpretation declares:

The Scriptures, given under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are nevertheless the words of men, conditioned by the language, thought forms, and literary fashions of the places and times at which they were written. They reflect views of life, history, and the cosmos which were then current. The church, therefore, has an obligation to approach the Scriptures with literary and historical understanding.³⁶

While the new confession was frankly designed to placate both right and radical opinions in the church and consequently offers much that can be agreed to so far as it goes, it is

noteworthy that after five decades and more of interpretation that does violence to Bible truth and text, there is hardly a vagary of form criticism or new hermeneutic that could not claim sanctuary in the phrasing of the 1967 Confession. Not any are anathematized or antithesized, and all are granted the right of existing, if not by actual mention then at least by tacit between-the-lines sanction. As in our own Lutheran church in our land and overseas, so among the Reformed today there is general and accelerating deterioration in proper Bible interpretation. Fairly recent developments in the Netherlands, once citadel of Reformed theology, are a case in point. In an article published in 1964 Sasse has this to say:

In Holland the “Gereformeerde Kerken,” the largest continental Free Church which in 1892 grew out of the separations of 1834 and 1886, has become the guardian of orthodox Reformed theology. This “neocalvinism” goes back to A. Kuyper (1837-1921) and Herman Bavink (1854-1921). With its center in the Free University of Amsterdam it has defended the classical doctrine of the inspiration of Holy Scripture not only against the modernism that prevailed in the (national) “Gevormde Kerk,” but also against Karl Barth. In view of Barth’s growing influence in both groups, the contrast seems to be lessening. This is apparent from the fact that the present leader in theology at the Free University of Amsterdam (G. C. Berkouwer), could write not only his great *Dogmatic Studies*, but also a book like *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, which might more forcefully have assailed Barth’s doctrine of Scripture (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1956).³⁷

This same church body, the Gereformeerde Kerken, has repealed the declaration of their 1926 Synod which insisted in reference to Genesis 2-3 that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the snake and its speaking, and the tree of life were perceptible realities. By repealing this declaration this preciously staunch church body is obviously making room for Genesis interpretations more acceptable to this modern era than the previously held literal interpretation of these chapters. Interestingly enough, a professor of Old Testament at Apeldoorn, Dc. Oosterhoff, a member of another even more conservative, free Reformed church body, the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken*, a few years ago published an interpretation of Genesis 2-3 which clearly illustrates that clash between old and new position, this tendency to make orthodox claims while opening the door to its opposite. The book, *Hoe Lesen Wir Genesis 2 en 3?*, is the subject of an extensive review in the Spring 1973 *Westminster Theological Journal* and merits some attention as a case in point.³⁸

The reviewer, Raymond Zorn of New Zealand, points out statements we approve of and applaud. The writer feels that the only acceptable approach to the understanding of Scripture is to interpret it in the way it wishes to be interpreted (p. 11). The Barth saga and the Gunkel mythology approaches are rejected. There is the appropriate caution (p. 33), “All too often the exegesis of the Bible has had to be altered to fit in with the opinion of a certain age. We must be careful with every attempt to bring the Bible and natural science into agreement with each other.” There is a clear declaration that Genesis 2 is not a second, different creation account.

There is, however, too often a hedging from an interpretive stand wholly acceptable. After rejecting Gunkel’s mythologizing, Oosterhoff concedes: “This, however, does not mean that all manner of old-eastern mythological motifs have not been reworked in Genesis 2 and 3. But specific sources cannot be proved” (p. 35). The lordship of science over Scripture is rejected, but the rejection includes the faulty declaration;

The Bible speaks its own language and has its own message which is far above what can be discovered or said by natural science. This message is not an answer to the

question of how everything in the world and man came into being. The Bible does not give this answer. The message of the Bible pertains to something entirely different. And it is this message we must understand (p. 57).

There is the concession that Genesis 2 could have been written by someone other than the writer of Genesis 1 (p. 99). The account of the creation of man is not to be taken literally “because an all too literal understanding of these verses becomes almost irreverent” (p. 103). As to the serpent’s speaking, the interpreter first states that, if this story is to be taken as an actual historical account, there is nothing against believing that the serpent as a tool of the devil spoke. Then comes the disturbing addition: “In the foregoing we have already found various symbolic features and therefore we must rather think of a symbolic account, though it be of a deep, historical reality. And in symbolic accounts animals speak as men without any difficulty” (p. 174). The writer is obviously trying to have his cake and eat it too.

The reviewer sums up the issues in a manner worth quoting when he states:

Even if Genesis 2 and 3 were prophetic history, we would not be prepared to concede what Oosterhoff does when he says, “If one understands by history events of the past that are datable and verifiable by scientific investigation, then these chapters do not give us history in this sense” (p. 219). For we remember only too well that this is the very thing the critics also say about Christ’s resurrection; not however to affirm it, but to deny it! And this is the fatal flaw in his method of interpreting these important chapters. For if a portion of the Bible such as this, which claims to be historical (as he admits), is not permitted an historical interpretation, but must be given a symbolical one, then where is this method to be properly stopped.

Where belief in the inspired and inerrant Bible has been surrendered, then, as the quotation suggests, there is no stopping false methods of interpretation. They will run wilder and wilder until they have outrun all of the Bible. This has happened or is happening in much of the Reformed camp. What is said is said without any holier-than-thou gloating. Much the same can be said of much of Lutheranism in this century. But our concern is current Reformed thinking.

This section on revelation and Scripture is concluded with the fervent wish and prayer that conservative Reformed circles that have thus far resisted the inroads of modern trends in interpretation may maintain their stand. The embattled and beleaguered Bible can use friends these days. The conservative among the Reformed, those who hold to Bible inspiration and inerrancy, have not been given attention at this time because it is the intention to denote the fifth of these sessions to this group and to their position on the Bible and its major doctrines. Leaving them out of the picture at this time has made for a gloomy presentation but also one that should help confirm in all of us the resolve through the strengthening of the Holy Spirit to endeavor to keep things looking brighter in our corner and cubby-hole of the Church. That will be achieved when the Head of the Church answers our prayer “Lord keep us steadfast in Thy Word.”

PART THREE: CURRENT REFORMED THINKING ABOUT SALVATION

This section will attempt to portray and evaluate some significant contemporary Reformed views concerning the general subject of salvation. Subdivisions will deal with the Savior, justification, faith and conversion and election and means of grace. With this theme we enter the holy of holies of religious subject matter; we treat articles by which the church now and always stands and falls. This means that at the outset we will determine to proceed as carefully and conscientiously as we possibly can. For what is taught regarding salvation, in the broad sense we use the term as our topic, will affect the well being of sinners in time and eternity; it

helps or hampers the working out of God's gracious plans for saving sinners.

We also approach the topic, "Current Reformed Thinking About Salvation," with special care because of certain preconceptions and predetermined concerns. We know that in centuries past there have been problems and errors in Reformed theology in just these very areas. We remember that some of the sharpest doctrinal divisions between Reformed and Lutherans have arisen over these very points. We therefore can't help but scrutinize carefully, even painstakingly, the statements on these matters to be found in reports of current dialogs. Some of the old concerns can be stated in a series of questions:

Is there a full appreciation of the Bible truth of universal grace?

Have the old conversion and election errors been overcome?

Is there a blunting of the gospel by confusing it with the law?

What is believed and confessed about the purpose and the power of the means of grace?

What are sacraments and what do they do?

What is received by whom in the Sacrament of the Altar?

Are sinners in these vital matters being offered the comfort and assurance that is theirs in the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Once more at the outset we express the caution that "current Reformed thinking" is a term that embraces a vast area of territory in which there will almost always be as many exceptions to the stated generalization as there are specific instances of it. Among the Reformed in the various denominations there are so-called "evangelicals" who want to be evangelical in these matters. There are also extreme liberals in most of the mainline denominations who propound a salvation that man either does not need or can easily supply. In this anti-confessional era, it is not easy to come by clearly and widely held doctrinal positions on the part of the major bodies. Only in the smaller bodies that have for confessional reasons determined to stand aside from their denominational mainstream is it possible to point out and to pin down distinct positions that hold true for all in the body.

One other preliminary observation is in place. Some Reformed positions on salvation are not uniquely theirs but cross the indistinct and shifting denominational boundaries of today to become Protestant views held both by some Lutherans and some Reformed. This is very definitely the case in the matter of today's thinking about the Savior himself, and his person and his relation to history.

In the good old days of the early centuries of the Christian era there were controversies and errors concerning Jesus Christ. Some made him too much man and too little God; others made him too much God and too little man. The union of the two natures was mistakenly conceived and described. But all involved in the struggles, the orthodox protagonists and the heterodox antagonists, were endeavoring to believe in and proclaim the Jesus Christ of Bethlehem and Nazareth, the Jesus Christ of the first century. It is easy to grasp the importance of the controversies and fairly easy to plot the positions taken by the opponents. It is possible to sympathize with the intention and sincerity of some of the heretics, if not with their heresies.

The situation is altogether different when attention is centered on that element of the Reformed tradition that has lost all interest in the Jesus of history. This is a current position of many, all too many. At one time it appeared that Albert Schweitzer, once a Lutheran but by the time of his death in fellowship with Unitarian-Universalists, seemed to have put a climax and conclusion to the so-called "quest of the historical Jesus" by liberal theology when back at the turn of the century he published his book. By casting Jesus in the role of an erring predecessor of William Miller prophesying an imminent appearance of the kingdom and proclaiming an interim

ethic for the nonce, Schweitzer was actually claiming that, regrettable as this might be, we just aren't going to find the historical Jesus, and it really doesn't matter if we don't because the message wouldn't apply to us in any case.

The summary quotation reads:

The study of the Life of Jesus has had a curious history. It set out in quest of the historical Jesus, believing that when it had found him it could bring him straight into our time as a Teacher and Savior. It loosed the bands by which he had been riveted for centuries to the stormy rocks of ecclesiastical doctrine and rejoiced to see the life and movement coming into the figure once more and the historical Jesus advancing as it seemed to meet it. But he does not stay; he passed by our time and returns to his own. What surprised and dismayed the theology of the last forty years was that, despite all forced and arbitrary interpretation it could not keep him in our time, but had to let him go.³⁹

Curiously enough, we see in our time, to use the Hegel approach, both the Schweitzer thesis that the historical Jesus is neither discoverable nor relevant and the antithesis that the quest must go on. If we eventually come upon a synthesis, we will, to paraphrase Schweitzer, probably have and want to let it go.

Both the darlings of Reformed neo-orthodoxy merit mention in this connection. Emil Brunner, setting aside John as legends in the Synoptics, distinguishes sharply between a Jesus of history and a Jesus of testimony in favor of the latter. Brunner makes the unmistakable assertions:

In faith we are not concerned with the Jesus of history as historical science sees Him, but with the Jesus Christ of personal testimony, who is the real Christ and whom John shows just as plainly as (I could even say with Luther still more plainly than) the Synoptists.⁴⁰

If once the conviction is regained that the Christian faith does not arise out of the picture of the historical Jesus, but out of the testimony to Christ, as such—this includes the witness of the prophets as well as that of the Apostles—and that it is based on this testimony; then inevitably the preference for the Synoptic Gospels and for the last generation will disappear. This view springs from a conception of Jesus, and of our relation to Him, which cannot really be combined with the Christian faith in Christ.⁴¹

Faith presupposes, as a matter of course, a priori that the Jesus of history is not the same as the Christ of faith.⁴²

It is not surprising that under such circumstances there is a rejection of the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. In fact, one wonders how there can be any Biblical teaching about Christ in a dogmatician with such presuppositions and premises.

Barth is no better. He has expressed his concern that too much interest in the historical Jesus could turn into a kind of Jesus-cult substitute for Christian faith. His approach to the concept of a historical Jesus is illustrated by an anecdote Carl Henry tells about Barth and himself. Back in the early years of the 1960's Barth was being lunched and lionized at a Washington reception. The great man would not give an address but condescended to answer questions. Henry, pointing to the reporters' table, asked on behalf of *Christianity Today* whether a reporter with today's assignments and responsibilities but living in the first century would have covered the Resurrection as a newsworthy event. Barth's counterquery was: "Did you say you represented *Christianity Today* or Christianity Yesterday?" Henry quoted Hebrews 13:8 but the only answer he got to the actual question was: "The resurrection had significance for the

disciples of Jesus Christ. It was to the disciples that he appeared.” The remark has to be taken as a negative answer to the original question that sparked the exchange.⁴³

In the same connection Henry supplies the Barth quote about New Testament scholars “who to my amazement have armed themselves with swords and staves and once again undertaken the search for the historical Jesus, a search in which I now as before prefer not to participate.”

It should be obvious that those in Reformed circles who follow these leaders in discounting a historical Jesus and espousing a Christ of faith are in danger of losing their Savior, their brother, and winding up with the dim figure of a distant cousin about four times removed. It is true that the biography and history of Jesus without faith will save no one. But that does not explain how there can be saving faith when there is no recognition of that biography and history. The Christ-of-faith approach gives us, at best, a Savior created in our image on the basis of an image created in those whose testimony we have and who may or may not have seen or heard something of Jesus. Not just John’s Jesus but also the Jesus of the Synoptics was pushed from the light of inspired biographical history into the shadowy never-never land of form criticism. A *Sitz-im-Leben der alten Kirche* soon replace a *Sitz-im-Leben* Jesus while Gospel history was transformed into *Gemeindetheologie*.

