

Seminar Outline – given in 1982 to Christian Reformed Church members, Strathroy, Ontario.

Christian and Reformed Today

How can we be Christian and Reformed Today? Look at the age in which we live.

1. A Pluralistic Society

1989 – Vancouver. The 25 year old Gideon tradition of offering New Testaments to grade 5 students ended when the school board prohibited the practice in spite of protests. According to the legal opinion given to the Vancouver school board, the practice of distributing Bibles "would most likely be viewed by the courts as being in contravention of the charter of rights and freedoms."

There is great influence from immigrants coming from non-European countries. Toronto has the largest number of Muslims in North America. In the Ottawa area there is a Hindu temple. Vision TV, a religious station, which is also used by Reformed denominations has non-Christian programming as well such as Hinduism and Islam.

2. Television

TV brought a revolution. It determines what is news. For example, the hunger in Ethiopia, the liberation of East European nations. Africa as such is no longer in the lime light despite the famines and revolutions. Wars are now fought and lost on TV. TV determines what is good and evil. Statistics show that a large percentage in the field of TV broadcasting is not Christian. Politicians lose or win not on the basis of what they say, but on the way their image gets across.

Because of TV the world has become a global village. What happens in Afghanistan is known immediately anywhere in the world. TV often gives useless information. We are now information saturated. No in-depth programming is possible. TV determines right and wrong. Soap operas have taken the place of the Medieval morality plays.

3. New Age

The fastest growing religion is the New Age Movement. It has an optimistic view of human nature. Humanity's task is to help nature in its struggle to perfect itself. It is a nature religion. We are one with nature. We are part of nature.

If a man is in fact bound together in one great organism with all other creatures, then to kill any of them is to commit suicide.

New Age is a mixture of Eastern (Oriental religions), ancient nature religions and Christianity. See: *Learning: Your Guide to the Ottawa Board of Education*. Winter 1990. pp.46,49,51.

4. Science

Science has a tremendous influence. Scientists are supposed to have all the answers for today's questions. They claim that science is neutral. Scientists only deal with facts. But scientists are also influenced by the social and cultural contexts in which they live.

When scholars dare to suggest that scientific assumptions, themes, truths, and principles are also culturally influenced, the gloves come off, tempers rise, and blood begins to spill.

See: *Creationists Conveniently Forget Facts* by David Suzuki.

5. Evolution

Old theory of evolution. This theory is based on the notion that life developed from non-life and proceeded through gradual mutations, from the very simplest forms of life to the more complex.

New theory. Evolution is the creative advance of the store of knowledge. Each species is "better informed" than its predecessor. Knowledge is something that evolves.

See: p.238 *Algeny* by Jeremy Rifkin.

6. Uniqueness of Christianity Questioned

Is the Bible really true? Has it a message for all of mankind? We live in a global village. How can we say that the way of the Hindu or the Muslim is wrong?

See: *Christians Can't Claim Their Way Only Way* by Rev. J. A. Davidson.

Christian and Reformed Today

What kind of message do we have for our age? Do we still have a message? Who are we?

Our Roots

1834 -secession (Separation)

A small group of Reformed Christians separated from the Dutch state church. Reasons: False teachings, liberalism, departure from the creeds and confessions, government interference. Why this interference? King William I forced a new form of church government on his subjects. Instead of being governed by consistories, who sent

delegates to classes and synods (the church being ruled by elders), the church was now ruled by boards appointed by the king and his counsellors.

Corpus Christianum: "the totality of christened". In this view the church's membership includes all those who happen to live in the country in which the church is located. All in that society are considered Christian. Baptism now simply meant christening, the naming of a newborn child. This view led to a decline of spirituality, depreciation of the confessions and lack of discipline.

Corpus Christi: Body of Christ

The secessionists viewed the church as the body of Christ. In this view the church consists of all who by faith have been grafted into Christ and have thus become members of his body. Only believing parents can have their children baptized.

Personal Response to Salvation

The emphasis is on conversion and rebirth. Secessionists resisted and rejected the idea of salvation sprayed on everyone like paint out of a pressurized can. They insisted that people must actively get involved in the salvation process.

