



# The Voice

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EDITORIAL  
The New Curriculum

In recent times much has been said and written about the New Curriculum published by the United Church for its Christian Education Program. It is quite conceivable that in some way this might have repercussions in our own circles and therefore it might be well for us to be somewhat more familiar with it, in order that we might know what stand we should take to it.

What is it?

The New Curriculum follows a three year cycle in which the following annual themes are considered:

God and His Purpose.

Jesus Christ and the Christian Life.

The Church and the World.

These annual themes are followed in each of the seven departments from nursery to adult. The story of the development of this curriculum reaches back a number of years and includes many persons as writers, involves all of the theological schools of the United Church and over 15,000 people in its testing program. Before the material was printed it went through a rigorous test in a number of typical churches right across Canada. Reactions were tabulated and evaluations solicited. All this preparatory work shows that the material is not the product of a select group, out of touch with the thinking of the main stream of the church, but rather that its theological position has been submitted to the scrutiny of at least a reasonable number of the rank and file members and is therefore representative of the church. Year one materials were available for use in the churches by September 1, 1964.

Reactions to this material within the United Church itself have been varied. The magazine **Focus**, September-October 1964 issue, and a special pamphlet report some of these. For the most part those reported are approval, varying from mild enthusiasm to unqualified delight. Some have voiced certain reservation about such matters as difficulty of the material, need for intensive study by teachers using the material, amount of material etc. However, there is also another brief statment which deserves our notice. "Some teachers had difficulty making the transition from a literal interpretation of Scriptures to a larger view 'whose truth and authority depend not on verbal accuracy but on God who speaks and acts with saving power in Jesus Christ'". More will be said about this later. The November - December issue of **The Christian Railroader**, includes a testimony of a C.P.R. conductor and his wife, who felt they had to withdraw their membership from their church because it was using the New Curriculum. Others instances of similar disagreement could be cited.

This then is the curriculum which is before us for some sort of evaluation. We could attempt to evaluate it from the standpoint of the United Church. From that vantage point it seems a tremendous step forward. For one, now at least the theological

presuppositions which have been current in most of its pulpits for almost 40 years and have been basic to its preaching, have also been made basic to its Christian Education program. Whatever we may think about it, this would seem to be an honest and logical course to pursue if persons are going to be subjected to the influence of both the school and the pulpit. One can only guess at the confusion and frustration which result from differing emphases in these two institutions.

Then also there is more body, more content to this curriculum. Some things are made more specific, more definite than they have been heretofore — at least as definite as a church which professes to be a “uniting church” can make them. As one teacher describes it: “Our Easter sessions came as quite a surprise to our junior teachers, accustomed as we were to skirting the crucifixion to talk of springtime and new life. In the New Curriculum the facts of the crucifixion are taught even at the Kindergarten level.”

There is in this curriculum very little of that sentimental optimism about the natural goodness of man. Sin is real and it was the sin of mankind that brought Jesus to the cross.

But speaking of some of these emphases leads us quite naturally to an attempt to evaluate the curriculum from our theological perspective. As one reads through teacher and pupil books one is agreeably surprised to find so much of what we consider orthodox doctrine, included. There is, for instance, a strong and repeated emphasis on God’s active guiding and directing influence in the lives of men and nations. There is an equally strong sense of purpose and meaning in life. God is a sovereign God, immanent and yet transcendent. He is the Triune God who “. . . acts as the Father in the Son and through the Holy Spirit” (God and His Purpose, p. 230).

The Incarnation is also given an orthodox emphasis. “As in the beginning he created the human race so in Jesus Christ he himself became man” or “How God could remain God and yet come into history in the person of Jesus is something we can never fully comprehend.” (Senior student book, p. 172-2). In the same book the resurrection is referred to as “the foundation of the Christian religion” and again, “the preaching of the resurrection remained unchallenged because the facts were above challenge” (p.194).

There is, of course, a great deal of unevenness in the strength of the conviction with which some of these affirmations are made. This variation in theological conviction is evident among the various writers who have created the curriculum. It would also seem to be right to say that generally speaking the student books contain more definite assertions than the Teachers’ guide book do. Take as an example the citations about the resurrection which were made above. The Teachers’ Guide Book for this session is much less definite about the literalness of the event, and would seem (at least to this reader) to leave room for a poetic interpretation according to which the statement about the resurrection might then be considered to be an attempt to preserve the fundamental Hebrew idea of reality (p. 238-9). In spite of what has been said

above about an increasing definiteness, there is still a good deal of ambivalence in certain doctrinal statement, and that characteristic vagueness which is so noticeable in much of the teaching of the United Church. Especially is this true when it comes to teaching how one becomes a Christian, the Christian life and what the nature of the Christian hope is for the future.

One of the most serious defects of this material, from our point of view, is its total approach to Scripture. According to one of the writers “the New Curriculum is based on the assured results of the best of modern biblical scholarship and we have got to be honest about this.” (Morgan, *Focus*, Sept. - Oct., p.21). This means, of course, that certain parts of the Bible are to be taken literally, others as poetic or theological affirmations, the interpretation of which must be sought by the scholar, and others are to be considered as unreliable, contradictory or downright erroneous. Thus is it that the Creation story (which receives a great deal of attention in this curriculum) becomes a theological affirmation of why God created the world. The story of the Fall (which is hardly mentioned at all, and we know why) becomes a story of “what happens to everybody when temptation comes”. The two Gospel accounts (Matthew and Luke) stating that Jesus was born of a virgin, are either passed over in silence or said to indicate a special involvement of God in this birth, but that in a real sense Jesus is the son of Joseph and Mary. And thus it is that “atonement” and “ransom” must not be taken as indicating that Christ bore the punishment due a rebellious and sinful heart.

Instead of putting our faith in a Christ, the incarnate Word of God to whom an infallible, inerrant written Word bears testimony, we are called by this curriculum, to belief in a God and a Christ of whom we learn from a fallible, human book. This book (so they say) speaks in terms of allegory and figures and poetry concerning some of the most vital and crucial issues governing our relationship to God. These allegorical, figurative and poetic references must be interpreted for us by competent scholars because they can obviously not (again, so they affirm) mean literally what they say. The trouble is that allegory is hard to pin down to specific meanings and interpretations of the so-called “poetic” affirmations vary from time to time if the past fifty years are any indication. Does not then this New Curriculum build on shifting sand?

Lack of space will not permit further evaluation. One cannot help regretting that some of this otherwise excellent instruction should be so poorly grounded. One also wonders how seriously students of this curriculum will take the Bible and the doctrines which are professedly drawn from it, when it is repeatedly asserted that this is a fallible, human record — inspired in a certain way — and yet a mixture of truth and error. No matter how sincere we are, we do not build well unless we have a solid foundation, even if the material we use to build with is excellent. “We have the prophetic word made more sure. You will do well to pay attention to this as a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:19). H. Voth.

## In Memoriam

B. B. JANZ

(1877 - 1964)

### Glaubensstarker Führer in sturmbelegter Zeit.

Der englische Schriftsteller und Geschichtler Thomas Carlyle hat einmal folgenden Satz geprägt: "Die Geschichte der Welt ist die Geschichte ihrer großen Persönlichkeiten." Obzwar wir obige Definierung der Geschichte als einseitig bezeichnen müssen, so liegt doch ein großes Stück Wahrheit darin. Auch in der Geschichte einer Glaubensgemeinschaft sind manche Epochen und Bewegungen aufs engste verbunden mit dem Leben und Wirken führender Männer. In der Geschichte des Rußland-Mennonitentums ist die stürmische Zeitperiode nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg — eine Periode nie-dagewesener politischer, sozialer, ökonomischer und religiöser Erschütterungen und Veränderungen — nicht zu trennen von dem hervorragenden Einfluß und der gesegneten Wirksamkeit von B. B. Janz.