Twenty years ago when Bultmann had carried this approach to what much of today’s Reformed theology views as a height of new New Testament interpretation, but that we more correctly recognize as a *reductio ad absurdum* of New Testament rejection, a predictable reaction set in. There was not more kerygmatic shrinkage possible; name and fame had to be acquired by charting another pathway. A so-called new quest of the historical Jesus was undertaken three decades ago and is still being pursued.

How new is this new quest? James Robinson’s *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus*, published in 1959, claims newness over against both the previous century’s liberal approach and method in dealing with the New Testament and also the present century’s rejection of a Jesus of history in favor of a Christ of faith. The liberal theologians of the previous century saw in the Gospels a biographical mine from which true ore, according to their standards of a Teacher-Jesus, could be mined. The new quester views the Gospels as existential history with the writers so involved with the events that, even though they wrote kerygmatically or backwards, they were in tune with the past and hooked up-with it. The assumption is that we can have access to the Lord via the kerygmatic pathway, which now is regarded as authentic continuation of what Jesus was, said and did. And we can also approach Jesus via the historical pathway as we deal with non-kerygmatic materials in the Gospels, such as His teaching or His dealing with outcast sinners. Thus the gap driven between the historical Jesus and the believed Christ is supposed to have been bridged or at least narrowed.

All this alleged newness, however, is tarnished by an overlay of all that was objectionable in the old. The source of Jesus knowledge is still a fragmented biographical source, where the picking and choosing may result in greater or lesser accepted source. There is no commitment to John 20:31 that “these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing ye might have life through His name.”

The existential approach to the Gospel history in itself moves the material from the realm of objective truth to a second or third or fourth-hand recreation of the Son of God in the image of the mind of man.

The quest of the historical Jesus is revived but without much hope of success, something like Brewer baseball in 1989. There was some new interest, there were some new fans and

players, there were some improvements, but the final average was still only at the break-even point of .500. So in the quest of the historical Jesus, the new hopes and promises cannot banish the old doubts and fears. The quest continues, sadly and strangely the very converse of itself. It seems almost as if the quest of the historical Jesus is continuing for its own sake rather than his. The quest itself has become the goal; the original Savior goal has been demoted to the status of a will-of-the-wisp, an elusive El Dorado, a pot of gold at rainbow's end.

Lutherans and Romans are certainly also involved. Bultmann was nominally a Lutheran. But our concern for the present is elsewhere and all too apparent that much of the upper echelon of the Reformed theological camp has capitulated to this approach to Jesus that robs him of his glory and honor as Son of God and Savior of the world.

The more modern the official pronouncements of Reformed bodies, the more glaring and blatant the denial of the Savior. Previously in this series of discussions we heard a Presbyterian say of the new 1967 Presbyterian Confession that it erases "the merit of the blood of Jesus Christ from men's hearts as surely as Rome ever tried to stifle the gospel of God's sovereign grace to man."⁴⁴

In the 1959 "Statement of Faith" of the United Church of Christ, today's grouping of Congregational and Reformed churches, there is a studied avoidance of using the term "God" in the section on Jesus Christ. The strongest designation is Lord. The statement reads:

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Lord, he [God the Father] has come to us and shared our common lot, conquering sin and death and reconciling the world to himself.⁴⁵

It is true, a twenty-fifth anniversary doxological version of the statement issued recently for use in congregations celebrating the anniversary has changed the phrase to "our crucified and risen Savior." But the doxology version still manages to avoid terming the Savior true God.

Where the person of the Savior is given such ill treatment it cannot help but be that his work will also be downgraded. In the area of the justification of the sinner current Reformed thinking continues to err along traditional lines and at the same time has embraced a host of new aberrations.

One of the basic problems here is sin, deterioration in the doctrine of sin. Reserving the perversions of ethical situationists for a subsequent section on sanctification, we now concern ourselves with sin, original and actual, as making man guilty before God and in need of justification.

The old evolutionary ethics peaked in the 1920's with Coue's rhymed slogan:

*Tous les jours en tous les lieux
Je deviens de mieux en mieux.*

usually rendered in English as:

Every day in every way
The world gets better and better.

The jingle became a joke as there appeared on the world scene in rapid succession a monster depression, a hot world war and several of the cold variety. The neo-orthodoxists claimed to have rediscovered sin at least two decades before Oppenheimer and other tardy scientists. One would have expected a return to Bible teaching in the Reformed camp, especially in the Calvinist side with its sturdy heritage of total depravity. But what was rediscovered was not the Bible's sin.

Among America's Reformed theologians it is especially Reinhold Niebuhr who is supposed to have led in a realistic reemphasis of sin in this century's theology. As ex-President Carter himself has declared, his approach to political decision-making has been profoundly influenced by an encounter with the thought of Reinhold Niebuhr. From his pulpit in Detroit's Bethel Evangelical and Reformed Church and later from his lectern at Union Seminary, Niebuhr spoke much about sin, but not correctly.

Among many erroneous positions that changed from time to time, two basic faults in Niebuhr's views of sin emerge. For one thing, there is an overemphasis on sin as a social dilemma and as a fault in modern industrial society. What one hears in his preaching and writing about sin is not so much the voice of God's prophet accusing the sinner with the blunt "Thou art the man" but rather the clangor and racket of the once-busy assembly lines at Hamtramck and River Rouge. The silencing of those assembly lines is well under way; but the noisy proclamation of erroneous views about sin, in the Niebuhr vogue has not been silenced.

Also, when Niebuhr does deal with the individual and his personal sins, it is unfortunately more in an anthropological setting and context than one involving God intimately and directly. Original sin, for instance, according to Niebuhr, is finite man's inability to cope with his existential anxieties arising from the drive for spirit and freedom. Actual sin occurs when man fails to fulfill the demands of his Angst because he gives way to his own selfish will or builds on his own imperfect achievements. Sin becomes sin, not against God, but against man and his destiny and his destination. Sin is excess; *inordinate* is a favorite, oft-repeated word in Niebuhr. It is unfortunate that Niebuhr is in our time and in current Reformed theology frequently recognized as the expert on the subject of sin.

Those who follow him are not going to be able to see the need for the Savior's work of redemption nor the manner in which it was executed nor the results achieved. Across the spines of his books on our library shelves we might well affix the auto bumper sticker you've seen, "Don't follow me—I'm lost too." The sad part of the joke is that *lost* means more than it seems to say.

The range of Reformed doctrine regarding Christ's priestly work ranges from the doubting seeker for the Christ of faith, who accepts an Easter event but isn't sure about anything that went before, to the evangelical and conservative Arminian who espouses objective, universal justification. Of all the in-between positions none is more tragic and regrettable than that of the conservative Calvinist. He is like the Rich Young Ruler, so admirable in so many respects and so superior to so many others in them that one could weep over his great lack, an appreciation for the objective and universal redemption and justification Christ Jesus accomplished in his death and resurrection. Conservative evangelical Calvinists seem to be inextricably bound to the old, old limited atonement theory of their spiritual fathers. A conditional gospel always and again seems to emerge. In his otherwise fairly acceptable articles on, "Jesus Christ the Divine Redeemer" in Carl Henry's collection entitled *Fundamentals of the Faith*, Calvin Linton can spoil a good statement with a final phrase as he says:

The wholeness, the perfection, the total efficacy of this act, this atoning redemptive death that he "once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God" (I Peter 3:18), is totally available to all who will accept.⁴⁶

D.M. Baillie, a Scotch Presbyterian now dead, in his book *God Was in Christ* has left us this statement about atonement:

It is doubtless impossible to speak of such things without using symbolic language. But it is good to let one figure of speech correct and supplement another, and

to remind ourselves that all of these are but attempts to exhibit the love of God dealing with the sin of the world and overcoming it as only love can do. That is the “objective” work of atonement.

But since it is neither a “material” nor a “legal” victory, neither a battle conducted outside human life altogether nor a transaction completed as it were behind our backs or before we were born, but a spiritual process in the realm of personal relationships, the objective work cannot be separated from its subjective aspect by which it becomes a reality in the hearts and lives of men.⁴⁷

Such Arminian approaches to Christ’s saving work do not want to limit grace and atonement but seem to have a great reluctance to proclaim an unconditional gospel, a universal and objective justification.

Some strict, old-line Calvinists found in the small Reformed and Presbyterian bodies still cling staunchly to the greater error of an actual and outright limitation of the atonement and its grace to the elect.

For a half century mainline Presbyterianism has been plagued by a variety of errors that diminish or displace Christ’s redemption. Back in 1923 the Presbyterian general session as part of the Fosdick dispute declared that, along with other important doctrines, that of Christ’s substitutionary sacrifice was essential and binding. But within two years the widely circulated and underwritten “Auburn Affirmation” called for the right to view Christ’s work of saving man in other ways than substitution and sacrifice. Since the “Auburn Affirmation” signers escaped discipline, they were soon finding “other gospels” to proclaim.

Similar situations prevail in other Reform bodies, most of which contain within their ranks various faulty opinions on universal justification, ranging from outright denial to a limited and conditional acceptance that is actually no acceptance.

Current Reformed thinking about faith covers an equally wide area. When we talk to strangers these days, we can no longer assume that the term *faith* will connote for them simply trust in and acceptance of a promise of grace from God and will also inevitably suggest the object of that trust, the content of the promise, the *fides quae creditur*.

In that alien land of the existentialists, faith could be the desperate leap into the dark made by a person suffering from an identity crisis. It could take him beyond the realm of the aesthetic, of the ethical, of the religious that is non-Christian to that which is Christian. But the outcome that supplies light in the dark will be primarily subjective, with emphasis on the subjective experience rather than the objective promise.

Next is the adjacent land of the I-Thou, anti-propositional encounter, a kind of theological equivalent of the flying island of Laputa to which Swift consigns Gulliver on his third voyage, where everything is disembodied, where brains fly, faith flits, and ideas float, where it is just about impossible to come to grips with anything. Here the one firm and absolute presupposition is the dubious proposition that there can be no objective, propositional truths about God which faith can accept. Everything has to be on the I-Thou level, with encounter the key. From this there can emerge just about as many different faiths as there are different encounters. And in this religious floating island of Laputa be sure not to ask what you believe in your faith, but rather ask what your faith does for you.

Those who have strayed and erred into the territories staked out by the form critics will be equally unable and unwilling to describe and define the content of their faith. At its worst, form criticism makes the faith of the believer today dependent on the possibly faulty faith of the first New Testament believer, for it views the New Testament account as the reaction of the

believers of that time to events that happened or they thought happened. When that which actually happened is limited to an Easter event or, more exactly, to what some assumed to be an Easter event, then of course the content of faith has been diminished to the vanishing point. At its best, form criticism has taken from those who are to believe a sure foundation of faith, leaving them always in doubt as to what part of the Gospel message is worthy of trust. Eventually this pathway leads to a *cul de sac* where the only way out is the poor path of personal experience. Blocks and barriers have been placed on the pathway to objective, reliable, absolute truth. Finally, in one's picking and choosing of what others have already picked over and chosen rests the determination of what each is to believe and the enthusiasm with which he is to believe it.

The ultimate point of what has been said about faith thus far is that modern approaches in theology, in philosophical presupposition to theology, in Biblical interpretation, and in presuppositions not only add up to a denial of *sola Scriptura* but are equally destructive in the area of *sola fide*. And to make the summary our assignment requires, such errors and deficiencies in the matter of faith are to be found in most mainline Reformed denominations. In fact, the Reformed tradition with its heavy emphasis on experience, long before Schleiermacher ever appeared on the religious scene, has proved itself especially susceptible to the persistent downgrading of the objective truth that faith accepts in favor of the believing process, the personal trust.

Of all the Reformed branches the Methodists have made themselves almost notorious in this respect. It is not difficult to perceive in the life of the devout Methodist what appear to be works of faith; it is much more difficult to ascertain on the basis of the confession of the denomination or of the individual believer just what that Methodist believes.

Current Reformed thinking about the essence and content of faith has placed us face-to-face with certain new and strange developments that have to be a prime concern when dealing with persons or views of that tradition. When attention, however, shifts to discussion of the origin and creation of that faith, then we are back at old and conventional and familiar problems.

Within the total Reformed picture there are two basic views—Calvinist and Arminian. They both err seriously in the matter of the origin and creation of faith. Old-line Calvinists operate with the concept of an “irresistible grace” offered to those elected for salvation and seem determined to maintain this position *ad infinitum* in order to uphold the glory of the sovereign God. Arminianists, on the other hand, traditionally allow a certain amount of room for man's participation and productivity in the origin of faith.