See: *Honor Your Mother. Christian Reformed Church Roots in the 1834 Separation* by Leonard Verduin.

Rev. Hendrick DeCock was deposed because of his loyalty to the Reformed faith. He baptized children of believers from parishes whose ministers were doctrinally unsound. Many suffered oppression, persecution, for uniting with the Secessionist churches.

Immigration

Albertus VanRaalte and P.Schollte.

VanRaalte – Holland, Michigan, 1846. He organized Classis Holland, which became virtually an independent denomination.

P. Scholte, a man of independent wealth, founded the town of Pella, Iowa. For years there was no contact between these two groups.

Reformed Church of America:

Dr. I. N. Wyckoff from Albany, N.Y., visited the colony in Holland, Mich. VanRaalte's classis Holland decided to join the RCA in 1850. Separation from the PCA 1857.

Reasons: Liberalism. Reformed doctrines were no longer preached, Lodge membership, open communion, and many hymns were not doctrinally sound.

Five churches left. Pastor VandenBosh left with 750 members.

The emphasis was on pietism, a personal relationship with the Lord. Little emphasis on the Lordship of Christ in all areas of life.

For further reading on the history of the CRC:

A Stranger in a Strange Land by Leona Scholte. The story of a Dutch Pioneer Settlement in Iowa, under the leadership of H. P. Scholte. Inheritance Publications, Neerlandia, Alberta.

De Kolonie. The church that God Transplanted. A Story About a small branch of the Church Universal called the Christian Reformed Denomination by Marian M. Schoolland. Board of Publication of the Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Mich.

The Bible

The Bible is an unusual book in that as we study it, we must distinguish between the primary author (God) and the various secondary authors (Moses, Luke, David, Paul, John, and so forth). In other words, the Bible was indeed written by human beings but was at the same time inspired by God and therefore serves as divine revelation to man. This confers upon the Bible an authority enjoyed by no other writing. The Bible is to be accepted as true and need not be proven true.

To take a sober and submissive attitude toward the Bible is to accept Scripture as the final authority in any dispute about the meaning of the Christian faith. The Westminster Confession (1646) affirms: The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinion of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other than the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.

The Bible's message is grasped first of all in childlike faith and trust.

It can also be understood, although some believers make more progress in this regard than others. Still, understanding often comes slowly, and certain passages remain dark and obscure to us even today, despite the thousands of books that have been written to clarify the Bible's message. Sometimes God's people have to wait a long, long time before this or that aspect of His message to them becomes clear. This lesson is all too easily forgotten in our busy, impatient world.

pp.61ff. *Contending for the Faith. Heresy and Apologetics* by Theodore Plantinga. Paldeia Press, Jordan Station, Ont.

Science

What is science? Rome Harré, a philosopher of science, said, "Science is knowledge of nature." Plantinga commented: "This definition would make the squirrel a scientist, for the squirrel certainly knows its way around the woods."

p.27 *Public Knowledge and Christian Education* by Theodore Plantinga.

Studies in Religious Education. Volume I. The Edwin Melln Press. Lewiston/Queenston. "Many people are convinced that science is a pure form of knowledge that can be set off from all that is not science. Knowledge in the strict sense must be reserved for the few. *We cannot all be scientists.* p.16 Plantinga. Scientist tried to look for, and find, in nature little more than they believe to be there, and yet they construct airier theoretical systems than their actual observations warrant." p.32 Plantinga. "Much scientific seeing is essentially akin to reading, in that interpretive conventions dictate what the sensory phenomena are supposed to mean or implicate. Much of what the scientist sees is beheld with the help of instruments, which always have an element of distortion built into them." p.39 Plantinga.

Is science good or evil?

"Twentieth-century Christians tend to take a benign attitude toward science: although they may disagree with certain scientific conclusions regarding human origins, they regard science as a force for good and are pleased to see believers seeking a career in science." p.68 Plantinga.

Dr. John Bolt seems to have a positive view of science. see page 40 *Christian and Reformed Today*.

Jacques Ellul, professor of the history and sociology of institutions in the faculty of law and economic science of the University of Bordeaux, France:

A curious theological perversion, which is so common as to be hardly contested, argues on the basis of Genesis 1:28 that man fulfills his vocation by laying violent hands on creation through technology. But this verse relates to man before the fall and at most it makes man God's vice-regent.