Es ist nicht möglich und auch nicht notwendig im Rahmen dieser Abhandlung die geschichtlichen Verdienste dieses heimgegangenen Führers unserer Bruderschaft richtig und allseitig zu bewerten. Diese Aufgabe wird erst dann entsprechend zu lösen sein, wenn das reichhaltige Archiv-Material durch gründliche Geschichtsforschung bearbeitet worden ist. Mittlerweile ist es für mich ein Vorrecht, in herzlicher Dankbarkeit gegen Gott, und in tiefer Hochachtung gegen den heimgegangenen Vater in Christo, einige Seiten seines öffentlichen Dienstes hervorzuheben.

B. B. Janz war ein Mann von festen Überzeugungen, die er auf Gottes Wort gründete. Er ließ sich nicht leicht bewegen von irgend einem neuen Wind der Lehre — einerlei ob der Wind politischen oder theologischen Charakters war. Einer seiner Schulkameraden aus der Zeit der Gnadenfelder Zentralschule findet diesen Charakterzug bei B. B. Janz schon in der Jugendzeit. In einem Briefe schildert er den jungen Studenten wie folgt: "Es war ein warmer Wintertag, und der Schnee klebte, so daß die schönste Schneeballschlacht auf dem Schulhofe ausgefochten werden konnte, und wir 'Oberklässer' wollten die zweite Klasse vom Hofe vertreiben, was uns auch mit allen gelang außer Benjamin Janz. Der stand mitten auf dem Hof, warf keinen einzigen Schneeball und ließ sich von uns bewerfen, ohne ein Haar breit zu weichen. Das ist B. B. Janz — auch heute noch" (Zitiert von H. Goerz in **Die Molotschnaer Ansiedlung** S. 145).

Vor mehreren Jahren schrieb der verstorbene H. S. Bender einen Artikel in **The Christian Ministry** über John S. Coffmann (1848 - 1899) unter der Überschrift "The Hour that Needed a Man." In dieser Abhandlung beschreibt Dr. Bender die traurigen Zustände in seiner eigenen Gemeinschaft um die Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts. Es fehlte an starker geistlicher Führerschaft zur Lösung der man-

cherlei Probleme des Gemeindelebens. Für diese Stunde schickte Gott der Konferenz einen glaubensstarken Führer in der Person von John S. Coffmann. Für die sturmbelegte Zeit zwischen zwei großen Weltkriegen, — für die Zeit der Auswanderung und der Einwanderung — schenkte Gott uns neben andern wertigen Knechten auch den Lehrer, Prediger, und Führer, B. B. Janz. Wir möchten die Verdienste des Verstorbenen auf drei Linien hervorheben.

### I. Im Kampf für den Glauben der Väter

Mit 19 Jahren trat der junge Lehrer bewußt in die Reihen der Kämpfer für den Glauben, der einmal den Heiligen übergeben worden ist. Mit wunderbarem geistlichen Scharf- und Weitblick erkannte er oft die Gefahren, die den kindlichen Bibelglauben oder das sittliche Leben der Gemeinschaft bedrohten. J. J. Thiessen, Mitarbeiter und Freund des Verstorbenen, berichtet wie schon auf einer Lehrerkonferenz in Rußland im Jahre 1912 B. B. Janz Stellung genommen zu einem fraglichen Buch für die Schulbibliothek. Mit großer Entschiedenheit sprach er sich aus gegen den verderblichen Einfluß solcher Literatur. Die meisten Kollegen stimmten ihm bei, und das Buch wurde aus der Bibliothek entfernt.

Das Wesen von B. B. Janz Theologie (wenn wir dieses Wort für seinen Glaubensansichten brauchen dürfen) könnte man mit dem Wort "Biblizismus" bezeichnen. Wie die ersten Brüder der M.B.-Gemeinde begründete er seine Prinzipien immer wieder mit der Lehre des Neuen Testaments und der Lehre Menno Simons. Auf der ersten allgemeinen Studienkonferenz im Rahmen der M.B.-Gemeinde Bundeskonferenz in Winnipeg im Dezember, 1956, brachte der fast achtzigjährige Vater auch noch ein Referat über das Thema: "Grundzüge im Charakter der Glaubensstellung unserer Väter." Unter anderm warnte er die Bruderschaft vor einer "doppelsinnigen Auslegung" der Heiligen Schrift. So ein "Meistern der Schrift" führt zur geistlichen Verwirrung und zur sittlichen Schwäche in den Gemeinden nach den Ausführungen des Referenten.

Br. Janz Botschaft hatte stets ein stark ethisches Gepräge. Glaube und Nachfolge durften nicht getrennt werden. Eine einseitige "Satisfaktionstheorie", und eine "billige Gnade" lehnte er entschieden ab. In den furchtbaren Glaubensprüfungen der Revolution und des Bürgerkrieges stand er fest auf dem biblischen Grundstanz und dem mennonitischen Bekenntnis der Wehrlosigkeit. B. B. Janz war einer von den wenigen führenden Männern unsers Volkes die im Jahr 1918 die Organisierung des Selbstschutzes verurteilten. Seine Entschiedenheit und Glaubenstreue brachten ihm manche Verkennung auch von seiten mennonitischer Theologen. Als mennonitische Bruderschaft sind wir heute dankbar für das klare und kraftvolle Zeugnis des Bruders in jener kritischen Zeitperiode.

In den politischen Verirrungen und Verwirrungen die durch das "Dritte Reich" auch in manche mennonitischen Kreise von Nord- und Südamerika hineingetragen wurden (meistens indirekt) war es wieder die Stimme von B. B. Janz die sich unzweideutig

hören ließ. Die scheinbar großen Leistungen der National-Sozialisten unter der Führerschaft von Adolf Hitler blendeten manchen Brüdern in Ameroka die Augen, so daß sie das antichristliche Wesen der Bewegung nicht erkannten. Die große Verehrung Hitlers und die mancherlei Verbindungen mit Deutschland stellten die Loyalität der Mennoniten zu der Regierung der neuen Heimat bei manchen Staatsbeamten in Frage. Die ganze Bewegung war auch eine Verletzung unsers historischen Prinzips der Trennung von Kirche und Staat. B. B. Janz sowie auch Ältester David Toews erklärten sich öffentlich gegen irgend welche Sympathie für den National-Sozialismus; die Wertschätzung der deutschen Sprache bei den Mennoniten habe geschichtliche und kulturelle Wurzeln, und nicht politische. Im Januar, 1939, erschien ein Artikel von B. B. Janz in vier mennonitischen Wochenzeitungen unter der Überschrift: "Bin ich ein National-Sozialist — Gott bewahre." Später erschien derselbe Artikel auch im **Lethbridge Herald**. Der Artikel war ein klares Bekenntnis für die Umgebung; andererseits war es aber auch eine Warnung für die mennonitische Bruderschaft. Diese Klarlegung brachte eine scharfe Erwiderung vom deutschen Konsul, Dr. Seelheim. (Siehe **Mennonite Exodus**, S. 325.) Br. Janz hat unsern Gemeinden und auch dem Reiche Gottes einen großen Dienst getan durch seine entschiedene Stellungnahme. Laßt uns der Führer gedenken, die uns Gottes Wort gesagt (Hebr. 13, 7), und die für den Glauben des Evangeliums einen guten Kampf gekämpft haben (2. Tim. 4, 7).

## II. Im Kampfe für das Wohl seines Volkes.

In Rußland sowie später in Kanada erstreckte sich der Dienst von B. B. Janz weit über den Rahmen der M.B. Konferenz hinaus. Einen großen Teil seiner Zeit und einen noch größeren Teil seiner Kraft, hat B. B. Janz den Interessen und Nöten der ganzen mennonitischen Bruderschaft gewidmet. Die Mennoniten aller Richtungen fanden in ihm einen verantwortlichen Vertreter und einen verständnisvollen Freund in den Tagen der großen Bedrängnis. Nach H. Goerz liegt B. B. Janz Hauptbedeutung und sein größtes Verdienst in der Gründung und Leitung des "Verbandes mennonitischer Bürger holländischer Herkunft." In dieser Stellung hat er "nicht nur den Mennoniten der Molotschna, sondern der ganzen Ukraine unschätzbare Dienste während der Hungerhilfe und der Auswanderung geleistet..." (**Molotschnaer Ansiedlung**, S. 144). Offiziell sollte der "Verband" in erster Linie dem wirtschaftlichen Aufbau in den Kolonien dienen, und er wurde auch zu diesem Zwecke von der kommunistischen Regierung bestätigt. Nach Gottes weiser Vorsehung jedoch sollte der Verband, und vor allem der Leiter desselben, einem höheren Zwecke dienen, und zwar der Herausrettung von etwa 21,000 Mennoniten aus dem "Roten Paradiese."