Both of these opposing views as to the creation of faith are represented in current Reformed thinking. Irresistible grace and absolute perseverance, unfortunately, are still upheld by such staunch Calvinists as the Christian Reformed, based in Michigan. M. Eugene Osterhaven in his 1971 book, *The Spirit of the Reformed Tradition*, polishes up the terminology but leaves no doubt about the fact that he still stands with the Dort-endorsed error that God can never be resisted whenever he earnestly offers his grace to men. Osterhaven writes:

The understanding of some believers leaves much to be desired here. They have a sound apprehension of the goodness and love of the Father in sending the Son into the world for their salvation, and they hold orthodox views on the person and work of Christ. Their conception of salvation ends there, however, with no appreciation of the work of the Holy Spirit, or how the salvation that has been wrought outside them is going to be worked within so that those who were once dead in trespasses and sins are made new creatures in Christ. At this point Calvin, the theologian of the Holy Spirit, has given the church much valuable help in interpreting the Word of God. It is from within the

Reformed tradition that the most significant treatises on the place and function of God the Holy Spirit in the salvation of men have arisen. Moreover, in its struggle with Arminianism, which reached its climax at the great Synod of Dordrecht in 1618-19, the Reformed Church put in creedal form a statement of the application of salvation that honors the initiative and efficacy of divine grace. What was said by the church at Dort was no optional matter. It had to be said to preserve the sovereignty of grace so that in man's salvation God might continue to have the glory.⁴⁸

As the quotation itself indicates, there is to be found among the Reformed denominations a contrary Arminian view. It also errs, however, hedging on total depravity and opening the door to man's cooperation in his conversion to a greater or lesser degree. Advocates of the existential encounter obviously will put a premium on man's participation in the whole process. Even when the Barthian insistence on the overriding importance of the "wholly other" is voiced, the encounter still must involve man much more than he actually is involved in conversion.

Ever since, back in 1740, John Wesley correctly rejected George Whitefield's insistence that grace be limited, as Calvin insisted, most of Methodism has been Arminian rather than Calvinist. As such, this huge Reformed grouping has been susceptible to the conversion-cooperation error. A similar situation prevails among the even larger grouping of Baptists. Their insistence on demeaning baptismal grace from an operative to a testimonial role obviously tends toward a magnification of the convert's own role in his conversion.

Even among the evangelically minded Reformed in these groups, the tendency to allow man his own part and parcel in his conversion remains to plague otherwise great efforts and crusades. Graham tries to preach law and gospel, sin and grace but then contradicts the proclamation with the decision-making process. Not in the heat of a revival sermon, but in the cool of the evening at his desk Graham has written: "The second element in conversion is *faith*. In order to be converted, you must make a choice...God's plan for our reconciliation and redemption was completed in His Son. However, man must respond by receiving and trusting."⁴⁹

"You must make a choice," "man must respond," this is the phrasing that both conditions the gospel and twists the Bible's teaching of conversion. As we concern ourselves more and more with a evangelistic outreach, as we should and as we should have much earlier, we should also scrupulously bear these matters in mind.

A hundred years of controversy in the Lutheran Church has certainly alerted us to the fact that there is a close relation between conversion and election. Error in one area will almost invariably be matched by error in the other. We are also aware that Reformed doctrine has historically been prone to election error.

George S. Hendry, one of the chief contributors to the New English Bible, a Presbyterian, in his book, *The Westminster Confession for Today*, frankly states:

The awesome doctrine of the "double decree," or "double predestination," which has often been regarded as the distinctive feature of the Reformed faith, is no longer held by the Presbyterian Churches in the form in which it is set forth in this chapter. This is one of the points at which several of these Churches have adopted declaratory statements regarding the sense in which they accept the formulation of the doctrine in the Confession. The doctrine still has its defenders among devotees of traditional orthodoxy; but not even among them is it cherished with any degree of enthusiasm. And in the preaching and teaching of the Churches generally it would seem that the recommendation given in Paragraph 8, that the subject be handled with special caution, has taken to mean that it should be passed over in complete silence.⁵⁰

The last words in the quotation point to an error into which those can easily fall who endeavor to escape the old Reformed “double predestination” error. Turning from too much predestination, they have gotten themselves into the position of not having enough, if any election.

One of the Reformed who still holds out for the traditional “double predestination,” M. Eugene Osterhaven, previously quoted, complains about this tendency of many among the Reformed when he says:

Undeniably this doctrine (predestination) brings with it certain intellectual difficulties, but those difficulties are shared by all persons who believe in an almighty, infinite God and the reality of evil in his world.

There are various ways that men have tried to solve these problems. One is to deny predestination in any except a very general sense, so that the decisions of men are untouched and free. This is an attempt to preserve human responsibility at the expense of divine sovereignty. Another proposed solution denies both foreordination and foreknowledge to God inasmuch as acceptance of one of them seems logically to lead to an acceptance of the other. But this position is even worse than the other...⁵¹

Other Reformed theologians look to Barth for a solution to the problem. In typical Barthian fashion he simply recasts the whole Bible doctrine and the meaning of Biblical terms by saying that in Christ all are elected both for salvation and for damnation. There is just one thing wrong with this daring solution of an old Reformed problem. It's Barth doctrine, not Bible doctrine concerning election.⁵²

In view of longstanding Reformed-Lutheran disagreement in the matter, attention will have to be given in this discussion of salvation to the means whereby God saves us. All that has been said previously about present tendencies that diminish Christ and his story and his work need not be repeated here, although an abridgment of the gospel is always involved. Here we concern ourselves with the gospel as such a means and as such properly distinguished from the law.

It will be recalled that the Ratzeburg critique of the “Leuenberg Concord” made the point that the “Concord” which calls for enlarged fellowship because there is a “common understanding of the gospel,” actually abridges that gospel and also relegates for later doctrinal discussions what it calls the unresolved issue of law and gospel. The 1966 results of American Reformed-Lutheran dialog also pointed to a similar unresolved issue. One of the summary statements in *Marburg Revisited* declares: “We are agreed that the new life of faith in Christ involves obedience, but there is some question concerning the place and meaning of law in the new life.”⁵³ What is involved is the Calvinist tendency to deny universal grace and then to find substitutes for the gospel and its comfort in law patterns and methods. This tendency continues and in fact is growing as appreciation for Christ's person and work diminishes in so many Reformed denominations and sectors of them.

Current Reformed thinking about the sacraments likewise includes a continuation of long-held, familiar erroneous positions and some new and even more objectionable features.

In typical Reformed fashion Barth led an attack on infant baptism which he liked to refer to as a “bad habit,” or scandal. In his final volume of *Church Dogmatics* he went even farther, denying the “sacramental or sacramentalistic” character of any Baptism. Insisting that it is the baptism with the Holy Spirit that brings repentance and renewal, he views Baptism with water as a mere liturgical response to the change already wrought by God. He questions whether the church can be a mature missionary force if it continues to “dispense the baptismal water with the

same disrespectful prodigality it has demonstrated in the past.”⁵⁴

In his last work Barth was simply bringing to a logical conclusion, revolting as this may appear to a Lutheran, the old Reformed minimization of the sacraments and the God-ordained use of their visible elements with the Word. Rejection of baptismal regeneration is still very much in the picture in current Reformed theology and in the “born again” modern mode of theology.

Very similar statements can be made in connection with the other sacrament. The erroneous views of the Reformed in this matter are so well known and of such long duration that no extensive discussion is necessary. Brief reference, however, may well be made to seeming agreements regarding Lord’s Supper in recent Lutheran-Reformed dialogs. Agreements have not been achieved by a radical change in the Reformed position, but rather by retaining old disagreements and assuming them to be non-divisive. One no longer talks about “real presence” but contents oneself with a discussion of “presence.” The unworthy communicant is described as to what makes him unworthy, but not as to what he receives. Actually, the Reformed Lord’s Supper view is being vigorously upheld. At least for the present, the yielding seems to be, if any place, in other quarters. The more rational Lutheran theology becomes these days, the more likely it will be ready to drop the mystery of the real presence in favor of the more reasonable Reformed theory.

This consideration of current Reformed thinking about the broad subject of salvation has revealed erroneous positions on the most basic issues of the Christian religion. The question, not just theoretical but also very practical, suggests itself: Are church bodies that embrace such wholesale and fundamental errors still to be regarded and treated as Christian churches? Because of time and space considerations that question cannot be fully treated here, but it merits the most careful concern of all who bear responsibility for upholding a correct and consistent Lutheran practice.

PART FOUR: CURRENT REFORMED THINKING ABOUT THE CHURCH AND BELIEVER IN THE WORLD

In this fourth section the general theme is the “Church and Believer in the World.” Special attention will be given to such major subdivisions as church boundary lines and ecumenical endeavors, mission work and the social gospel, sanctification and the new morality.

The chief characteristic of today’s Reformed theory and activity regarding the church’s structure involves the removal of boundary lines and the enlargement of horizons. The rules of the game set no limits. What the future holds is anybody’s guess.

In the Protestant world, both in Lutheran and Reformed varieties and in their interrelations, old, long-standing denominational and synod lines are becoming blurred. This point bears emphasizing at the outset of today’s topic.

Old confessional dividing lines are becoming indistinct because of the anti-confessional climate of the times. The whole current theological approach to Bible interpretation and doctrinal statements described in previous sessions simply makes doctrine less important as a means of shaping church alignments. When Bible content is undetermined and open to dispute, it is hardly possible to get too concerned about a specific doctrine. Not so long ago church and world were treated to the spectacle of a bishop in the Episcopal Church actually terming the doctrine of the Trinity “useless baggage” that the church should discard if it wanted to perform effectively in today’s come-of-age world. The bishop, no piker in his doctrinal aberrations, was censured by his fellow bishops, but only by a 103-36 vote. The heresy trial the resigned bishop subsequently

sought was dodged since that is about the last thing any Episcopalian would want.

Anti-confessionalism is plaguing all churches these days, even Rome. But Reformed churches are especially susceptible to this ecclesiastical ill of our time. It is appropriate in this connection to recall two quotations from our first session. One from *Marburg Revisited* by a Reformed theologian made this point:

It remains true that the Reformed Confessions have more the character of constitutional documents by which the confessional position of the church is defined, than instruments with which they actually confess their faith. The crowning example of this type of document is the Westminster Confession of Faith which originated, not in a confessional situation at all, but in the context of a politico-ecclesiastical scheme which was the price of a military alliance.⁵⁵

In view of such a background and origin of a main Reformed confession, the next statement of a Reformed theologian comes as not too great a surprise:

The propriety of using the confessions as a basis for an exposition of the church's faith at the present day, however, raises a number of questions which demand further consideration. The fact cannot be ignored that the Confession no longer holds the same place in the mind of the church as it did in the past. While Presbyterian churches on both sides of the Atlantic continue formally to accept the Confessions, they do so with certain expressed and unexpressed qualifications and reservations.⁵⁶

We have reason to regret that Biblical fellowship principles are being all but ignored in our day, even in the Lutheran Church. Our assignment being what it is, however, we will have to note that the case is even worse among the Reformed. Fellowship based on unity of doctrine is regarded as neither necessary nor desirable nor possible.

Substitutions for unity in doctrine are sought and assumed to be found. Anglicans, much as Romans find in papal authority a unifying factor, look to their vaunted apostolic succession as valid cover and cure for a multitude of doctrinal deviations. It is ironic, however, that by this very reliance on succession as a union device, they have painted themselves into a corner of today's ecumenical scene. Broad enough in doctrinal latitude to embrace the even more latitudinarian Methodists, their concern for apostolic succession has motivated them to turn aside from union with Methodists at least three times in recent decades and may very well yet squelch future union endeavors.

Another Anglican substitute for unity in doctrine is liturgical conformity. Canon Smyth and Bishop Rawlinson in their 1958 *The Genius of the Church of England* declare:

The great contribution of Archbishop Land to the Anglican tradition was the dual principle of maintaining a decent uniformity in the external worship of God according to the doctrines and discipline of the Church of England as the basis and condition of a wide liberty of theological speculation. You can afford variety in the pulpit so long as your clergy are united by "using the Form in the said Book prescribed and none other," their divisions of opinion are a source of strength and not of weakness in the life of the Church....the Church of Rome encourages an almost luxuriant variety of devotion, but insists on theological uniformity: the Church of England embraces many shades of theological opinion, but desiderates liturgical uniformity.⁵⁷

To this blatant subversion of Biblical fellowship principles through an espousal of liturgical uniformity Lutherans schooled in Augustana VII and its *satis est* and the companion *nec necesse est* can react in only one way. They will mark such liturgical formalism with such objectives as a major threat and danger to the church's health.

Another non-doctrinal unifying factor the Reformed look to as a replacement for fellowship based on true unity, is a least-common-denominator type of essential unity, around which all can rally when threatened by a great danger and a powerful foe. This approach of the Reformed is old but still new.

It was advocated among the Germans in Luther's day when Pope and Emperor threatened the Reformation. It was advocated among the Germans in our day when Hitler sought to control church affairs through *Reichsbischof* Ludwig Mueller's German Evangelical Church. Then the opposition Confessional Synod of Barmen in 1934 under the leadership of Barth addressed to German evangelical churches the plea:

Irrespective to their Lutheran, Reformed or United background and responsibility to recognize anew the majesty of the one Lord of the one church and, on this account, the essential unity of their faith, their love, and their hope, of their confession and their task, and of their message through sermon and sacrament.⁵⁸

Now that Hitler has been all but forgotten, those who helped conquer him have become the common enemy against whom all the Reformed are to unite in spite of doctrinal disagreements. "Christians, unite against Communism" is a cry heard frequently in Reformed circles and also unfortunately among Lutherans.