He cannot seize and use creation as he chooses. Ignorance of facts accompanies the theological error. Only a superficial view of science and technology can speak in this way, namely, the view that science unfolds the secrets of creation and thereby helps us the better to worship God. This bears no relation to reality. The reality is the rape of the earth, the exploitation and depletion of its resources. Secrets are pierced not to the better worship of God but to the greater wealth of man. Have we any right to disintegrate matter? Have we any right to find the origin of life in order to reproduce it? Can we pay the

price of penetrating all the mysteries of God? These are not metaphysical questions. They have to do with the results of our autonomous conquest that God allows: death, the extermination of animal species, the pollution of air and water, the transformation of the simple things of creation into a universe of things, into a giant sophistication. The key to this is not at all obedience to a vocation but the expression of a mad lust for power, for unlimited consumption, for rapacious seizure.

I think that there is no more dangerous illusion today than the justifying of science and technology by Christians. I am not interdicting or condemning scientific work. I am simply saying that it is open to question, that it does not express a divinely given vocation, that it does not set forth God's glory but effaces his creation. Man views himself as an owner, not a steward.

He thinks everything is his.

pp.217f. *The Ethics of Freedom* by Jacques Ellul. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Socialism and Christianity

Dr. Abraham Kuyper - The ownership of private property was normed by the principle of stewardship and not by humanistic speculations based on reason and evolutionary development. Kuyper wanted to see the principle of stewardship incorporated in social reform.

Kuyper's view of management and labour is best expressed in his work *Christianity and the Class Struggle*. The following are thoughts and quotes taken from this book.

In 1853 Groen van Prinsterer declared: "With reference to the socialist ideas, one should take note of the really pitiful position of the lower classes and especially of the harm which the higher classes, through their moral corruption and false science have brought about among the people."

For those who hope for money and who would build on the power of money, the Holy Scripture is a despairing book. The Holy Spirit who speaks in Scripture finds much gold and silver to be dangerous rather than desirable, and deems an inheritance of millions not even distantly to be compared with the inheritance that awaits us as saints. This is the witness of the Lord in His Word, therefore I may not represent it otherwise; but them too, let no one reproach me for it, but let him realize that his criticism directly attacks the Bible itself.

"Oh, it is so profoundly untrue that God's Word lets us hear only appeals for the salvation of our souls. No, very definitely also for our national existence and for our social life together, God's Word gives us fixed ordinances; it marks out lines that are very clearly visible; and it is unfaithfulness in us Christians if we, noting this fact,

impiously permit our theory and practice to be determined by ruling opinion or conventional law, consulting our own comfort.

And, therefore, you who profess our Lord Jesus Christ, it is your duty to place in the foreground, with a gripping earnestness and a soul – penetrating emphasis, on every occasion, for rich and poor alike, the life eternal. Only he who reckons with an eternal life knows the real value of this earthly life.”

Christian Education

We American Christians, like Americans generally, have been inclined to view our struggle as engaging one particular issue at a time, and we are only now just beginning to be aware, as Kuyper was in his time, of the systematic denial, in our society, our schools and universities, of the living God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. John Dunphy. *A Religion for a New Age*.

I am convinced that the battle for humankind's future must be waged and won in the public classroom by teachers who correctly perceive their role as the proselytizers of a new faith: a religion of humanity that recognizes and respects the spark of what theologians call divinity in every human being. These teachers... will be ministers of another sort, utilizing a classroom instead of a pulpit to convey humanist values in whatever subject they teach, regardless of the educational level-preschool day care or large state university. The classroom must and will become an arena of conflict between the old and the new – the rotting corpse of Christianity, together with all its adjacent evils and misery, and the New faith of Humanism, resplendent in its promise of a world in which the never-realized Christian ideal of 'love thy neighbour' will finally be achieved.

pp.xl,xll, *The Practice of Political Spirituality* by McKendree R. Langley.

Public education: based on the conviction that man is perfectible. It is related to anti-Christian humanism in general.

Christian education: based upon the belief in human depravity and the need for conversion as the basis of true learning.

Johan D. Tangelder

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