Die Jahre 1923-1926 zählen jedenfalls zu den schwersten Jahren von B.B. Janz öffentlichem Dienst. Wie ein Mose immer wieder vor Pharaon trat, so mußte auch B. B. Janz immer wieder vor die Machthaber der neuen bolschevistischen Herrschaft treten mit der

Bitte: Laßt mein Volk ziehen! Die Gänge zu den verschiedenen Kommissaren, und besonders zu der gefürchteten G.P.U. (politischen Polizei) waren oft Gänge durch das "Tal der Todesschatten." In diesem heißen Kampfe gewann der Glaubensmut, die Beharrlichkeit, und Diplomatie dieses mennonitischen "Staatsmannes" manche Siege. Ein Beamter der Sovietregierung soll bei einer Gelegenheit gesagt haben: "Schon drei Jahre habe ich mich nicht bekreuzt, aber wenn ich noch einmal von dem Janz loskäme, ich würde mich dreimal nach einander bekreuzen!" Zitiert von A. Wiens in **Mennonitische Rundschau**, Vol. 87, N. 47, S. ). Der Dienst des Bruders in dieser Zeit war ein Dienst unter großen Gefahren, aber auch ein Dienst großer Opfer. Die längeren Perioden der Trennung waren für die Familie Zeiten der bangen Sorge um den Gatten und Vater. Viele Mennoniten in Kanada, und auch manche in den Vereinigten Staaten und in Südamerika, verdanken ihre Errettung nächst Gott diesem furchtlosen Führer, der immer wieder willig war, für seine Brüder in den Riß zu treten.

Doch im Kampfe für das natürliche Wohl seines Volkes vergaß B. B. Janz nie den tieferen Zweck der Auswanderung. Es war auf einer Konferenz der Immigranten in den Anfangsjahren in Kanada, wo Br. Janz einmal folgenden Ausspruch machte: "Wenn die Auswanderung aus Rußland nur eine Errettung aus leiblicher Knechtschaft zur Folge haben sollte, und nicht auch gleichzeitig eine Errettung aus geistlicher Knechtschaft — dann ist mein Bemühen ein Fehlschlag gewesen."

Seine Sorge um das Wohl seines Volkes — in aller Welt zerstreut — kam hier in Kanada zum Ausdruck durch seine Mitarbeit in der "Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization" und im Westlichen Hilfskomitee. In der ersten Organisation war er jahrelang der Gehilfe des Vorsitzers; im letzteren Komitee diente er viele Jahre als Vorsitzter. Die "Brüder in Not" fanden bei ihm stets ein offenes Ohr und einen warmen Vertreter vor der Bruderschaft. Eine beständige Sorge in den letzten 20 Jahren seines Lebens waren für ihn die mennonitischen Gemeinden und Kolonien in Südamerika. Die wirtschaftlichen und geistlichen Nöte der "Brüder im Süden" gaben Veranlassung zu einer umfangreichen Korrespondenz; noch mehr waren sie für Br. B. B. Janz ein ernstes Gebetsanliegen. Wer je an dieser Gebetsgemeinschaft teilgenommen, dem werden seine Gebete unvergeßlich sein!

## III. Im Kampfe für die Reinheit der Gemeinde.

Im Jahre 1909 wurde Br. B. B. Janz ordiniert als Prediger des Evangeliums in der M.B. Gemeinde. In den 55 Jahren seines Gemeindedienstes (davon 20 Jahre als Leiter der Coaldale M.B. Gemeinde) war die Reinheit der Gemeinde ein Hauptanliegen seiner Verantwortung. Im Geiste sehen wir ihn heute noch wie er auf Konferenzen, und auch in seinen Predigten von der Kanzel, mit erhobenen "prophetischen Zeigefinger" die Bruderschaft warnte vor den Gefahren der Verflachung und der Verweltlichung. Bruder Janz war tief bekümmert um die schwache Prüfung bei der Aufnahme neuer Glieder in die Gemeinde. In seiner letzten Konferenzpredigt auf der Kanadischen Konferenz im Jahre 1954, brach-

te er diese Sorge zum Ausdruck: "Die Aufnahme von Gliedern, oft Kindern oder auch etlichen andern, deren innere Stellung nicht klar zu beurteilen ist... bringt uns Umkehrte in die Gemeinde. Für die Kinder heißt es: 'Lasset die Kinder zu mir kommen'. Da sind wir in großer Gefahr, Volkskirche zu werden" (*Jahrbuch* 1954, S. 14). Bei einem meiner letzten Besuche in seinem Krankenzimmer in diesem Jahr bat er mich, doch die Gemeinden vor dieser Gefahr zu warnen. Br. Janz war auch besorgt um den wachsenden Einfluß mancher kulturellen Bestrebungen auf unser Gemeindeleben. Wir erinnern uns noch wohl seiner Mahnung: "Laß den Kulturgaul nur ruhig den Evangeliumswagen ziehen — aber nicht umgekehrt!"

In der oben erwähnten Konferenzpredigt schließt B. B. Janz seinen Appell an die Bruderschaft mit folgenden Worten: "O Brüdergemeinde, wie bist du in bald 100 Jahren so schwach geworden in praktischen Leben und Wandel! Du hast ein so wunderschönes Bekenntnis, ganz apostolisch, eine großartige Organisation... Das Leben weicht, obwohl der Kern gottlob noch gesund ist. Die Krisis einer untergehenden Welt ist an Hand... Ach daß eine allgemeine Neubelebung, Buß und Reinigung durch all unsere Gemeinden von Küste zu Küste ginge! Ach daß wir irdisch ärmer und geistlich reicher wären! Ach, daß das Treppenwaschen von oben anfinde, hinab bis in den letzten Winkel!... Ach daß die Konferenz selbst in Buß und Beugung eintreten möchte!" (*Jahrbuch*, 1954, S. 14, 15).

Diese prophetische Stimme eines gläubensstarken Führers in sturmbewegter Zeit ist nun verstummt. Das Zeugnis seines Wortes und Wandels redet jedoch weiter. Am Grabe des abgeschiedenen Vaters in Christo erinnern wir uns an Hebräer 13:7: "Bleibt Eurer Führer eingedenk, die Euch das Wort Gottes verkündigt haben! Betrachtet immer wieder den Ausgang ihres Wandels und nehmt ihren Glauben zum Vorbild" (n. Menge).

J. A. Toews

## ARTICLES

### The Near East Speaks

A visit to the Near East requires a heavy investment in terms of time and finances. So staggering are the above demands that one just naturally asks 'Is it worth it?' Justification for such a venture must be found in the returns that come to the person that makes the trip. After having made the journey and having spent the major part of the summer in these countries, one seeks to evaluate the benefits of such an experience. Naturally a good deal of the information received on such a trip can also come to the individual through the reading of books and periodicals as well as travelogues of those who have been there before. Yet almost any visitor to a foreign land will concede that there is some-

thing that you cannot bring home in pictures or reports or longer dissertations. To appreciate foreign cultures fully, one must become at least to a degree involved in its network of interactions and pressures exerted upon an individual. And one cannot help but return with certain basic impressions which one desires to share with friends at home.