Even the best of the Reformed seem to have this Achilles' heel of compromising some doctrine in the face of a dangerous foe on the grounds of *essential* unity. J. Gresham Machen, who can be mentioned with honor in many another connection, in his struggle with modern liberal theology within Presbyterianism put this less than honorable quotation on the record in *Christianity and Liberalism*:

The recrudescence of "chiliasm" or "premillennialism" in the modern church causes us serious concern; it is coupled, we think, with a false method in interpreting Scripture which in the long run will be productive of harm. Yet how great is our agreement with those who hold the premillennial view! They share to the full our reverence for the authority of the Bible; they share our ascription to the deity of the Lord Jesus and our supernaturalistic conception both of the entrance of Jesus into the world and of the consummation when He shall come again. Certainly, then, from our point of view, their error, serious though it may be, is not deadly error; and Christian fellowship, with loyalty not only to the Bible but to the great creeds of the church can still unite us with them.⁵⁹

This was a general viewpoint of the Fundamentalists of the previous generation. But more on them in the next session.

If old Reformed doctrinal and confessional denominational boundaries are being obliterated by today's theological drives and programs, it is not surprising that less important, more practical dividing lines of church polity are giving way, at least on the theoretical and clergy plane, if not down there on the practical, grassroots level. Lutherans who hold to Augustana_XXVIII will actually see in this downgrading of the old polity distinctions that divided Reformed bodies, especially in England and our country, one of the rare pluses of this ecumenical age.

A specific instance of this development is the ease with which previous and long-standing conflicts were settled in the consummation of Congregational and Presbyterian union in England into the United Reformed Church created in October 1972. John Huxtable, an official of the new church as well as of its Congregational parent, describes the experience in this way:

One of the questions which had soon to be settled was the relation of the local

church, the seat of ultimate authority for Congregationalists, and the Session (meeting of local elders), which in Presbyterianism, carried local responsibility. This inevitably led to a discussion of the eldership. Presbyterians ordain elders for life; Congregationalists elect deacons for a specific period of service; the actual work done by these two groups is in fact much more similar than might at first sight appear. There was considerable objection from the Congregational side to the notion of eldership, since an ordained elder seemed a sort of cleric: but Presbyterians claimed that this office was a safeguard against clericalism. In the end it was agreed that the two characteristic features of the local churches in each tradition should be retained; and that Presbyterians should learn to experience the Church Meeting and that Congregationalists should learn the meaning of the eldership. Accordingly the responsibilities of the Church Meeting and of the Elders Meeting are spelt out in some detail; and while elders will be ordained for life, their period of service may be limited to such periods as the local church may determine. It is expected that these two spheres of responsibility in the local church will work out easily by mutual consultation. In this way it is hoped that the value of the two traditions will be mutually enriching.⁶⁰

This example demonstrates how the anti-creedal, pro-merger climate of the times, given some shared experiences, can overcome what were once regarded as irreconcilable differences over church polity. There can of course be hang-ups when such a thorny question as apostolic succession is raised. It is also true that on the grassroots level there are still strong feelings about the pet form of polity. But at least to a great extent in Reformed thinking, if not so much in actual fact and practice as yet, the idea is getting stronger that the old arguments about bishops, synods, congregations just aren't as important as they once seemed.

Although more than just Reformed thinking is involved in the matter, for practical purposes it might be well at this point to take stock and sum up major developments among the Reformed in actual and proposed mergers and realignments and in the grand but elusive ecumenical dream. There is considerable material to be reported.

The Sixties were as big a merger decade for the Reformed as for Lutherans. In July 1961 with formal ratification of the new constitution the United Church of Christ took the final formal step in the creation of a merger, actually in business already for four years, of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches.

In the middle of the decade of the Sixties the large Methodist Church and the small Evangelical United Brethren worked out a union proposal that was finally consummated in April 1968 by the creation of the giant United Methodist Church. Most of the people involved thought this was the thing to do and simply did their thing. Some 10,000 EUB members in the Pacific Northwest, however, thought otherwise. Shunning Methodist liberalism, they set up their own Evangelical Church of North America. One of the leaders of the Oregon opponents of merger explained: "The liberalism of Methodism practiced here in Oregon just isn't compatible with my conservative theological position."⁶¹

After a property settlement was worked out with as little court action as possible, the new church took its place in the ranks of the rather small, rather conservative Reformed bodies. Even Reformed mergers are subject to what might well be an ecclesiastical Parkinson's law: The decrease in the number of churches that mergers endeavor to accomplish is offset by the increase in the number of churches that mergers actually bring about.

Meantime the Reformed in England were busy in union efforts. By 1969 the Methodists had overwhelmingly favored a reunion with the Anglicans. An undefined laying-on-of-hands

service was planned to soothe Anglican consciences without ruffling Methodist egos. The Anglicans failed to approve by the required three-fourths majority. Soon there was another effort along the same lines; again the Methodists were left waiting at the altar. The effort, however, was by no means dead. It once again became an item of church news. The knotty problem of apostolic succession should simply be side-stepped is what those propose who favor the merger on the alleged grounds that “much doctrinal unity has already been established,” or that “the Methodist ministry has been used by God,” or that “Anglicans have traditionally been free to interpret worship forms and actions according to conscientious conviction.”

As was previously indicated, one major transdenominational merger did occur in England recently. In 1972 the United Reformed Church (URC) was created by putting together about 175,000 English Congregationalists and 60,000 Presbyterians. The old Calvinist-Arminian dispute had long since subsided when the Presbyterians abandoned their hard-line positions of the past. Cooperation in church work from 1933 on had demonstrated that the polity questions were not as important as they seemed.

Back in 1925 in Canada one of the most ambitious Reformed mergers up to that time was effected. Canadian Congregationalists, Methodists, and Presbyterians linked themselves in the United Church of Canada.

More recently, in 1947, a United Church of South India was formed. United were Anglican, Methodist, Congregational, Presbyterian and Reformed Churches that had come into being through denominational mission endeavors. Since the mission front was especially susceptible to the idea of cooperation and merged efforts, the daughters preceded mothers in merger marriage. This has also happened in other areas. In the middle part of this century there were some 50 trans-confessional church unions around the world. Reformed churches, using the term as a specific denomination and not as a catch-all grouping, were involved in 17, Congregationalists in 9, Methodists in 7. This contrasts with Anglican and Lutheran involvement in one such trans-confessional merger. At the end of the 1960's some 80 trans-confessional union negotiations were under way, with Methodists participating in 19, Reformed in 18, Anglicans in 16, and Congregationalists in 10.

The Seventies, however, saw fewer unions consummated than had the previous ten years. The creation of the United Reformed Church in England has already been mentioned. It will soon be enlarged by the addition of the Reformed Association of the Church of Christ. The Protestant Church of Belgium achieved the second union within ten years in 1978. The first occurred in 1976, and 1977 was the year of the birth of the Uniting Church in Australia, a church that has 1,700,000 members formerly Congregationalists, Methodists and Presbyterians. In 1970 alone three unions took place; the Eglise du Christ au Zaire; the Church of North India, merging a half dozen denominations; and the Church of Pakistan, uniting Anglicans, Methodists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians. The listing is not without significance. But in comparison to the previous ten years the merger pace has slowed.

Some attention at this point should be given to the Consultation on Church Union, the ultimate in U.S. Reformed merger efforts still in the works. More than anything else, it represents current Reformed attitudes in our country about church and fellowship. A brief sketch of the Consultation's history may be in place.

A sermon set this bit of modern church history in motion. Preaching in Bishop Pike's California cathedral, E. Carson Blake in December 1960 urged that it was high time to bring the churches together. Within two years four churches, the Episcopalian, the Northern Presbyterian, the Methodist and the United Church of Christ, were holding the first consultations. In the next

year, 1963, at Oberlin, the four were joined by the Disciples of Christ and the Evangelical United Brethren. In 1966 there were another two additions, the Southern Presbyterians and the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The 1967 additions were two black churches, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. This made 10 partners in the consultation, a number reduced to nine the next year when the Evangelical United Brethren-Methodist Merger was achieved. Now the number is back at ten, with the recent addition of an association of community churches.

From 1963 to 1968 the Consultation devoted most of its work sessions to matters of faith and order. Special subjects receiving attention were: the authority of the Scriptures, the authority of creeds, the relation between Scripture and tradition, the meaning of the sacraments and the manner of their administration, and ways and means of overcoming differences regarding ministry and polity. Given the bright dream of a unified church of about 25,000,000 members and a studied indifference in doctrinal matters, it was not too difficult to issue vague statements of agreement or to declare unsolved problems not divisive. In 1968 the COCU Liturgy, "An Order for the Proclamation of the Word of God and the Celebration of the Lord's Supper," was produced in anticipation of the many union services that it was assumed would soon be held. It didn't work out that way.

The Consultation's long-range agenda determined that the next step would be to draft and then to send out for study the plan of union which had been the specific and stated goal from the start. The union plan was approved for study and sent out to the member churches in 1970 with the request that it be studied in local congregations in ecumenical groupings, and at scholarly and administrative levels. The timing could not have been worse. The plan ran into stiff opposition.

It isn't that the nine Reformed churches involved had suddenly found a lost confessional conscience and had determined to follow the Bible's fellowship directions. Rather, the merger motivation and momentum had all but vanished in a new situation. By 1970 there were serious doubts that the nine churches could hold their own members, let alone shepherd them into a new body. There were dropouts by the thousands. Some were disenchanted because their churches were moving too fast or too slow in social areas, while others opted for an ecumenical underground or underground ecumenical effort. There was a deep suspicion of the value of institutions and structures. The plan of union never had a chance.

The COCU nadir came when the United Presbyterians simply withdrew in 1972, charging that the whole effort was causing more harm than good. The "inordinate concern" for the plan and the related "tinkering with structure," it was charged, were actually impeding interdenominational cooperation. In not too long a time, however, the United Presbyterians were back, but the Consultation has not yet fully recovered from the setback.

The 1973 Plenary of the Consultation on Church Union in Memphis heard the report that the responses of the nine churches to the union plan indicated considerable agreement with non-controversial items of doctrine and order but very little consensus in the matters of ministry or church structure. The result was that the Consultation decided on a radical change in its methods, if not in the ultimate goals.

The idea of trying to draft a more satisfactory plan of union was simply tabled. Instead it was resolved to explore ways in which union could be practiced and promoted immediately within the existing denominational set-up. The hope was that grassroots ecumenical developments involving neighboring parishes of different denominations would teach the ecumenical lesson by doing. An example is the five-parish union congregation that was created

in Virginia. The Consultation also resolved to speed efforts to lessen tensions between the three black churches and the others. There have been some heated discussions about “compensation action.”

Episcopalian Peter Day sums up the matter in this way:

The Consultation did not yield in its insistence that the ultimate goal was structural unity, but agreed that the way to such a goal was process rather than a plan—the discovery of Christian unity by Christians working and praying together and developing such structures as might be needed to make this unity effective in action.⁶²

In an earlier Plenary of COCU an attempt was made to reach agreement on an amended version of the old Plan of Union. Sharp disagreement manifested itself in the church-ministry section. But in a subsequent Plenary a mutually agreeable statement was worked out by the commissioners. Latest COCU reports speak of a Leuenberg-type mutual recognition proposal that member bodies are to act on.

That there have been and are Reformed efforts at work in the ecumenical movement is so obvious it scarcely needs mentioning. The biggest names and the most influential leaders, men like Cavert and Jones, have pushed the cause almost from the beginning. At Edinburgh’s World Missionary Conference in 1910 the modern ecumenical movement is supposed to have been born. It grew to adulthood in the formation of the World Council of Churches at Amsterdam in 1948. In 1962 at New Delhi the International Missionary Council was integrated into the movement. In all these steps the major impetus came from Reformed circles.

The Reformed have always been most susceptible to two ecumenical errors: the notion that John 17:21-23 describes church reunions and ecumenical endeavors, and the supposition that denominationalism and confessionalism are the sin of sins that needs to be repented of, preferably by denominational suicide, Emil Brunner for once was right when he warned Reformed ecumenicals in a 1954 book, *The Misunderstanding of the Church*, that in the external reunion of denominational churches it is always the organizational element that gains, not spirit and life. He emphatically states: “In the last resort such a movement must end with the victory of the most ecclesiastical church—the Roman.”⁶³

The spectacle of misguided Reformed leaders in the ecumenical effort playing Rome’s game in a restructuring of visible Christendom is sad to behold. Even sadder is what has become all too apparent in another portion of the subject under discussion, the matter of the church’s mission and missions. This can be regarded as one of the key concerns of our time that affects profoundly everything the churches are and do.

Almost from the time of its origin the Reformed tradition has shown a tendency to violate the injunction of Augustana_XXVIII: “The power of the Church and the civil power must not be confounded.” Well known are the story of Zwingli’s large and legion politico-religious endeavors, the Geneva management under Calvin, and the Pilgrim and Puritan plantings in our own land. This inveterate inclination that never diminished through the centuries was reinforced and redirected when the social Gospel approach made the scene in 1907.

The Reformed were the motivators, chiefly Walter Rauschenbusch. His name sounds Lutheran. His grandfather and four other pastor ancestors were Lutherans. The father, who came to this country with Weinmann and Wrede, our Synod’s father, however, made the switch that brought Walter into the Baptist camp and into this discussion. Little more need be done or said than to allow the familiar name of author and books to conjure up insights and understanding acquired previously. Rauschenbusch wrote in 1907 *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, in 1912 *Christianizing the Social Order*, in 1916 *Social Principles of Jesus*, and in 1917, one year before

his death, *Theology of the Social Gospel*.

