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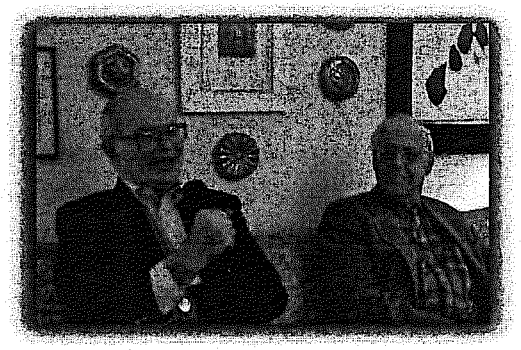
A Reformation & Revival Journal Interview with M. Eugene Osterhaven and I. John Hesselink



John Hesselink Eugene Osterhaven

In 2003 I visited with two of my favorite Reformed theologians, in Holland, Michigan. Both Eugene Osterhaven and John Hesselink have served the Church well for decades. And one, Eugene, was the teacher while the other, John, was once the student. They have worked from within an evangelical Dutch Reformed tradition for a lifetime but they have remained open to the wisdom of the whole Church as the interview will show, since the interview was conducted, Eugene Osterhaven went to be with the Lord he so loved on January 24, 2004. John Hesselink gave a tribute to Gene at his funeral service on January 28. This message appears in *Final Thoughts* in this issue.

Eugene and John both studied God deeply and they also love him more deeply every day. Rarely have I enjoyed the company of two brilliant and godly men quite like Eugene and John. I believe the interview we conducted will glorify Christ and help many think about how to do good orthodox theology in the modern age.

R R J — Eugene, please tell us about your childhood and early years of life.

M E O — I was born and reared in Grand Rapids, Michigan. I came from a tradition that was strongly rooted in the Church and one that was particularly Reformed. My mother was an especially devout woman who read the Bible diligently, studied it faithfully, and taught a Sunday school class for fifty years. She also had a strong prayer life. My father's family was different. They were also Reformed but strangely my dad and most of his siblings never made a confession of faith until before the time they were married, some even a little later than that. Some of them were afraid that they would be hypocrites, or inconsistent in living their faith, so they held off on a confession of faith. This wasn't true on my mother's side. On her side there was a different type of Dutch Calvinism than my father's family knew. I was thus taught to pray from my childhood. We had regular prayers in the home. My mother loved nothing more than to sit with the Bible and two or three commentaries at the kitchen table and go over them and try to ponder the real meaning of God's message.

I made confession of my faith when I was sixteen and it meant quite a bit to me. I had always prayed because I had been brought up that way. The first time I really remember struggling in prayer was when I was seventeen. I was on a long, twenty-six day canoe trip. Most of it was upstream and quite difficult. I was so disturbed during this trip that I had to go to the woods all by myself to ask the Lord to help me have the right attitude so I wouldn't be too nasty to my two companions. I came back to camp after a half-hour of praying in the woods alone and God answered my prayer. My attitude changed—it was a mini-miracle.

R R J — So, you were seventeen when this occurred?

M E O — Yes, but I had been gone from home for two months before we ever began the trip. I had spent two weeks at the Chicago World's Fair in 1933 with a band I played in, the Grand Rapids Sea Scouts. Then I was at camp for two months.

R R J — What kind of band was this?

M E O — It was a very excellent concert band. We would go to Chicago every year and we were invited to play at the World's Fair. We played every day and this enabled us to get into everything for free at the Fair. It made us very happy.

R R J — Was this your first canoeing trip? I understand you are quite an outdoorsman and that you have taken many canoe trips.

M E O — This was my first *long* canoe trip. I have taken many trips since. I have taken trips all through northern Ontario, all the way down through James Bay and so forth. Most of this trip was upstream. One of the two fellows with me was a rich man who had financed the trip. He wasn't used to work, so the other guy and I had to do the paddling and fight the currents. I got sick of the whole thing and wanted to go home. I struggled, as I said, but the Lord heard my cry and helped me.

The next tremendous prayer experience I had was two years later in 1935. I wanted to go to college. I had already been in school for three years, one of them full-time and then the next two years part-time, because I had to work during the depression. When school was out in 1935, our family hit rock bottom financially. My dad had a business that was doing very poorly so he could only take $15.00 a week out of it. I had to get work and I was sure, being quite confident of myself at that age, that I could find a job even if thousands were pounding the streets looking for work. But it didn't happen. Almost in desperation I prayed and prayed and looked at the skies above me and asked the Lord to help me. Miraculously, or almost miraculously, I got two job offers the next day. Both of these parties came to the house offering me work. This was another tremendous confirmation of the reality and power of prayer and how the Lord *does* take care of us. So, I peddled ice that summer and the next three summers afterward. I made $20.00 a week, leaving most of it at home of course. I was so very sure that God had heard me and helped

me when I was in great distress.