During my visit the Near East has spoken to me in various ways particularly with regard to the following points:

#### 1. The Amazing Advance of Early Cultures

In Egypt most tourists are carried away with the grandeur of the pyramids built before 2,200 B.C. by such magnanimous men as Khufu. Upon a square base covering some 13 acres he heaped up 2,300 blocks of yellowish limestone, each weighing, on the average, 2½ tons, until the whole pyramid towered 481 feet into the sky. Historians tell us that it took over 30 years to build such structures with 100,000 new men subscribed to this task every three months. Besides, our attention may be directed to the awesome ruins in Baalbeck, Lebanon, where the tourist is shown one single cut stone called Hajar El Hu-bla (stone of the pregnant), the largest cut stone in the world weighing more than 1,000 tons. The moving of such stones as well as the erecting of these huge structures would tax some of the most modern engineering skills. The beautiful sculpturing on the walls, pillars and ceilings of the temples, plus the most magnificent mosaics on the various floors would be difficult to duplicate in our modern day.

But even more breath-taking for me was the visit to the various museums, particularly the one in Cairo, Egypt, where they have displayed the fabulous treasures found in the tomb Tutankhamun, who lived around 1350 B.C. The beautiful art work on his golden coffin was placed into a little larger one, and these two in a third, and the three together in the fourth coffin with the most beautiful golden decoration. These four coffins were then placed in gold-lined boxes; again, the first one is placed within a little larger one and together in the third and at last in the fourth box — all constructed from wood nailed together with nails as we know them today. Besides this, they will show you folding cots, gloves, sandals, fingernail files, socks, and razor blades made of copper and gold. All this causes one to stand in amazement and ask whether our civilization has advanced very far from those ancient days. We, today, may have some new mechanical gadgets, but as far as standards of living, they were not so far behind our day.

#### 2. That the Things Which Are Seen Are Temporal

Ancient ruins of the near East testify of the mental attitude the builders must have had. They wanted to produce something that would abide forever. They constructed stone walls made of such blocks as described above and they built stone pillars of more than twenty feet in circumference. The language of permanence was written on these structures. One's mind is stunned at the thought that such structures of strength and grandeur could ever

perish. But in Pergama, Turkey, alone, you will find more than ten such great temples, some of which date as far back as the fourth century B.C. It seems as though the stones cry out, "The things which are seen are temporal but the things which are not seen are eternal" (II Cor. 4:18). The futility of confidence in the visible is only too evident as one travels from ruin to ruin of that which was once great and magnificent. The Romans seem to have distinguished themselves in such great architecture of stone, but today only the crumbled rocks testify that the Romans have been there. They themselves and all that they have, has perished.

### 3. Of An Historical Christianity

This is particularly true in Palestine, where one may ask anyone, and he knows of a Christ who once lived, walked, talked, and died there. How often the guides would use the expression "Jesus was here." Then they would relate in detail what Jesus had done and said, whom he had met, and the miracles he is supposed to have performed. Taking the tourist along the Via Dolorosa they tell in detail about the tragedy of crucifixion. The repeated expression "Jesus was here" caused my heart to become restless. It was a feeling similar to the one we experience when we have gone into considerable effort to come and see some and are told, "He was here, but is gone." This is disappointing and frustrating, to say the least. They take you from shrine to shrine, some of which glitter with artificial beauty but the glory of the Lord is gone. Is this the best we can say? "Jesus was here." Or can we enjoy the contemporary reality of His presence. In our Bible talk and our ecclesiastical language we often speak in terms of historical realities. In our churches the people and in Sunday School our children are under the impression that we speak of someone who lived years ago — an historical figure. How refreshing to come home and hear Billy Graham say "Jesus says," not "Jesus said." We have more than the Near East speaks about. We have him who says, "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matth. 28:20).

### 4. Of the Blindness of the Human Heart

The people of Palestine are everywhere surrounded by geographical reminders of that which God has done for them. One cannot help but marvel at the accuracy with which the Mohammedan guide will portray the life of Christ. Many of the people there know much more Scripture than some of our church people here. Some can quote it almost endlessly as they stand upon the spot where things actually occurred. They have so much knowledge and yet so little light. The light that is in them seems to be darkness. When one begins to communicate with these people pointing out that some of the realities they are speaking about can become realities of the heart, they resolutely turn away from it. In a sense, the Near East tells us how much light a man can reject. Instead of seeing the redemption, incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the people of Jordan see in the perpetuation

of the Christian tradition nothing but an economic advantage. To them it is a way of making a living in this world, but they refuse to concede that the Christ of whom they speak is the answer to the need of their souls. But also tourists coming from other lands stand in amazement of what they see and hear, but to many it is little more than a tourist experience in a strange land becoming familiar with an old tradition; spending their vacation there, instead of finding Him of whom Moses and the prophets have spoken. The religious pursuits of ecclesiastical orders manifest an almost unparalleled zeal and devotion. A good part of their life is preoccupied with meditation and participation in religious ritual, but never tasting the riches in Christ. In a sense all these people in Palestine are so near and yet so far. The Near East speaks of the blindness of the human heart.

### 5. Of Religious Fanaticism

The Near East is religious. Mohammedanism is predominant everywhere, except in Israel. Religious Orders of the Roman Catholic Church and even more so the Greek Orthodox Church have many shrines, and members of these orders move about in the milling crowds as a constant reminder that they are there to pursue religious goals. The minaret call be heard everywhere five times a day and at such moments it matters not where the Mohammedan may be, or what he may be doing, he prostrates himself in prayer. I entered an antique shop inside the walls of Jerusalem and found a little boy greeting me at the door, while through an open door to the back I saw his father with his face toward Mecca bowing repeatedly, praying to Allah in the name of Mohamet his prophet. All business was halted, all sales opportunities had to wait, until his prayer was finished. In the Judean desert east of Hebron we visited the monastery of St. Saba. There the monks live as isolated from the world as I have seen it anywhere. Their main task is that of mediation. The monk who showed us around even took us into the chapel of what he called 'extreme meditation'. In this chapel we saw a big pile of human skulls, which the monks told us, were the skulls of those of their Order that had been killed during the time when the Turks took over in Palestine. Here in the presence of the skulls they pursue their religious contemplations. As one visits the Convent of the Sisters of Zion one is led from one chapel to another and again and again one notices the nuns in worship and prayer. The Near East is characterized by a certain fanaticism and one cannot avoid the impression that religions are kept going by the power of human effort. They are doing much for their religion but their religion is doing so little for them. Yet even at such meagre returns they give themselves unreservedly to the task of maintaining and promoting an alternative to that which is real. Such fanaticism seems to tell the observer of the hunger of the human heart which, when that which is real has not been apprehended, will cause men to grope in the darkness of uncertainty for anything that may satisfy the craving of the inner soul.



## 6. That The Church Has Become A Museum Piece

This is particularly the impression one receives in Turkey where the churches of Byzantine times are in ruins along with the ruins of many temples. In a number of instances, of course, every trace of a church has been erased. This is one reason why I did not go to visit the city which the Revelation calls Thyatira. In its place you have only the thriving modern city of Akhisar. The ruins in Ismir, the former Smyrna, are also very scanty. In Sardis you find only a little brick hut which is supposed to be the only remnant of a church dating from Byzantine times. In Alasehir, the former Philadelphia, people have built houses right around old ruined church towers. I had a hard time finding people who knew what I wanted to see, when I told them that I was looking for the remains of a church.

One ancient church which still stands in tact is the church built by the mother of Constantine, St. Helena. It is called 'The Church of Holy Wisdom' (St. Sophia). It stands next to one of the main mosques of Istanbul, and the church is surrounded by the high towers from which goes forth the minaret call. In the mosque, people worship Allah in the name of his prophet Mohammed. But the church is nothing but a museum piece where tourists go to see the remains of Christianity which has once been but is no more. Who in the days of Constantine, when this church and others with it thrived, would have predicted that Christianity would be so eliminated from the country of Paul's birth and his missionary journeys? Of the seven churches of which we read in Revelation none continues to exist. This once Christian country knows no longer the name of Christ. This can be a strong warning for western civilization which is called Christian today, but lacks the genuineness of its Christianity. Unless God gives a gracious revival, we might expect the end of the Christian era in our lands. Should the churches we build today be a museum piece tomorrow? This is the challenge to Christian men and women everywhere. Let us rise and build Zion while it is day, for the night cometh.