The social gospel movement has had its ups and downs among the Reformed, as well as among Christians in general. The first major victory was Amendment XVIII and the Volstead Act. This was followed by the enforcement fiasco and a loud call for repeal. World War I disillusioned Rauschenbusch about the prospects of improving the world. The Depression came along to underscore social injustice, but the funds and fervor needed for action were lacking. By the end of World War II it was painfully obvious that industrialization, urbanization, and socialization were definitely on the increase, at a fast pace and a high level in certain sections of the globe while at a beginning crawl in others.

All this gave impetus to the social gospel endeavor. This was especially the case among the Reformed who have always had the intellectual inclination and the emotional itch to reshape Caesar's world into a secular version of Christ's kingdom by an application of an augmented list of Commandments. This was especially the case among those Reformed who had departed from a Biblical program of believing and proclaiming salvation by Christ Jesus in favor of providing a form of secular Christianity for a come-of-age world.

It is not necessary in this gathering to detail by chapter and verse the extent to which most of the mainline Reformed groups and most of the smaller, more conservative bodies are playing the role of social activists. Contributions intended for honest mission endeavors end up in Angela Davis defense funds or in grants for purchasing modern versions of Beecher's Bibles. Methodists and members of the UCC go all the way in these matters. Southern Baptists zealously endeavor to keep the state out of the church's business, as they have for two hundred years since Virginia disestablishment, but they are not always as scrupulous about keeping themselves out of the government's business. The Moral Majority was as typical a Reformed development as could be found anywhere, anytime. In a recent presidential election two Reformed pastors were prominent candidates.

This is a point to be noted. Even the Missouri Synod has been infiltrated by this Reformed perversion of the church's mission. And this needs to be said: even a Missouri on the way back in some respects can't seem to shake itself loose from false commitments to a social gospel, neither at the presidential level, where some things are to our liking, nor at other levels. Even Bohlmann takes time out from a busy schedule for leading prayers in unlikely places.

What is especially regrettable about this Reformed social gospel instinct is the effect it has had on the churches' missions, especially foreign missions. Often the time marked by the end of World War II and the consequent emergence of the Third World is looked upon as a break in old mission traditions, with the emphasis shifting from Christianizing the individual to socializing the community, from proclamation of the "none other name" to a reluctance to tamper with homegrown paganism.

Actually, this tragic development was plotted at least fifteen years earlier. In 1930 the Reformed denominations of our land undertook a large-scale interdenominational review of missions. Reasons for the timing are obvious. Available funds for missions were drastically reduced. Seven Reformed groups pooled efforts in carrying out the study. Involved were these denominations: Northern Baptist, Congregational, Episcopal, Methodist, Northern Presbyterian, Southern Presbyterian, and Reformed Church in America. Congregationalist Hocking headed the commission that in 1932 published the report, "Rethinking Missions: A Laymen's Inquiry after 100 Years."

The report stressed the need for building indigenous churches and for recruiting for the effort the best talents in the church, viewpoints with which we would not quarrel. It also said,

however:

If a new alignment of forces, rising above denominational and doctrinal barriers can evoke creative missionary statesmanship at home and abroad, can command the enthusiasm of the finest and most adventurous type of Christian young men and women, and bring the whole enterprise to new levels of accomplishment, we are convinced that the churches of America will have a great part in the making of a better and happier world, but not otherwise.⁶⁴

The report also said that “the time has come to set the educational and other philanthropic aspects of mission work free from organized responsibility to the work of conscious and direct evangelism.”⁶⁵ Thus the program of social improvement was given an independent status and began to be viewed as an end in itself. Most unfortunately, the door was opened to a universalistic approach to foreign mission by the viewpoint expressed in this statement regarding attitudes toward other faiths: “We can desire no variety of religious experience to perish until it has yielded up to the rest of its own ingredient of truth. The Christian will therefore regard himself as a co-worker with the forces within each such religious system which are making for righteousness.”⁶⁶

The Hocking Report was strenuously debated in Reformed circles during the Depression years. It was hotly contested in certain quarters. Rockefeller, who liked the report, was so disturbed by attacks on it that his previous donations to Northern Baptist mission endeavors began to shrink and soon dried up. Among the sharpest critics were the conservative Presbyterians and their leader, J. Gresham Machen, who was soon embroiled in a controversy with Pearl Buck. When an independent Presbyterian mission agency was set up by Machen and others as a protest to the Hocking report and its thinking, discipline was attempted. The result was the founding of an opposition Presbyterian body. Despite such strong but scattered resistance, the Hocking view prevailed in most mainline Reformed bodies, first at home and eventually also out in the foreign fields.

The ultimate results were on parade at Bangkok in December 1972 and January 1973 at the WCC's Mission and Evangelism Conference. The theme was “Salvation Today.” But Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul, sin, justification, and heaven were lost in the shuffle as attention centered on solidarity with Hanoi, creative liberation movements, and dialog with Buddhists. It is no wonder that zeal for foreign missions has declined sharply in the large Reformed bodies. The American Baptist Convention cut its foreign workers in half from 1936 to 1968 and the United Presbyterians by one-third. When loss in quality of the work is added to this quantity diminution, the picture becomes doubly depressing.

Current Reformed sanctification theology and theory is a compilation of most of the old errors that afflicted the Reformed in centuries past and some modern aberrations that have resulted from new views of what sin and salvation is. There always has been among the Reformed a tendency to overemphasize the works of sanctification to the point of legalism. This holds true of both the Calvinist and the Arminian branches.

Calvin himself gained the title of “theologian of sanctification.” His denial of universal grace and of universal justification necessitated a search for the missing comfort in the believer's own heart and life. Stress was placed on the evidence of the conversion experience and the resultant testimony of works. It was easy in such a situation to fall into the trap of legalism and externalism. In our own time there are Reformed tendencies to operate with blue laws, with a first or seventh day command, with prohibitions of smoking and drinking, with various infringements of Christian liberty.

In this century many of these types of sanctification extremes are aimed beyond the individual Christian at the community and its transformation. Not only is the born-again individual supposed to stay out of stores on Sunday, but all of the citizens of the community, including Jews and Seventh-Day Adventists, are also supposed to conform. Whether atheists like it or not, there is going to be a prayer period in the public schools, even if it takes another amendment. Even though we definitely place ourselves on the side of church worship and private prayer, we can't help but be annoyed by Reformed efforts to regulate the community in the name of him who wants to save, not society, but individual sinners one at a time and through the Spirit sanctify them also one at a time.

The other side of the coin reveals a Reformed tendency to sanctification relaxation. This involves those who have swallowed a modern theology that transforms the Bible's sin into an anthropological flaw or an environmental ill. Under such terms the struggle against sin and for sanctification involves individual or joint effort to right social wrongs or an existential encounter with a so-called "New Being." Popular is the Tillich approach that defines sanctification as a "process in which the power of the New Being transforms community, inside and outside the church."⁶⁷ Reinhold Niebuhr likewise can view Christ as the Sanctifier, but this is not the Jesus Christ of the Bible whose merits cleanse us and whose power strengthens us. This is a symbolical Christ whose agape spirit we have to absorb to become sanctified. How this neo-orthodox view of sanctification is supposed to be an improvement over the old moralism of liberal theology is hard to see. Under a cover of new and strange terms there is to be found the same old hope for an ethical improvement based on man's capability for common sense and the good life. A personal encounter with a symbolical Christ just isn't going to provide the kind of sanctification the Bible teaches.

The Arminian brand of Reformed theology, as developed by Wesley and many Methodists, was vulnerable to the old sanctification error of perfectionism. There has been a long debate about Wesley's perfectionism. Some hold that this involved only conquests over voluntary sins and an occasional mood of completeness. We pass that debate by in the interest of evaluating current Reformed thinking on the subject. Regardless of Wesley's own views, he has some contemporary disciples who leave no doubt as to their stand. H. Orton Wiley wrote in 1960:

We believe that entire sanctification is that act of God, subsequent to regeneration, by which believers are made free from original sin or depravity, and brought into a state of entire devotement to God, and the holy obedience of love made perfect. It is wrought by the baptism with the Holy Spirit, and comprehends in one experience the cleansing of the heart from sin and the abiding indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, empowering the believer for life and service.⁶⁸

While the number of Reformed who believe in perfectionism in the strict sense of the term, may be relatively small, yet in actual fact there are many who have so minimized sin and sanctification that they might just as well believe that man can attain a perfect victory over their kind of mini-sin and achieve a 100% performance in their kind of graded sanctification.

Closely related to this kind of perfectionism is millennialism. The form in which the error is found in Reformed theology today varies. Some hold to a so-called theology of hope, with all hope centered on earthly improvements and perfections achieved through man's skill and goodness assisted by a returning Christ or a Christ waiting at the wings of the world's stage. Such a view surfaced strongly at Evanston in 1954 when the World Council of Churches met under the theme, "Christ the Hope of the World." Only a few European theologians conceived of

this hope in spiritual and Biblical terms. When one of them, Edmund Schlink, gave his exegetical study of the teaching regarding Christ's return, most of the U.S. theologians in the assembly simply could not comprehend what he was talking about, so earthbound had their theology of hope become.

Among the Reformed are also those who actually hold to a millennium either of the *pre* or *post* variety. This has always been a folly of many of the more conservative among the Reformed. It was the common error of most of the so-called Fundamentalists. It is an error that has not died out. Writing for Carl Henry's *Fundamentals of the Faith*, Wilbur M. Smith of Deerfield insists:

Whether we believe in a literal millennium or not, we cannot deny that both the Old and the New Testament clearly set forth a time when Christ Himself will reign upon this earth, when righteousness will prevail and when the enemies of Christ will be subdued, when all rule and authority and power will be subjected to Christ. This will culminate in the deliverance of creation from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the children of God (Ro 8:21). This is no doubt the period to which our Lord Himself refers when He speaks of the time "in the regeneration."⁶⁹

Smith is by no means alone in such millennial views. At the opposite pole are such views as Dodd's "realized eschatology," which makes futurism in the New Testament irrelevant or the symbolical approach to eschatology that Reinhold Niebuhr favored, which interprets its terms as something like inspiring poetic concepts but nothing more than that.

To the moral deterioration of our time liberal Reformed theology has contributed an impetus that can be clearly noted. The chief factors have been the inclination to take sin much less seriously than it deserves and the readiness to challenge any absolute authority in the ethical field.

An obvious case in point is the willingness with which most Reformed churches in this century have accommodated themselves to liberal divorce laws. Their Seventh Commandment was allowed to become a dead letter, and a host of ills descended upon the land. In more recent years a good number of Reformed churches took the lead in calling for the legalization of abortion on demand and perpetrating on our land the greatest evil it has ever seen. When conventions and councils of church bodies cease to take sin seriously, it is unlikely that the members themselves will be inclined to take a firm personal stand.

Especially detrimental in the matter of our declining moral standards is the approach termed the "New Morality" or "situation ethics." Fostering this brand of ethics are numerous Reformed thinkers scattered throughout the major denominations. Men from the Anglican communion are especially prominent. Robinson, Pike, and Fletcher can be mentioned.

Latching onto only one of the Bible's three dimensions of a good work, these situationists deceive the simple with their endless talk about a love ethic. This ethic rules out all prescriptions and absolute norms and allows love to reign and to regulate conduct in each situation according to its own big and bleeding heart. After a decade or two or three of brainwashing along this line, many are finding situation ethics most uninhibiting and much to their liking. The worst is yet to come.

More likely than not, it will come at the hands of Joseph Fletcher, one of the main spokesmen for the situationists. His more recent writings cause us as much trouble as his *Moral Responsibility* volume. Soon after its publication Fletcher switched his field from theology to medical research, beginning his new career as visiting professor of Medical Ethics at the University of Virginia. As if there weren't already problems of casuistry enough in the medical

field caused by miracle drugs and organ transplants! One shudders at the thought of Fletcher situationism being applied to the field of the ethics of medicine. One can only hope that somehow his medical ethics views gain less acceptance than did his general ethical approach.

PART FIVE: CONSERVATIVE REFORMED ELEMENTS

In this fifth and final part of our examination of current Reformed thinking the purpose is to concentrate on the more conservative elements in this religious grouping. In the course of previous discussions on Reformed approaches to dialog, revelation, salvation, church, and sanctification we have for the most part withheld comment on this conservative Reformed element with the intention of giving it its own special consideration in the final section.

Several reasons suggest such a procedure. For one thing, this conservative Reformed position is obviously a minority view, not representative of the mainline body. If viewed simultaneously with the majority mainline trends, it could easily get lost in the shuffle and fail to receive the attention it deserves.

Though an off-beat minority position, Reformed conservatism is important, not only from our viewpoint, but also for its own sake and on its own merits. In most cases it represents the old traditions that reach back to the original fathers and founders of Reformed theology and may well be around much longer than recent innovations that hopefully may soon be folding their tents like the Arabs and silently stealing away.

This important, though sideline, conservative brand of Reformed theology is also going to get special attention from us, because it's our brand of theology too. We may not agree with the single doctrines but we approve the approach that grants importance to Scripture, to confessions, to doctrines. There can't help but be, at least by way of comparison, some admiration, some affinity, some attraction on our part.