J. J. Toews

## Where Do We Go From Here ?

**Can we a relatively small denomination develop an educational program on a post-secondary level and give it the necessary moral and financial support to enable it to succeed?**

Those who have been assigned the task of structuring such a program are more than anxious to know the answer.

It is commonly agreed that we have a few strikes against us before we really begin. It is no secret that a fairly large segment of our society is still not appreciative of higher learning. Some consider it their responsibility to oppose actively such a program. One active opponent usually neutralizes the positive contribution

of a proponent. When four horses pull a load and one of them pulls in reverse and thereby neutralizes the efforts of the second horse, the possible forward pull is reduced to one half. It is therefore essential to win the opponents in order to double our forward thrust.

Our M.B. Population in Canada is spread over a wide geographic area. The concentration of members in a few widely separated areas may give to these respective groups a spirit of local loyalty and a relative feeling of strength which tends to encourage them to take on projects which they cannot support successfully on a long term. To prevent failure, people are often asked to contribute beyond what they are willing to do and they begin to resent the pressure. This brings discouragement and criticism.

The greater demands of a complex society continually raise the standards of instruction, which in turn result in a spiralling cost of operation. Education today is an expense item of no mean proportion. It costs the Manitoba government \$300.00 per year to educate one child on the elementary level. The cost increases substantially as the level of education rises. College education is costly. We are asked to pay for our private program not with tax dollars but with special donations over and above what the government exacts from us. This can become a financial burden which some don't want to bear.

Our people are no longer primarily an agricultural people. Fathers with half a dozen sons must finally retire on the farm alone while their sons seek specialized training to enter the professions. The great diversity of occupations for which our younger generation seeks preparation calls for a wider field of courses than we feel competent to offer.

In the light of these and other circumstances we ask ourselves: Do we perhaps strive for something that we basically do not want? It can become very difficult and frustrating to seek to keep interest alive in a cause to which we are not dedicated at all. Or do we perhaps want something that we cannot have? Maybe it is unreasonable for us to think of sponsoring an educational program on a denominational level that will be competitive enough to challenge young people to attend and older people to support it. The cost may simply be prohibitive. The emotional strain and disappointment caused by desiring the unattainable may have disastrous effects.

Have we got the financial resources to support a challenging educational program on the secondary level? Have we got the insights that will help us plan a program that will be adequate to meet the needs of tomorrow? Have we got the unity of purpose to agree on a course of action which will result in a proper balance between consolidation and decentralization of our educational efforts? Have we got the will and determination that will persevere under the heavy demands that such a program will place upon us over an extended period of time? These questions must be faced and answered before we proceed too far.

A thorough evaluation of our resources may convince us that we



cannot have all we want and visualize, but possibly we can agree to want what we can have.

We have a valuable spiritual and cultural heritage to preserve and promote. We have a great potential in our youth that needs to be developed. We have a strong desire to exercise a measure of control in the training of our children and youth. We have a collective income that enables us to invest more money in an educational enterprise which we can approve. We have a growing teacher potential to staff our schools of higher learning. As a conservative group we learn gradually to make necessary adjustments to a world in flux, which includes the educational world. We also find a general willingness to follow a course of action which to us seems necessary, reasonable, and practical. What we need is to educate ourselves with reference to what we can do better together than alone and then to work together in a spirit of unity that will help us to do the incredible. This may require a rethinking of our program and a re-organization of our forces.

We have an example in our secular schools. The trend in elementary and secondary training has been to bring the school to the people. When it became necessary to raise the standards and increase the efficiency at a cost which the taxpayer could afford to pay the move was toward consolidation.

For a while the tendency in higher education was toward centralization and the 'one university' idea found acceptance. With the increasing enrollment and demand for higher education the trend now is toward decentralization and the increase of the number of universities and Junior Colleges.

Our problem today is to find out when centralization and consolidation are essential for progress and when this trend has reached the point beyond which it becomes detrimental to our best efforts. It appears expedient today that we move in the direction of combining our total efforts in the field of higher theological and liberal arts training in order to be able to offer a program on a level that will be respectable and challenge teachers and students alike. This does not exclude the possibility of multiplying our institutions in the future when circumstances may call for it.

For the immediate future it appears that we can offer the best possible program on a post-secondary level with the least expense by a concentration of our efforts on a limited field of offerings.

J. H. Quiring

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Christoph Blumhardt: "Wir Menschen müssen zweimal vom neuen geboren werden, einmal vom Weltkind zum Gotteskind, und dann vom Gotteskind zum Menschen der geheiligten Natürlichkeit. Das uns die erste Neugeburt zuteil wird bleibt immer ein Geschenk der Gnade. . . . Aber dann gilt es, darauf zu achten, daß der zweite Schritt gelegt und getan wird, der Schritt vom Gotteskind zum Menschen der geheiligten Natürlichkeit. Wie oft unterbleibt er, und wie sehr hängt damit das gequälte und unerlöste Wesen zusammen, das man auch in christlichen Kreisen antreffen kann."

## A SERMON

### Das Heilige Abendmahl (Text: 1. Cor.11, 23-24)

#### Einleitung

Es ist ein erhabener und großartiger Gedanke, welcher die ganze Heilige Schrift durchzieht, und welcher uns so recht ins Herz der ewigen Liebe hineinschauen läßt, daß sich der Unendliche mit dem Endlichen, der Heilige mit dem Unheiligen, in Freundschaft und Gemeinschaft vereinigen, und sich in einen Bund mit ihm einlassen will. Welch eine gnädige Herablassung des ewig treuen Bundesgottes! Es gefiel Ihm sogar, der Beschränktheit des menschlichen Wesens Rechnung tragend, seinen Bund mit den Menschen durch gewisse sichtbare Zeichen zu bestätigen und zu versiegeln. So setzte der Herr beim Bund mit Noah das Zeichen des Regenbogens ein. Seit der Bundesschließung mit Abraham war es die Beschneidung. Dieser Gedanke findet sich auch in den zwei neutestamentlichen Bundeszeichen, in der Taufe und im Abendmahl, wieder.

Lasset uns nun unsere Aufmerksamkeit dem heiligen Abendmahl zuwenden.

#### I. Merken wir zuerst auf dessen Bedeutung.

In der Verbindung mit dem Alten Testament steht das Abendmahl heute an der Stelle des Passahmahls. Indem der Herr selber an einem Abend diese zwei verband, machte Er auch somit ein Ende mit der Feier des Passahmahls. Alles fand in Christo seine Verwirklichung, das Typische wurde in der neutestamentlichen Verwirklichung aufgelöst.

Durch das Passahfest, welches alle Jahre als das erste der israelitischen Hauptfeste gefeiert wurde, sollte der Israelite eines-teils an das Vorübergehen des Würgengels an den israelitischen Häusern erinnert werden, welche nach dem Wort des Herrn an den Pfosten und Türschwellen mit dem Blut des geschlachteten Passahlammes bestrichen waren; andererseits auch an die Erlösung und den schnellen Auszug aus dem ägyptischen Diensthause. Weil das Volk Israel nicht schuldlos war und nur durch das Opferblut eines fehlerlosen Lammes errettet werden konnte, so war dieses ein Vorbild auf das völlig reine, sündlose, neutestamentliche Lamm Gottes, das große Versöhnungsoffer für die Sünden der ganzen Welt. Wie nun im alten Bunde diese große Erlösung der Kinder Israel aus Ägypten als die **Grundtat** der Bundestreue Gottes galt, ebenso ist auch im neuen Bunde die durch Christum vollbrachte Erlösungstat der höchste Beweis der ewigen Bundestreue und der größten Liebe Gottes.