And that's just why some very special attention is in place. We need to be able to orient ourselves properly over against the conservative Reformed camp. In this age of vanishing doctrinal concern and denominational bounds, the suggestion is frequently heard that the ultimate result of merger movements is going to be a new ecclesiastical realignment of churches along lines that might be loosely termed "liberal-conservative," but that some prefer to denominate "moderate-fundamentalist."

The last word of the previous sentence and section introduces the new point, the problem of semantics involved in today's topic with the term "fundamentalist." This is the classic example of a respectable and cherished term lost to all good in theological discussion by misuse and abuse. Some by deliberate misapplication of a possible implication have sought to fortify a false position of theirs. Others have turned the term into a loaded adjective that caricatures what's good and exaggerates what's bad and thus appeals to today's theological illiterates who want to be supplied with instant thinking in slogan form.

If "fundamentalist" were allowed to mean what its root says, if it referred to those who stand on the fundament of the Bible, who trust the foundation facts of the Christian faith, and who confess the whole Christian truth as revealed in Scripture, then certainly we all would want to be called and would want to be fundamentalists and would consider the term a badge of honor.

When, however, a century ago, Inspector Grossman of St. Sebald tried to tell Doctor Walther of St. Louis that in fellowship determination and confessional subscription a distinction between fundamental and nonfundamental doctrines could be made, a type of "fundamentalism" was being espoused that Walther properly rejected.⁷⁰ Neither he nor we would ever object to the valid differentiation in dogmatics between doctrines that are fundamental and nonfundamental,

but objection must be made to a view that, in an alleged espousal of “fundamentals,” improperly classifies nonfundamentals as inconsequential for confessional and denominational integrity and as disregarable and discardable when fellowship is determined.

The semantic problem with the term “fundamentalist” is complicated by the fact that special historical connotations have, in one use, been attached to the word. Since 1921 the usually capitalized “Fundamentalism” has more often than not been used to designate a conservative theological thrust in Reformed churches exerted against liberal inroads, especially during the years from 1909 to 1930. This specialized use of the term to designate a distinct grouping in a distinct period in church history unfortunately spawned a derivative epithet, sometimes but not always capitalized and often used as sneer and smear word to conjure up the image of an illiterate literalist preacher from the so-called Bible Belt.

Finally, one branch of today’s descendants of the original Fundamentalists insists on designating itself by the term and thus proudly disassociates itself from other branches. To minimize the semantic problem as much as possible, the term “Fundamentalist” will be used here exclusively in the sense mentioned in the last and the antepenultimate place in the list, that is, designating either a 1909-1930 Reformed conservative or one of his today’s descendants.

One other introductory problem remains to be pointed out. As indicated in the previous section, there are various types of conservative Reformed theologians. They are found both in the mainline denominations and also in the small conservative bodies that have broken off from the larger groupings, usually for confessional and conservative reasons. To distinguish properly among the various types of Reformed conservatives, it may be well for us to view briefly their common ancestor, the Fundamentalist of the first third of this century.

That century dawned on deeply disturbed Reformed church bodies in which the conservatively minded were under attack on three distinct fronts. Higher criticism was by then in full swing. Theories of multiple authorship of single Bible books and of a common origin of all religious ideas in folk mythology were undermining the old confidence in an inspired and inerrant Bible. Then too rapid and recent urbanization and industrialization caused many to view religion from the social gospel angle and to shift emphasis from the individual sinner to the disturbed society, from the means of grace to a legislative program, from the heavenly goal to the building of a heaven on this poor earth, from creeds and convictions to deeds and demonstrations. Finally, by 1900 Huxley had fulfilled his self-appointed task of popularizing the dry-as-dust writings of Darwin and it sometimes seemed that the whole war for the Bible centered on single battle between Genesis truth and evolutionary theory.

Against these three developments the Reformed conservatives directed the theological thrust that has been designated since 1921 as “Fundamentalism.” The first counteractivity was the intradenominational heresy trial. There were some expulsions from seminary chairs and parish pulpits. A typical early Presbyterian battle was the Briggs trial in which the Old Testament teacher was suspended but continued working at Union Seminary that had by then broken its old denominational ties. A typical feature of this battle was the fact that the storm centered on an Old Testament man. Old Testament teachers were often in the forefront of the liberal lines.

As the liberal-conservative struggle continued with less and less success for the better cause, the tendency was to switch from intradenominational to interdenominational efforts. Bible conferences, such as the World’s Christian Fundamental Association, reached across denominational lines. Outstanding leaders and known spellbinders, such as Reuben Torrey of the Los Angeles Bible Institute and James Gray of the Moody establishment, and the indefatigable

and practically ubiquitous William Bell Riley of First Baptist in Minneapolis, were sought out for help by troubled groups in denominations not their own. Interdenominational periodicals such as *The Christian Fundamentalist* championed the cause. A popular effort that caused hands to join across denominational lines was the legislative and judicial effort to prevent the teaching of evolution in public schools. This peaked at Dayton, Tennessee, in July, 1925 when Darrow in the famed Scopes “Monkey Trial” clashed with Bryan, who was presenting his swan song on the American political and religious scene.

But by far the best remembered and no doubt most effective Fundamentalist effort and the actual trigger of the movement that is thus designated was the production and dissemination of the publications entitled simply *The Fundamentals*. Appearing in twelve volumes for about five years from late 1909 on, some 3,000,000 copies were supplied gratis, and up to Volume IX even without request, to “more than 275,000 pastors, evangelists, missionaries, theological professors, theological students, YMCA and YWCA secretaries, Sunday School superintendents, religious editors, and Roman Catholic priests in the English speaking world.”⁷¹ The oil fortune of Lyman and Milton Stewart of Los Angeles supplied the huge funds necessary. The two editors were A. C. Dixon of Chicago’s Moody Church and Dean Torrey of the Los Angeles Bible Institute. The ninety individual articles were supplied by Reformed theologians, mostly Methodists and Anglicans, and in general were moderate, well-written offerings.

As far as content is concerned, the most popular topic in *The Fundamentals*, is the Bible, treated in 27 of the 90 articles. There were 9 general apologetical articles. The next most popular subject was Christ, his person and work, treated explicitly in 8 articles. These three categories account for almost half the 90 articles.

The articles in *The Fundamentals* were effective in renewing and reviving the lagging fight against modernism and liberalism that after several decades of quite fruitless efforts was beginning to show signs of battle fatigue. Theological conservatives among the Reformed took heart, joined hands, and soon the so-called Fundamentalist Movement was under way. Expert researchers of the movement, whose number is no legion, generally agree that it was during the period of the publication of *The Fundamentals* from 1909 to 1914, and immediately thereafter that the Fundamentalist Movement peaked. After World War I a decline set in both in zeal and gain and also in tone and method.

How orthodox was the Fundamentalist movement, especially in its best era? There is much to be praised. In general we can paraphrase Fond du Lac’s Ed. Bragg in his endorsement of Grover Cleveland as a presidential candidate and say, “We love the Fundamentalists most, for the enemies they made.” They fought our natural foes, the exponents of liberal, modern theology.

To be more specific, it was the Holy Scriptures *The Fundamentals* sought to uphold. Exactly 30% of all the 90 articles dealt with the authority or inspiration or necessity or value of the Scriptures. There is a balance between attacks on the claims of higher criticism and more positive statements of what the Bible teaches concerning itself. The chief point made over and over again is the truth that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant truth of God and therefore the reliable source and standard of religious teaching.

The Fundamentalists are also to be commended for their firm stand on certain basic doctrines under special attack. In hindsight and as a parallel to the old “five points” in the Calvinism-Arminianism struggle, it has been common practice to speak of the “five points” of Fundamentalism, even though there never was any specific Fundamentalist quintuple confession to emulate what was done at Dort. The five Fundamentalist points are: Scripture inspiration and

inerrancy, the virgin birth, the substitutionary atonement, the bodily resurrection, and miracles.

This is not, however, to say that we would give a theological *carte blanche* to Fundamentalism. This holds true even in the area of Fundamentalism's greatest strength, Bible inspiration and inerrancy. In spite of their relentless struggle for the Bible Fundamentalists clung to their errors in direct conflict with Scripture. Despite all their praise of the Scriptures, they demonstrated an arrogant trust in reason learned from Zwingli and Calvin. In such vital doctrinal areas as conversion, election, and means of grace, false teachings were emphatically espoused. To cite one out of many possible examples, a quote from *The Fundamentals'* article on "The Science of Conversion" declares that in conversion "the Divine Spirit operates how and where he pleases and with or without means and agencies" and that one of the means required for converting the sinner is "an absolute faith on the part of the human agent," i.e. the worker or public minister.⁷² For us *Sola Scriptura* not only rules out another source or standard of religion but also requires that all of the Bible's doctrines be clearly and correctly confessed, not just those that touch on certain selected "fundamentals."

A second general erroneous approach of the Fundamentalists, was a faulty view of fellowship. Fundamentalists knew there were doctrinal differences within their ranks, but they were willing to agree to disagree. For the sake of the great crusade against the common foe the Fundamentalists ignored differences among themselves either by a mutual pact of silence regarding such differences or by a mutual agreement to treat these differences as not fundamental and not divisive. They did not mark and avoid. They did join in religious work and worship, in union services, in common periodicals and educational endeavors.

The doctrinal Achilles' Heel of the Fundamentalists, however, was premillennialism. Sandeen's 1970 study, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, subtitled *British and American Millenarianism 1800-1930*, effectively supports the thesis that a study of Fundamentalism should shake previous preoccupation with the fascinating 1910-1930 era and move to an earlier period to discern as one of the strong sources of Fundamentalism the premillenarian viewpoint with a strong dispensationalist bent. For all practical purposes those sharing the viewpoint became a church within the Reformed Church in Britain and America in the previous century.

The Reformed conservatives who were more orthodox on this point simply had to put up with such avid premillennialists as Dixon, Pierson, and Gray. There was a gentlemen's agreement to play down millennialism in *The Fundamentals*. Only three articles deal with Christ's return and only one of them by Princeton's Charles Erdman is explicitly premillennialist and even that one pleads: "However great the divergence of views among students of prophecy may seem to be... the "points" of "agreement" are far "more" important."⁷³

The hush-hush tactic worked while the theological war raged but surfaced as soon as the fighting died down. For instance, in the Machen-McIntire split a key issue was premillennialism.

Fundamentalism also was flawed by the old Reformed error regarding the sacraments. If any set of Lutherans were to write ninety articles on "Fundamentals of the Faith" we can be sure a fair share of them would deal with Baptism and Lord's Supper. But in all twelve volumes of *The Fundamentals* with their 90 articles, there isn't a single one devoted to the sacraments.

A list of erroneous positions and practices of the Fundamentalists must include its typically Reformed resort to the state to achieve religious aims. General support for national and state prohibition is one instance. The anti-evolutionary campaign is another. Synodical Conference pastors in the Twin Cities area were branded as evolutionists by William Bell Riley simply because they would not join in his legislative and judicial campaign to outlaw the teaching of evolution. Riley just couldn't see how any Christian who believed in Genesis 1 and 2

could stand aside from his endeavor to get Minnesota to pass a Tennessee-type anti-evolutionary law.

This sketch of the attitudes and activities of the Fundamentalists in the first third of this century has been supplied to make for an easier and sharper description and identification of their successors today. Fundamentalism did not die out in 1930. The Depression sharply curtailed financial resources for all-out drives and national campaigns. New concerns tended to replace the old ones or at least to gain the major share of attention. Liberals mistook a temporary weakness in the Fundamentalists for an early demise. They joined in a premature wake. They thought the answer to Fosdick's old question: "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" was by now a resounding negative. But Fundamentalism just didn't die. It wouldn't even fade away. It emerged from a temporary eclipse somewhat stronger and somewhat wiser than ever before. Improved style and tactics were a part of the revival. Far from dying, Reformed conservatism developed to the point that in our time even a nonconservative like Dean Kelley wonders out loud why in this time conservative churches are experiencing such a favorable growth rate.

Who are today's Fundamentalists? Where are they? What are they doing? A distinction must be made between two sharply divided conservative schools and then in two wings of the schools. Also here some attention to semantics is in place. We distinguish between evangelicalism and contemporary fundamentalism and then secondarily between more conservative and less conservative evangelicals and between withdrawing fundamentalism and aggressive fundamentalism. The basic theological positions are the same and do not differ too much from those of the earlier Fundamentalists. But there are differences in style, in pet activities, and especially in fellowship principles and practices.

Neo-evangelicals were given their name by H. J. Ockenga to provide a more exact designation than was possible under the broader basic term. Some reserve the "neo" prefix for only the more liberal wing of the evangelical camp. That is a matter of semantics. The neo-evangelical or, if someone prefers, evangelical of today claims to have the same theology and doctrines that the earlier Fundamentalists had but wants to improve on their weaknesses. This neo-evangelical or evangelical is opposed to separation and is willing to work within a particular denomination until expelled. Doctor L. Nelson Bell was a staunch conservative in the Southern Presbyterian body. But when innovations and merger proposals upset the body to the point of an exodus of some, Bell pleaded with all to stay in and there continue the fight against liberal inroads. In this approach neo-evangelicals or evangelicals are following in the steps of their Fundamentalist fathers who generally stayed within denominational boundaries.

Modern neo-evangelicals, however, try to avoid some of the fathers' foibles that earned them such a bad image. Modern evangelicalism emphasizes scholarship and tries to meet modernism on its own scholastic and intellectual level. It does not want to be looked upon as an anti-intellectual second-generation Fundamentalism. A favorite evangelical dream of today is a top-level conservative university that will have the prestige that such schools as Fuller and Wheaton now lack. It may be in the making soon, thanks to Graham foundation funding.

Back in the twenties the modernists liked to accuse the Fundamentalists of being so wrapped up in theological controversy that they had no time and energy and inclination for relevant social concerns and contemporary national problems. Modern evangelicalism seeks to avoid this reproach by emphasizing political participation and taking a Calvinist stand on such issues.

The chief working organization of today's neo-evangelicals is the National Association of Evangelicals, founded in April 1942 at St. Louis. It endeavors to bring Christians together in

united action on the basis of common statement of faith, which obviously cannot cover all doctrinal issues. A favorite slogan is “Cooperation without compromise” among Bible-believing Christians. The NAE represents 33 complete denominations, not in the WCC and mostly on the small size, and also has in its membership individual churches or societies from 27 other denominations. Total membership is over 3,000,000. Among the denominational members are such groups as the Elim Fellowship of Pentecostals, Mennonite Brethren, and Primitive Methodists.

A strong voice for today’s evangelicalism in publication is *Christianity Today*, while their ranking pulpit master is Billy Graham. Influential schools are Fuller, Moody, Wheaton.

In contrast to these evangelicals, especially in the matter of fellowship, are the Reformed conservatives who like to call themselves “fundamentalists,” spelled now usually with a small first letter. Carl Henry, former CT editor and at the moment busy at doctrinal writing and publishing, a conservative by almost anybody’s definition, describes his dissatisfaction and that of other neo-evangelicals with old and new fundamentalists in a section in his 1957 book, *Evangelical Responsibility in Contemporary Theology*. Fundamentalist faults he lists are:

1. Displaced doctrinal responsibilities, since so much emphasis was put on selected fundamentals that venerable church creeds were all but forgotten.
2. Misplaced theological emphasis on the other world, personal piety, and emotionalism instead of on the whole counsel of God, the crying needs of civilization, and a sober intellect.
3. Lack of theological and historical perspectives revealed in the minimal amount of theological works produced.
4. Tendency to separation and anti-denominationalism.
5. Emphasis on premillennial dispensationalism.
6. Moving gradually from the positive approach to the negative and polemical as participants in the long struggle suffered from battle fatigue.⁷⁴

This is a modern evangelical criticism of its opponents in the Reformed conservative ranks. A rebuttal in the shape of a fundamentalist evaluation and condemnation of modern evangelicalism will of course be an altogether different matter. The first point the fundamentalist would raise would be the doctrine or lack of doctrine regarding separation.

Robert Lightner of Dallas Seminary in the 1969 introduction to the third edition of his *Neo-Evangelicalism* puts it this way:

Neo-evangelicals either completely neglect or tone down ecclesiastical separation from apostasy and personal separation from the world until these are virtually denied. Since the last [1965] edition of this volume, there has been little change in this attitude. If anything, there has been on the part of spokesmen for the neo-evangelical mood an increased attempt to view certain aspects of the ecumenical movement with more favor and to promote the philosophy which really says that the leaders must become more and more involved with the world if they are going to be able to make the gospel relevant to it. A contradiction of John’s words “love not the world, neither the things that are in the world” is becoming more and more apparent in the new evangelical philosophy.⁷⁵

It is to be noted that Lightner in the previous quotation is not only concerned about what he terms neo-evangelical failure to separate from an apostate denomination, but equally about not enough separation from the world and its social problems and programs.

The typical fundamentalist evaluation of the evangelical position of today will also point to what it terms soft spots in certain doctrinal areas. It is alleged that there is a weakness on the

part of some evangelicals in upholding full Bible inspiration and inerrancy, especially when it comes to yielding to the claims of much of the scientific community. This of course is the main thesis of Lindsell's 1976 book *The Battle for the Bible*. It is further more claimed that the line is not being held firm and true by neo-evangelicals in the matter of the unpopular teaching of total depravity.

Fundamentalists are most dissatisfied with what they call neo-evangelical yielding in eschatology. Fundamentalists are still in the main confirmed premillennialists and do not like the idea that in Reformed conservatism postmillennial or even amillennial views should be allowed to surface.⁷⁶

It is to be expected that fundamentalists with their sharp stress on separation will not be easily pigeonholed when it comes to identifying their associations and groupings. In addition, some of the groupings seem to be extremely reluctant to give out organizational statistics, membership rolls, and program descriptions.

Several fundamentalist associations, however, can be listed. There is the American Council of Christian Churches that was originally formed by McIntire and others to combat the National Council of Churches and which now has added to its list of opponents the National Association of Evangelicals. In addition to a number of independent churches and individuals, the ACCC lists twelve constituent bodies, the largest being the 210,000 member General Association of Regular Baptist Churches. The split in which control of the ACCC was wrested from McIntire was formalized in 1970.

The Independent Fundamental Churches of America (I.F.C.A.) through its publication *Voice* stated clearly that it remains separate from the National Association of Evangelicals for two reasons: the N.A.E. attitude toward apostasy and its broad doctrinal position.⁷⁷ Associated Gospel Churches, organized in 1939, claims to represent some 3,500,000 members. It stands for separation from apostasy and is chiefly active in school promotion and chaplaincy matters. Other associations could be added to the list but those mentioned are among the more influential.

The July 6, 1973, *Christianity Today* carried an article by Elmer Towns with the title, "Trends Among Fundamentalists," which can be drawn on to round off our picture of today's Reformed fundamentalist. Towns presents this provocative opening paragraph:

A few years ago the critics of fundamentalism predicted its demise in an increasingly enlightened America. But to their consternation fundamentalism is experiencing explosive growth while the mainline denominations continue to decline in membership. On the conservative side of the American church scene there is a dichotomy between fundamentalism and evangelicalism. While some evangelicals are not sure just what constitutes a fundamentalist, the fundamentalist knows for sure that he is not an evangelical. The fundamentalist and the evangelical hold to the same theological position, the difference between them is in lifestyle and methodology.⁷⁸

Among the characteristics of the fundamental life style and methodology that Towns considers noteworthy are these:

1. Large churches—the architectural style could be called "massive auditorium." The Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia built a preaching auditorium seating 16,000.
2. New colleges—fundamentalists are said to be starting new colleges by the dozen and in one two year period opened up sixty ministerial training schools, most of them Bible colleges.
3. Christian day schools—representing a desire for Biblical, quality, non-violent,

- patriotic education.
- 4-5. Master teacher plan for Sunday schools and locally prepared curriculum materials.
 6. Local church conferences that feature “how we did it” programs that are supposed to be in contrast to the neo-evangelical “how to do it” approach.
 7. Media explosion—not necessarily television, but more frequently printing presses and newspapers to back up the traditional radio services.
 8. Church campus—often up to 100 acres just off an expressway for a total church-living complex from orphanage and school to senior citizens’ home.⁷⁹

The article that lists these characteristics of the modern fundamentalist church also has a section pointing out a division among fundamentalists. The paragraph reads:

Fundamentalism is divided into two camps, reflecting two areas of emphasis. First, there are “withdrawing fundamentalists,” exemplified by the Northern Bible Church movement which refused to cooperate with apostasy. (They also might be called “militant fundamentalists.”) These churches place priority on pure doctrine and pure life. The second are “aggressive fundamentalists,” who are committed to bold evangelistic outreach. The catalyst for this movement is aggressive soul-winning through local churches; pure doctrine and pure life are seen as important ingredients but as means to an end. This group is often accused of “button holing” prospective converts or proselyting believers from other churches. The “withdrawing fundamentalists” believe in second-degree separation from liberalism (rejecting those who have fellowship with liberals), while “aggressive fundamentalists” believe only in first-degree separation (refusal to have direct fellowship with liberals). The two camps among fundamentalists have fellowship with each other and are more similar to each other than either is to the evangelical camp.⁸⁰

What this amounts to is that within the ranks of the Reformed conservatives there are degrees of conservatism. There are very liberal conservatives addicted to the social gospel and opposed to an inerrant Bible. There are more conservative evangelicals, such as Carl Henry and Billy Graham and L. Nelson Bell, now dead. They can often be found inside mainline denominations. The less liberal conservatives are the “aggressive fundamentalists” who refrain from direct fellowship with liberals in mainline denominations and form their own body. Least liberal conservatives are the “withdrawing fundamentalists” who not only withhold fellowship from the liberals themselves but also from conservatives who fellowship with liberals. Carl McIntire and his Bible Presbyterians, and Bob Jones are such “withdrawing fundamentalists.”

These distinctions are emphasized in a recent book by Donald Bloesch titled *The Evangelical Renaissance*. The 1974 Lent issue of *Lutheran Forum* contains an article by Ralph Moellering, “A Lutheran Look at the Neo-Evangelicals” that aptly summarizes Bloesch’s categories. A lengthy and colorful quote from the article follows:

Instructive and illuminating is the attempt of Donald Bloesch to distinguish between different forms of American fundamentalism and orthodoxy (cf., his book, *The Evangelical Renaissance*). What he calls separatist or militant fundamentalists, reminiscent of Billy Sunday in their equation of patriotism with Christianity, are unequivocal in their denunciation of worldly pleasures, are adamant in their insistence on verbal inspiration and Biblical inerrancy, usually promote a Dispensationalist apocalypticism (premillennial pessimism in respect to the present world situation) and espouse ultra-conservative political causes. Together with the strident Carl McIntire,

such institutions as Bob Jones University, the Church League of America and the long-standing anti-communism crusade of Jimmy Hargis come to mind.

What Bloesch denominates as “open fundamentalism” is less extremist and vociferous. Rejecting a direct alliance between religion and right-wing social views, it generally contends that Church and State should be kept rigidly separate. “No politicking from the pulpit” is one of its admonitions. In this category one might place the Moody Bible Institute and Dallas Theological Seminary. Some observers include Hal Lindsey’s brand of dispensationalism portrayed in his “best seller,” *The Late Great Planet Earth*.

Differentiated from both militant and moderate fundamentalism is what Bloesch labels as “establishment evangelicalism.” Large numbers of conservative churchgoers would blend with this grouping represented by the National Association of Evangelicals, *Christianity Today* and Billy Graham. Campus Crusade with all of its college student adherents would be included. Like the fundamentalist, the “establishment evangelicals” hold to the authority of the Bible, but with a somewhat less literalistic and legalistic approach. The cautious social concern that they endorse is usually limited to charitable enterprises and welfare measures. For the most part, however, they are not rigidly separatistic. The bulk of the Southern Baptists, together with many self-acclaimed “evangelicals” from a variety of denominations, are kindred spirits within this classification.

Finally, Bloesch endeavors to explain the “new evangelicalism” which clings to a firm belief in the authority of Scripture, but is willing to reinterpret old concepts of infallibility and inerrancy as it takes full cognizance of the cultural conditioning which comprises the human side of the Bible. These church people, who might be called progressive conservatives, have an aversion to dispensationalism and express a strong interest in the social dimension of the Gospel. Even though they may stress personal conversion and aggressive evangelism as much as other types of evangelicals, they do not believe that the regeneration of individuals (a la Billy Graham) will in itself bring about necessary social change. Unlike most fundamentalists and even most “establishment evangelicals,” they are prepared to enter into dialogue with mainstream ecumenical liberalism and other world religions. Their intellectual-theological roots seem to be in C.S. Lewis and Dietrich Bonhoeffer with considerable appreciation for Karl Barth and Hans Kung, even while partially disagreeing with them (cf., Richard Quebedeaux in *The Young Evangelicals*, 1974).

Despite such classifications and dividing lines among Reformed conservatives it will still be possible because of basic similarities to present a general evaluation of this Reformed wing in terms of what is good and what is not so good.

By and large, we would consider the conservative Reformed stand on Scripture to be decidedly a plus factor, if not the major plus factor. This is said with an awareness that the Reformed Scripture position has always been flawed by the rational tendency fostered by the founding fathers, a tendency that is willing to draw doctrinal conclusions without and even in spite of Scripture. This is also said with an awareness that there can be discerned among some neo-evangelicals a tendency to limit inerrancy to so-called fundamental issues in the manner of Gospel reductionism. The Southern Baptists have recently had a serious battle over a Genesis commentary. Even an editor of *Christianity Today*, Harold Lindsell, had to write: “Today there are those who have been numbered among the new evangelicals, some of whom possess the keenest minds and have acquired the apparatus of scholarship, who have broken or are in the

process of breaking with the doctrine of an inerrant Scripture.”⁸¹ That point Lindsell elaborates in *The Battle for the Bible*.

Yet, in the overall and especially in comparison with what has happened to the Bible at the hands and in hearts of liberal theologians and mainline denominations of the Reformed, we have reason to respect the willingness of many of the Reformed conservatives to stress Bible inspiration and inerrancy. The Bible needs friends these days. We should be glad that it has many in the hands of the Reformed conservatives, both neo-evangelicals, evangelicals and fundamentalists of both kinds.