Das heilige Abendmahl lehrt uns, daß sich dieser vorbildliche Charakter des Passahmahls erfüllt hat; daher bezog Christus sich in den Einsetzungsworten des Abendmahls unmittelbar auf die Einsetzung des Passahs. Das gebrochene "gesegnete" Brot als Symbol des für uns getöteten Leibes Christi, tritt nun an die Stelle des Passahlammes, und das durch den "gesegneten" Kelch sinnbildlich dargestellte Blut Christi tritt an die Stelle des Blutes der Passahlämmer. Wir können nun mit dem Apostel beim Blick auf das Vergangene in Wahrheit sprechen: "Wir haben auch ein Osterlamm, das ist Christus, für uns geopfert" (1. Cor. 5, 7).

Der Israelite sollte bei dem alle Jahre wiederkehrenden Passahfest zurückschauen auf die geschehene Erlösung aus Ägypten; wir schauen jedesmal beim Genuß des Abendmahls zurück auf die Erlösung durch Christi Blut. Wie geeignet ist doch das Brechen des Brotes uns an seinen um unserer Sünden willen zerschlagenen und gemarterten Leib zu erinnern, ebenso das Ausgießen des Weins, uns an das Vergießen seines Blutes zur Vergebung unserer Sünden zu erinnern. Hier ruft uns der Gekreuzigte zu: "Das tat ich für Dich!"

Das Abendmahl weist uns nicht nur zurück auf das, was für uns geschah, sondern verkündigt uns auch ein freies gegenwärtiges Heil, das in uns wirkt. Der Herr ist gegenwärtig in der Gemeinde, und das heilige Abendmahl spricht von dem der Seine Herde nie verläßt. "Siehe ich bin bei Euch alle Tage." Die ganze Frucht seiner Erlösung ist uns zuteil geworden: Vergebung aller Sünden, völliger Frieden und Ruhe im Gewissen, Kraft zur Heiligung und Vermehrung des geistlichen Lebens. Christus ist unser Brot, Er ist unser Kelch.

Diese Selbstmitteilung Christi im Abendmahl geschieht jedoch nicht auf eine materielle, substantielle, noch auf eine magisch wirkende Weise. Nach katholischer Auffassung ist in Brot und Wein der **natürliche** Leib und das **natürliche** Blut Christi enthalten. Nach lutherischer Auffassung ist der Leib und das Blut **in, mit** und **unter** den Elementen wahrhaftig gegenwärtig. Wir glauben, daß nach der Schrift, Brot und Wein **sichtbare Zeichen** sind, welche der Herr bei der Einsetzung des heiligen Abendmahls gebrauchte. Sie stellen uns sinnbildlich den für uns gebrochenen Leib und das für uns vergossene Blut des Herrn vor. Der Glaube hebt sich über die Elemente hinweg und kommt in einer neuen Weise in Christo zu ruhen. Die Gegenwart und Selbstmitteilung Christi besteht somit darin, daß Er als der Gottmensch sich selbst mit seiner Heilskraft der gläubigen Seele offenbart und mitteilt.

Der unbekehrte und ungläubige Mensch genießt nur die sichtbaren Elemente; er geliebt sie wie ein bemeines Mahl und darum unterscheidet er nicht den Leib des Herrn, welcher uns in Brot und Wein symbolisch dargestellt wird. Weil er es nicht im Glauben genießt, verachtet er in gewissem Sinne das Versöhnungsoffer Christi. Er ißt und trinkt sich folglich selbst das Gericht.

Das heilige Abendmahl verkündigt uns aber nicht nur ein freies gegenwärtiges Heil, das Gott für uns vollbracht hat und jetzt in uns vollbringt, sondern es weist uns auch auf unsere ewige Vol-

endung und Bestimmung hin. Es weist uns auf das Kommen unseres Herrn und Heilandes Jesu Christi zum allgemeinen Weltgericht und zur Vollendung Seines Leibes hin. "Bis an den Tag, da ich's neu trinken werde mit euch in meines Vaters Reich." Dieser Zukunftsblick beim Abendmahl ist auch ein kostbares Vorbereitungsmittel für die Gemeinde. "Wer solche Hoffnung hat, der reinigt sich."

## II. Merken wir uns nun, für wen dasselbe eingesetzt ist.

Weil nun das Abendmahl ein Bundeszeichen ist, so ist es klar, daß das Abendmahl auch nur für Bundesglieder bestimmt ist. Jeder wahrhaft Bußfertige und an Jesum Christum Glaubende hat nach dem Wort des Herrn ein Anrecht auf den Genuß dieses Mahls. Wer von Herzen an ihn, als den gottmenschlichen Erlöser glaubt, wer durch die Liebe Gottes getrieben wird, wer mit dem festen Vorsatz kommt, den Weg der Sünde und des Verderbens zu verlassen, wed seinem Bruder vergibt und auch den liebt, der ihm Unrecht tut; für den ist das Abendmahl. Hingegen, jeder der in Unbußfertigkeit und Unglauben, ja sogar in offenbaren Sünden und Lastern lebt und das sühnende Leiden Christi leugnet, ist entschieden untüchtig und unwürdig dazu, weil seine Gesinnung im Widerspruch mit der Natur und dem Zweck des heiligen Abendmahls steht.

Darf die Gemeinde über die Teilnahme am Abendmahl ein Wort sagen, oder ist die Entscheidung über den Genuß lediglich dem Einzelnen überlassen? In manchen Gemeinderichtungen ist dieses die Ordnung. Wir in der Brüdergemeinde sind andern Sinnes. Wir glauben, daß die Gemeinde des Herrn soll und muß über dieses Gemeingut der ganzen Gemeinde ein wachsames und offenes Auge haben und den Forderungen der Apostel gemäß Zucht und Ordnung halten (1. Cor. 10, 21; 2. Cor. 6, 14-18). Und doch kann die Gemeinde nur das Offensichtliche richten; Gott und der Einzelne müssen das Herz richten.

Darf ein Ungetaufter das Abendmahl essen? Hier stehen wir vor dem Umstand, daß in der Urgemeinde zwischen Bekehrung und Taufe nicht der Zeitraum herrschte, den wir heut als Regel in der Gemeinde haben. "Die nun sein Wort gern annahmen, ließen sich taufen; und wurden hinzugetan **an dem Tage** bei dreitausend Seelen" (Apg. 2, 41). "Der Herr aber tat hinzu täglich, die da selig wurden zu der Gemeinde." Die Bibel kennt keine Gläubigen außerhalb der Gemeinde. Weiter ist das Abendmahl nicht nur ein Akt für den einzelnen. Es ist vielmehr ein Gemeinschaftsmahl, das den Leib, der sich in der Gemeinschaft der Gläubigen sichtbar macht, darstellt. Wenn der Teilnehmer nun zeugt, daß er mit Christo in Gemeinschaft steht, hat sich aber nicht der Gemeinschaft der Brüder angeschlossen, so fehlt dem Zeugnis etwas Wesentliches.

## III. Merken wir uns nun zuletzt, wie dasselbe gefeiert werden soll.

Soll das Abendmahl auf eine würdige und Gottwohlgefällige Weise gefeiert werden, so kann solches nur nach einer gründlichen

und gewissenhaften **Selbstprüfung** im Lichte des Wortes geschehen. "Der Mensch aber prüfe sich selbst." Diese Selbstprüfung ist dringend nötig, um als würdiger Abendmahlsgast in der rechten Abendmahlstimmung zum Tisch des Herrn gehen zu können. Wer diese Prüfung unterläßt, der ist nicht würdig zum Genuß dieses Mahles.

Die Frage bei der Selbstprüfung muß sich mit dem Gegenstand der Würde auseinandersetzen. Nicht **was** macht mich würdig, sondern **wer** macht mich würdig. Mancher sucht die Würde bei sich und bleibt somit in der Ungewißheit eines zagenden Herzens. Die Würde, die uns angenehm vor Gott macht, ist und bleibt die Würde des Lammes. Er ist unser Friede; Er ist unsere Gerechtigkeit. "Christi Blut und Gerechtigkeit, das ist mein Schmuck und Ehrenkleid. Damit will ich vor Gott bestehn, wenn ich zum Himmel werd' eingehen." Die Würde, die uns den Himmel erschließt, versichert uns auch ein Willkommen beim Tische des Herrn.