Worthy of a word of commendation also is the determination of these people to take seriously doctrinal issues and doctrinal proclamation. Most of mainline Reformed denominations have surrendered by intent or default to the idea that doctrinal, propositional truth is a will-of-the-wisp goal of an impossible dream. By the same token, they espouse the corollary that the church must find its reason-for-being in non-doctrinal, non-creedal busyness in the affairs of this world. Refreshing is the readiness of Reformed conservatives to fight for doctrines. For the most part, the doctrines upon which they have expended most concern are vitally important doctrines, whether in or outside a neat, five-part package. The bodily resurrection is a key point, not just because so much of form criticism, *Gemeindeftheologie*, encounter theology, and demythologizing revolves around this point, but most especially because 1 Corinthians 15 says it is a key issue.

Knowing what it believes regarding this doctrine and others and believing that it is the church's business to stand up for the doctrines it believes is so much a part of fundamentalism that some regard this as its chief identifying characteristic. Dean Kelley believes it is a most important reason why the movement is enjoying growth in our time.⁸²

Along with this doctrinal vigor and rigor goes the determination, remarkable in those of the Reformed persuasion, not to get overly involved in matters that are clearly not the church's business. Again there are degrees, with the fundamentals accusing neo-evangelicals of emulating liberals and with some fundamentalists so anti-communist that they almost resemble political parties and so political as to produce a "Moral Majority." But again, in the overall and by way of comparison with NCC activism, at least up to the very last years, the Reformed conservatives are more inclined to preach and indoctrinate and less inclined to foster social revolution and political programs, especially when these are of the more liberal type.

Unfortunately problems remain, basically the old Reformed problems. Words of praise need to be balanced by words of blame. Reverence for Scripture and its inspiration and inerrancy is commendable; one wishes, however, it would extend to all of the Bible's teachings. Respect for doctrines is sorely needed these days; but not too much is accomplished when the doctrines are false and there is zeal but not enough knowledge to match it.

Unfortunately the more committed to conservative theology the neo-evangelical or fundamentalist actually is, the more vigorously he will espouse old Reformed errors regarding the sinner's election, justification, conversion, and salvation. And these are the heart issues that matter most. In the individual case, at the altar, on the deathbed all the reverence for Scripture is not going to help, if error has led the sinner to harbor in his heart despair or self-righteousness to the exclusion of saving faith.

One cannot in a discussion of doctrinal aberration of the Reformed conservatives pass by the matter of millennialism, especially premillennialism, and most especially when that involves dispensationalism and rapture. Millennialism is traditional among the fundamentalist segment of the Reformed. Those of the grouping who know better have for the most part learned to go along

with the error as the necessary price of keeping conservatives together.

The last remark points to another problem to be found among Reformed conservatives. There has always been a readiness to join hands in the fight against the foe. This was true of the earlier generation of Fundamentalists and it is still true of today's Reformed conservatives. If the small group of "withdrawing fundamentalists" are exempted, the bulk of the neo-evangelicals and fundamentalists show the old inclination to worship and work together comfortably even though actual doctrinal unity is lacking.

What has been stated in previous paragraphs suggests what our attitude and our relations to the Reformed conservatives will and will not be. There will be some appreciation for their virtues. It will be sincere and observable. But it will remain aloof. It will practice the difficult art of admiring the good in the cause without making a common cause and of resisting the bad in the cause without rejecting the worthwhile along with the bad.

Perhaps our fathers can show us the way in this effort, as they do in so many other matters. Fifty years ago there were on the scene many Reformed conservatives that were battling theological innovations. The fathers experienced and demonstrated joy over the good confession to the Lord and the Word in the Fundamentalist pulpit or publication. But there was no extension of the hand of fellowship. The books written now like to explain Lutheran aloofness over against the Fundamentalism of the early years of this century as a matter of cultural and language and geographical differences. It was more than that. No Synodical Conference Lutheran, and few Eastern Lutherans, joined the Fundamentalist endeavor of that era. This was chiefly because of the desire to follow Bible fellowship principles.

This is to be remembered, especially when the suggestion is heard that the needs of the hour require a realignment of Christians in which all Bible-believing Christians of all denominations join to resist the increasing inroads of a secularized version of Christianity.

We clearly see the objectionable features of any Lutheran-Reformed fellowship developed by the dialog principle and process of finding the least common denominator of doctrinal agreement. We should see equally clearly, that also in the case of the best, the conservative wing of the Reformed fellowship and cooperation in the common cause is not possible on either group or selected basis.

Along with an aloof appreciation of their good efforts, must go a clear testimony to truth and against error. This may set us off from a popular crusader. It may earn for us the label of obstructionist or something worse. We may be told and it may even seem to us that thereby a disservice is being done to the cause of Christ and the Gospel. It will only seem but not be so. The Reformed conservatives are, thank God, conservatives but they are also Reformed. In their centuries Luther and Calov and Harms showed how Lutherans should stand over against Reformed conservatives and Reformed tendencies. Our fathers in this century reviewed the lesson for us. It is to be hoped we've learnt it and will live it in our own era of church history.

ENDNOTES

1. LWF Release No. 13173, p 8. This release and Leuenberg in general is discussed in a "News and Comment" item with the title, "Leuenberg Revisited" in the July 1973 *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, pp 211-212.

2. *Marburg Revisited*, Paul C. Empie and James I. McCord, eds., has the full “Report” on p 191. Martin J. Heineken discusses the conversations in “The Reformed-Lutheran Conversation in the USA” in *Lutheran World*, XIV, 1 (1967), 101-106. Hereafter citations from *Marburg Revisited* will be identified simply by title and page.
3. See “From ‘Marburg Revisited’ to ‘Princeton ‘72’ in *The Springfielder*. XXXVI, 2 (September 1972, 110-114. The article was republished in *Lutheran Theological Journal* . VI, 3 (December 1972) pp 138-141.
4. All three quotations in the paragraph are from the LCUSA *News Bureau Release*, 72-94, p 3.
5. LCUSA News Bureau Release 73-28, p 5.
6. *Marburg Revisited*, p 191.
7. E. David Willis, “Report on Reformed Theology,” *Theology Today*, XXI, 4 (January 1965), 500-501.
8. Hans-Lutz Poetsch, “Confessional Lutherans React to Leuenberg Concord” in the *Springfielder* XXXVI, 3 (December 1972), 188.
9. John A. Mackay quotes this declaration in “The Witness of the Reformed Churches in the World Today” in *Theology Today*, XI, 3 (October 1954), 379-380.
10. The “Ratzeburg Theses” appear in translated form in the *Springfielder* XXXVI, 2 (September 1972), 115-119.
11. *Marburg Revisited*, p 37.
12. *Marburg Revisited*, p 180.
13. *Marburg Revisited*, p 28. George S. Hendry of Princeton is the Reformed essayist.
14. George S. Hendry, *The Westminster Confession for Today* (Richmond, 1968) p 11. This book is also cited in the next note.
15. Hendry, pp 12-13.
16. Cornelius Van Til, “The Certainty of Our Faith” in *The Presbyterian Guardian*, XXXXII, 7 (August/September 1973), 102.
17. This was *Scottish Journal of Theology*, XXVI, 2 (May 1973), 182-203. The Rev. Dr. Herbert Hartwell wrote the article.

18. Klass Runia, *Karl Barth's Doctrine of Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), p VII-VIII. This book was extensively utilized for subsequent material.
19. E. David Willis, "Report on Reformed Theology," *Theology Today* XXI, 4 (January 1965), 501.
20. The Nein refers to Barth's "Nein! Antwort an Emil Brunner" in *Theologische Existenz heute*, V, 14 (Munich, 1934).
21. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I, 2, (Edinburg, 1963) p 529. Hereafter the citation will be shortened to *Church Dogmatics* and the location.
22. *Church Dogmatics*, I, 2, pp 528-529.
23. *Church Dogmatics*, I, 2, p 508.
24. *Church Dogmatics*, I, 2, p 509.
25. *Church Dogmatics*, I, 2, p 510.
26. John Dillenberger and Claude Welch in *Protestant Christianity* (New York, 1954).
27. Carl Henry, ea., *Revelation and the Bible* (Philadelphia, 1958). The pertinent article is found on pp 219-234.
28. *Church Dogmatics*, I, 2, p 508.
29. Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason* (London, 1947), p 290.
30. C. H. Dodd, *The Authority of the Bible* (London, 1928), p 16-17.
31. J. K. S. Reid, *The Authority of Scripture* (New York, 1957), p 267.
32. John Baillie, *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought*, (London, 1956), p 66.
33. Archbishop Temple, *Nature. Man and God* (London, 1934), p 350.
34. *Church Dogmatics*, I, 2, p 531.
35. Schubert Ogden, *Christ Without Myth* (New York, 1961), p 143-144.
36. The Confession of 1967" is reproduced in Edward A. Downey, Jr's, *A Commentary on the Confession of 1967* (Philadelphia, 1968). The quoted section is found on p 18.
37. Sasse's article, "European Theology in the Twentieth Century" appears in a book edited by Carl Henry, *Christian Faith and Modern Theology* (New York, 1964), pp 3-22. The

quotation is on p 22.

38. Raymond Zorn's review of B. J. Oosterhoff's book in *Westminster Theological Journal*, XXXV, 3 (Spring, 1973), 324-333.
39. Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York, 1948), p 397).
40. Emil Brunner, *The Mediator*, Wyon trans., (London, 1934), p 159, note. Citation abbreviated in the next two notes.
41. *The Mediator*, p 172.
42. *The Mediator*, p 184.
43. Carl Henry, "Cross-Currents on Contemporary Theology" in *Jesus of Nazareth: Savior and Lord* (Grand Rapids, 1966), p 11.
44. See previous note 16.
45. The statement is reprinted in *A Christian Handbook on Vital Issues*, edited by Herman Otten (New Haven, MO., 1972), p 624.
46. Calvin B. Linton, "Jesus Christ the Divine Redeemer" in *Fundamentals of the Faith*, edited by Carl Henry (Grand Rapids, 1969), p 133.
47. D. M. Baillie, *God Was in Christ* (New York, 1948), pp 200-201.
48. M. Eugene Osterhaven, *The Spirit of the Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids, 1971), pp 102-103.
49. Billy Graham, "The New Birth" in the book edited by Carl Henry, *Fundamentals of the Faith* (Grand Rapids, 1969), p 195-196.
50. George S. Hendry, *The Westminster Confession for Today* (Richmond, 1960), p 51.
51. M. Eugene Osterhaven, *The Spirit of the Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids, 1971), p 101.
52. Barth discusses this doctrine in *Church Dogmatics*, II, 2, 1-506. A statement of his view of double predestination is found on 174ff.
53. *Marburg Revisited*, p 37.
54. Barth discusses "Baptism with Water" at length in *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 4, 41-213. The section on infant baptism begins on p 165. Emphatic statements can be found on p 102 and p 165.

55. *Marburg Revisited*, p 28. George S. Hendry of Princeton is the Reformed essayist .
56. George S. Hendry, *The Westminster Confession for Today* (Richmond, 1968), p 11.
57. A. E. Rawlinson and Charles Smyth, *The Genius of the Church of England*_(London, 1958). pp 33-34.
58. Found in Velmos Volta, ea., *Church in Fellowship*, (Minneapolis, 1963), p 93.
59. J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*_(New York, 1924), p 49.
60. John Huxtable, "The United Reformed Church," *The Expository Times*, LXXXIV, 1 (October, 1972).
61. May 12, 1968 *Northwestern Lutheran*, p 157.
62. Peter Day, "An Alternative Model of Church Unity," *Anglican Theological Review*_(Supplementary Series—Number Two, September 1973), p 52.
63. Emil Brunner, *The Misunderstanding of the Church*_(Lutterworth, 1954), p 112.
64. Wm. Ernest Hocking, chairman, *Rethinking Missions: A Laymen's Inquiry After One Hundred Years*_(New York, 1932), p 329. The citation is abbreviated in the next two notes.
65. *Rethinking Missions*, p 326.
66. *Rethinking Missions*, p 327.
67. Paul Tillich, *Existence and the Christ*_(Chicago, 1957), pp 179-180.
68. H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*_(Beacon Hill Press, 1960), II, p 466,
69. Wilbur M. Smith, "The Second Advent of Christ" in *Fundamentals of the Faith*, edited by Carl Henry (Grand Rapids, 1969), pp 261-262.
70. The reference is to the Missouri-Iowa colloquy held at Trinity Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, November 13-19, 1967.
71. *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, V (Chicago, n.d.) p 4 of Foreword. Hereafter cited as *Fundamentals*_with appropriate volume and page number.
72. *Fundamentals*, VIII, p 68.
73. *Fundamentals*, XI, p 98,

74. Carl Henry, *Evangelical Responsibility in Contemporary Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1959, pp 32-47.
75. Robert Lightner, Neo-Evangelicalism (Des Plaines, Illinois, 1971), pp 13-14. Hereafter cited as *Neo-Evangelicalism*.
76. *Neo-Evangelicalism* pp 103-104.
77. Ernest Pickering, "Why the I.F.C.A. Does Not Belong to the N.A.E.," *Voice*. September 1957 5
78. Elmer L. Towns, "Trends Among Fundamentals," *Christianity Today*, XVII, 20 (July 6, 1973), 12. Hereafter cited as "Trends."
79. "Trends," pp 13-19.
80. "Trends," pp 12.
81. Harold Lindsell, "An Historian Looks at Inerrancy," *Bulletin of the Ev. Theological Society*, Winter, 1965.
82. This conclusion is a main thought in Dean Kelley's *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing* (New York, 1972), *passim*.