Auch gehört zur rechten Abendmahlsfeier, daß man jedesmal des Herrn Tod verkündigt. Dieses geschieht sowohl durch die Predigt vom Leiden und Sterben Jesu Christi, als auch durch ein freudiges Bekenntnis von dem, was der Herr an uns getan hat. Das Abendmahl soll nicht nur ein Gemeinschaftsmahl sein, sondern es ist auch ein Gedächtnismahl. Das Abendmahl soll ein Zeugnis vor der Gemeinde und für die Gemeinde sein. Man sollte nicht sofort an die Ungläubigen denken und vielleicht sogar für sie als Beobachter bei der Feier Raum machen. Die Gläubigen brauchen immer wieder das einfache Zeugnis vom Kreuze.

Das Abendmahl soll auch in beiden Gestalten gefeiert und genossen werden. Also den "Laien" darf man nicht den Kelch entziehen.

Und wie oft sollte man das Abendmahl feiern? Die Frage ist verschieden beantwortet worden. Einige, zum Andenken an die fünf Wunden Jesu, wollen es fünfmal im Jahr feiern. Andere haben es viermal im Jahr; wir in der Brüdergemeinde jeden Monat. Die Schrift sagt einfach "so oft ihr davon esset."

Unsere ersten Brüder sprachen davon, daß die Gemeinde "am ersten Tage der Woche" das Brot brechen sollte. Damit wollten sie sagen, daß man jeden Sonntag es genießen müßte. Dieser Gedanke aber hat sich nicht in der Brüdergemeinde durchgesetzt. Hauptsache ist vielleicht auch nicht "wie oft", sondern ob man es oft genug feiert, um den vollen Segen zu genießen.

### Schluß.

Das Abendmahl ist das teure Gut der gläubigen Gemeinde. Hier finden sich die gleichgesinnten Seelen zusammen. Alle Schranken der natürlichen Gesellschaft treten zurück um dem Geistlichen Raum zu machen. Hier fühlt sich die Gemeinde eins in ihrem Herrn. Das walte Gott in seiner Gnade. Amen!

F. C. Peters

## BOOK REVIEW

### THE HOUSE OF CHRISTMAS

by Harold Kent. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964.

"The reason that, as the Christmas season comes and goes, many are stirred by its message and its ministry, yet with no lasting fruit in their lives as a result, is, I think, that they have never been to Bethlehem in their imagination, nor permitted the Lord to reveal to them what happened there." The **essential truth** contained in this statement may be confirmed by a recollection of the responses of those who first heard about the birth of Christ: Amongst those earliest hearers were wise men from the East; these Gentiles, compelled by "imaginative faith," sought out the Christ Child in Bethlehem and permitted God to reveal to them something of the deeper meaning of this event. Amongst those hearers were also: Anna and Simeon and they too "visited" Bethlehem in faith and were granted wonderful revelations about the divine person and mission of this Child. But amongst those hearers were also the chief priests and scribes of Israel, and their response did not extend much beyond temporary astonishment and merely curious enquiry, and therefore they were denied any revelation from God whatever.

The situation has not changed materially since then; very many — even professing Christians — meet the Christmas season, year after year, with the same casual gaiety, custom-worn indifference, or blithe ignorance, and therefore miss the holy reverence and wondrous joy that belong to any worthy commemora-

tion of Christ's birthday. They miss these blessings because they never "go to Bethlehem in their imagination, nor permit the Lord to reveal to them what happened there."

H. Harold Kent's little book, **The House of Christmas — the Place Where God Was Homeless and All Men Are At Home**, from which the above statement is derived, is a collection of lay sermons which can indeed enable readers to visit Bethlehem and to discover what actually transpired there. It can enable readers to learn, for example, that at Bethlehem — some 2000 years ago — the eternal Son of God was miraculously born of human flesh, without sin, and by a woman who was a virgin. This miraculous incarnation of Christ is a fact once attested by sufficient historical evidence, and one that, therefore, though distorted or temporarily denied by some, shall stand forever.

It can enable readers to learn, also, that at Bethlehem was born Someone who, by His own eternal life, "could snatch the sceptre of authority from the Prince of this World," and destroy Satan's works, in the lives of Christians and (ultimately) in the world at large.

It can enable ready readers to learn, too, that at Bethlehem One descended amongst men who proved to be the perfect fulfilment of ancient prophecy, the perfect manifestation of the Father's love, and the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all mankind (all aptly illustrated in the

context of Philip's encounters with the historical Christ).

One again, **The House of Christmas** can enable honest readers to discover — if they be not Christians already — that what happened at Bethlehem once may, in a sense, be repeated in themselves today. For, as Christ was once formed (physically) in the body of the Virgin Mary, so may He also be formed (spiritually) in those who (today) believe in His name. (Galatians 4:19).

And so, by taking as his point of departure or contextual basis some Biblical text or incident that refers, directly or indirectly, to the incarnation of Christ, Kent focuses upon the Advent theme — once illuminating this, and once that facet, of this so infinitely rich theme. The author's characteristic method in this series of sermons is, first, to identify the principal spiritual facts or issues involved in the text or incident, to illustrate their fuller significance, and then to apply that significance to contemporary man. **Pertinent illustrations**, drawn from church history (often) and human experience generally, an **essentially plain and yet strangely moving style** (wherein the dramatic force is achieved mainly through skilful variation in sentence structure and sentence length), and an **earnest and inviting tone**, contribute not a little to the fine quality of these sermons.

The author, Harold Kent, an architect by profession, preached these sermons as a lay preacher of St. James' Cathedral in Toronto. One wonders whether many ordained preachers and pastors of our day could not learn something needful (about clarity of analysis and relevance of application) from this particular lay preacher!

The last sermon in this collection of fourteen is something of a "digressio" in that it deals, not with a

Biblical passage or incident, but with the practice of the Church in respect to Christmas celebration. It is a very interesting discourse that establishes, contrary to the careless comments of some, that Christmas and Christmas celebration "was not a pagan festival; it was the Church's challenge; it was the gauntlet flung in the face of paganism by those who emphasized the coming of the Son of God."<sup>1</sup>

We would certainly wish a host of appreciative readers for Mr. Kent — readers who are prepared to meditate upon the contents of these messages, at leisure, and with open minds. And may the hope of the author be realized for such readers: "that... those who have gone to Bethlehem will renew their joy, and that those who have not yet made the journey will find their way to worship the ever new-born King."

"O holy Child of Bethlehem!  
Descend to us, we pray;  
Cast out our sin, and enter in,  
Be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels  
The great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with us,  
Our Lord, Immanuel."

1. Full and objective confirmation of this fact may be gained from Francis X. Weiser's excellent **Handbook of Christian Feasts and Customs**. (Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1958.)

Herbert Giesbrecht

#### A CHRISTMAS PRAYER

"Slow me down Lord, and inspire me to send my roots deep into the soil of life's enduring values, that I may grow toward the shares of my greater destiny" —W. E. Songster (on a Christmas card to a friend).

## Theologian, Reformer, Editor, Prime Minister

Frank Vanden Berg, **Abraham Kuyper**, Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans' Publishing Company, 1960, 307 pages.

Men who possess such a combination of eminent qualities of Abraham Kuyper are rare in the Christian church. He was a first-rate theologian, an active church reformer, an editor and writer, a founder and professor of a Christian university and for a time, at the turn of the nineteenth century, the Prime Minister of Holland. The works of Kuyper reveal not only a theologian and a Christian statesman of great depth and breadth of mind; but they also reveal a man with a warm, pious and devout heart who, in the midst of varied and strenuous labors produced such significant books as, **The Work of the Holy Spirit, Principles of Sacred Theology**, and an excellent devotional book **To Be Near Unto God**. In reading these and other books one is impressed by his dedication to the Lord of scriptures and the desire to work out one's faith in life, in society, and in the church. Indicative of the quality of Kuyper's commitment is one of his statements: "In the total expanse of human life there is not a single inch of which the Christ, who alone is sovereign, does not declare, 'that is mine'."

Vanden Berg's book serves the useful purpose of introducing one of God's great gifts to the church, an introduction long overdue, at least to many Canadian and American evangelicals. The biography is an attempt to trace the chronology, the life and the varied activities of Abraham Kuyper. The author's treatment is sympathetic. His partiality toward the Reformed Church is quite obvious. The early struggles and conflicts of Kuyper which lead to his conversion and commitment to

Christ and to the reform of the church are very well presented. The subsequent years of Kuyper's life show tremendous vigour and activity. The willingness to give so unstintingly of his energy to the work of the Kingdom to the point of physical exhaustion, and the readiness to enter into many areas of Christian concern, remain a standing challenge to all who take a good look at the life of Kuyper. The author moves briskly in setting forth biographical details and manages to maintain the sustained interest of the reader. One would, however, wish at times a fuller treatment of the theological views of Kuyper.

Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) was born and reared in the home of a pastor of the Reformed State Church of Holland. A good deal of his education was received at the hands of his parents. Later he entered Leiden University taking particular delight in languages (Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, German, French and English) and in literature. After his university years he attended Leiden Divinity School from which he graduated with a doctor's degree in Theology at the age of 25. Kuyper had entered his university and theological studies, orthodox in his theology. However, the exposition to professors with extraordinary reputations as preachers and lecturers committed to the prevailing liberal theology, gradually drew him into the sphere of liberal theology to the extent that on one occasion he too applauded with other students when his professor denied the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Of significance were two exper-

iences of Kuyper. He entered an essay contest which required of him a study of the comparison of John Calvin's and John A. Lasco's views of the church. Eight months of intense work, including a remarkable discovery of most of Lasco's works, resulted in a gold medal and a prize. But his strenuous activity had exhausted him to the extent that he had to leave his studies for many months in order to recover his health. During the time of his convalescence he read Charlotte M. Young's, **The Heir of Redclyffe**, which made a profound impression upon him. It exposed his spiritual poverty and aroused him to a renewed interest in the Christ of scriptures.

The next major Christian experience came in his early years as pastor. In his parish he met with some of the lower class people who had spiritual interests, who had remarkable Bible knowledge and who were also staunch in their orthodox convictions. Through his interaction with them he emerged from an intense soul struggle to a final commitment to Christ. Henceforth Kuyper would use all his resources of study, speech and writing ability to the end of reforming the church.

Kuyper's concerns covered many areas. One of the areas of his concern was the church: the theology of the church, the life of the church, the pastoral care and the mission of the church. The aggressive steps he took by means of the pen and by means of united action with brethren who were like-minded, stimulated sympathetic support on the part of a number, but also stimulated, or brought about harsh opposition and bitter hostility. Eventually his reforming activities within the church brought about a split when in 1887 about 200 congregations with a mem-

bership of 100,000 left the state church. Kuyper had wanted reform within the church; he had not sought to create another church, but circumstances and the opposition within caused the movement to break with the state church. Another area of concern was Christian education. Kuyper supported the idea of parental autonomy and responsibility in Christian education. He maintained that parents ought to have the right to educate their children in accordance with their faith. Consequently Kuyper maintained that parents ought to be able to pay school taxes to Christian schools. Another area of concern was of higher Christian education. In 1876 Holland had three universities, largely staffed by liberal and modernistic professors. To each of these universities was attached a divinity school where men sought to train pastors for the state church. These divinity schools were like-wise infiltrated by Liberal theology. Kuyper sensed the need of a university which would be erected upon the foundation of the Word of God. In 1880 Kuyper, with friends, founded the Free University of Amsterdam. In his address on that occasion he spoke words which ought to ring in our own ears as we contemplate education for our youth:

"What we are doing is to inculcate principles, what we are doing is to train young men for a life of struggle and self-denial. What we are doing is to point them not to enervating ministerial financial security, or to intoxicating clerical insence but to the crown of glory that beckons to them from beyond the grave. We desire to train men of granite and steel who like the Puritans of old will stand steadfast and immovable... men who do not look forward to a place of ease and quiet and deference but who dare to fight the battles of the Lord and

who sing songs in the night, if they are ever accounted worthy to suffer shame and reproach for His name sake" (Page 120).

In order to bring about educational reform in Holland and to permit Christian parents to support Christian schools and to enlarge the enrolment of Christian schools, Kuyper ran as candidate for a Christian political party. Eventually he became the Prime Minister of Holland, and during that time passed some significant legislation in the field of education.

The chief agency for the dissemination of his ideas was the paper **Heraut** and the **De Standard**. Through them Kuyper as editor sought to let the Word of God speak out with great boldness and clarity to all the issues affecting man in his

society. During the course of his life Kuyper managed to speak frequently. He also lectured at the university and wrote a number of books.

Even if one does not agree with all the aspects of Kuyper's theology, he has much to say to the church and exemplifies Christian scholarship, devotion and loyalty to the Christian faith as he understood it. His influence is apparent in many evangelical men of our day; one notices, for example, the very extensive influence of Kuyper's theology in Bernard Ramm's recent publication. Every pastor who acquaints himself with Abraham Kuyper will find him a fresh, invigorating breeze which stirs to great zeal and commitment to Christ.

Victor Adrian.

## The Earliest Christian Confessions

by Vernon H. Neufeld (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1963, pp. 166)

It is always gratifying to find Menonite students giving themselves to a serious study of the Biblical text. Dr. Vernon Neufeld, president of Bethel College, Kansas, in his monograph, **The Earliest Christian Confessions**, has made an effort to analyze the form, the meaning, and the place of the 'confession' in the life of the early church. His findings are published as Volume V, in **New Testament Tools and Studies**, edited by Bruce M. Metzger, of Princeton Seminary.

By means of lexical, syntactical and formcritical methods, the **homologiai** imbedded in the New Testament documents are scrutinized. After a study of the word **homologia** itself, Neufeld shows that the background for early Christian confessions is to be found in Judaism, as epitomized in its Shema.

Paul's letters are investigated to discover the basic confessional formulae. The basic confession, according to Neufeld, is: 'Jesus is Lord'. At this point he gives valuable information on the use of 'lord' in the Biblical and Hellenistic world of Paul. In his attempt to discover the **Sitz im Leben** of the Pauline **homologiai** Neufeld will probably not take all of his readers with him, since some will question his approach to Biblical tradition.

The Gospel and the Letters of John present a somewhat more complex picture. In the background of the Johannine **homologiai** are the heretical movements against which alone they can be fully understood. In the Synoptic Gospels the basic **homologia** appears to be: 'Jesus is the Christ'. This is true also for the Book of Acts. Neufeld feels that although it



was used variously in the early church, in personal confession, exorcism, baptism, and persecution, its main function lay in the church's dialogue with Judaism, where Jesus was not accepted as The Christ.

After treating the Pastorals and the remaining Catholic Epistles in similar fashion, Neufeld concludes that the basic pattern of the earliest **homologia** includes two elements: The naming of Jesus, and the ascription to him of important titles (Christ, Lord, Son of God.) By such confessions the person and the work of Christ are closely bound together. Also, both his incarnation and exaltation are emphasized. Our author contends that the confession 'Jesus is the Christ' is the earliest confession, and not 'Jesus is Lord', as is commonly thought. This basic confession was then developed and broadened.

The early confessions of the Chris-

tians were a declaration of personal faith, Neufeld argues. However, they also found expression in exorcism, in hymnody (1 Tim. 3:16, would be a good example), and in the proclamation of the Gospel to unbelievers. At times they were used for defence rather than for proclamation; and they also served as a test of the orthodoxy of the church's members. In time of persecution they were part of the confession of the faithful which often determined life and death for them. Finally, the New Testament confessions became the basis of the creeds of the church.

This book is not written in popular language, but those who are seriously interested in New Testament backgrounds and the history of the early church, as these are reflected in the New Testament writings, can receive some valuable insights by a careful perusal of this volume.

D. Ewert

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