R R J — John, would you tell us about your development, your childhood years and your faith in Christ?

I J H — I grew up in a traditional Reformed home and my father was a minister. The thing I remember most from my early childhood, the first nine years of which I lived in Grand Rapids, was that we were the only church in our neighborhood. I was completely unaware that there were other groups. It was only later that I became aware of the Christian Reformed Church, for example. I then realized I had to define what it meant to be Reformed as opposed to being Christian Reformed.

I had a very happy childhood, even though these were the post-Depression years. We then moved to a small town in Iowa where there were two churches, one Reformed and the other Christian Reformed. That also sharpened my sense of what it meant to be Reformed, but mostly compared to what it meant to be Christian Reformed. A lot of it had to do with some petty legalism and that didn't nurture a strong spiritual life.

So I grew up in this little town near Pella, Iowa, another strong Reformed center. I had a strong sense of sin—not that I sinned blatantly or terribly—but I had a stronger sense of sin than of grace. It was only later in my career when I taught theology that I came to appreciate the fact that the Christian gospel has to do with sin, of course, but even more so with the grace that is so much greater than all our sin. I didn't have the kind of serious struggles with prayer that Gene did. Perhaps this was because I prayed less or had fewer critical moments. In any case, I made a public confession of faith when I was 12. Mine was a really peaceful and happy childhood, except that my mother contracted Hodgkin's disease about the time I was twelve. She died when I was only fourteen. I was the older of two sons, so that made for some rapid maturing and a searching of the real issues of life and death. My mother was the warmer and more gracious parent. My father was certainly

orthodox, although his Reformed orthodoxy was tempered by taking *Moody Monthly* magazine and by listening to his favorite radio preacher, Walter Maier of *The Lutheran Hour*. Therefore, his rather strict Reformed orthodoxy was mellowed by this evangelical influence on the one hand and the Lutheran influence on the other. Dad was not a great scholar, though he read a good bit. He was mostly a good solid country pastor and grew up in a warm traditional Reformed environment of Dutch influence. One of the things I remember as a boy was that he was at first leery of Billy Graham since he was not Reformed and he was asking people to make decisions. My father was not a hyper-Calvinist by any means. I remember him warning me once when I was hitchhiking back to Michigan because I had been picked up by a Jesuit on one of these trips. He warned me about Jesuits because he said they were so crafty [laughter]. I mention this because dad later became a real fan of Billy Graham. He mellowed a great deal in his older years. People, as they get older, seem to go in one of two directions. They either get harder or they mellow. Well, he mellowed and became very supportive of the Billy Graham ministry. And after he retired from a church near Lincoln, Nebraska, he ended up assisting the chaplain in the veteran's hospital in Lincoln where the chaplain was a Roman Catholic. That chaplain became his very best friend. He later proudly displayed a plaque on his wall paying tribute to his ministry at the hospital with this good friend. Those were broadening influences for my father and to some extent they also affected me.

My call to the ministry came about in a somewhat unusual way. I wasn't rebellious as a child but a pretty straight kid. I loved sports and music. In high school I did just about everything. I wrote for the school paper, sang in the glee club, and played football, baseball and basketball. I was faithful in the church and sang in the choir. Later, when I was in college, I taught Sunday school. While I was in high school I struggled with what I was going to do with my life. I wasn't going to be a minister because one lady said, "Johnny, you look like your father, you talk like your father, I'll bet you become a minister

some day." I was resolved that this was not a good reason for becoming a minister. So I struggled with that sort of thing. I decided to major in philosophy at Central College in Pella, Iowa. We all had to take a required course called "Ethics for Democracy." The text was Plato's *Republic*. The professor, Bill Vander Lugt, who ended up teaching at Hope College some years later after teaching at Penn State and elsewhere, was such a winsome professor that I decided to major in philosophy. It was at the end of my freshman year in college, sitting with the choir in chapel, way back in the balcony, that a woman sent out from our board of foreign missions gave a talk. I was singularly unimpressed because she was not a particularly good speaker, nor was she a very attractive woman. I thought, "Why don't they send out somebody more persuasive who can speak better than this woman?" So I tuned out her speech, but at the end she listed a number of mission fields where there were needs. She mentioned the need for a nurse in Arabia and an evangelist in Japan, etc. The Lord strangely spoke to me through that woman, a most unlikely and unpersuasive sort of person. When she invited people to come to talk to her if they were interested, I suddenly felt moved to go and talk to her. Her first question was, "How long have you considered becoming a missionary?" My response was, "I never thought of it before." She didn't take me very seriously, a freshman wasting her time [laughter]. When I came back the next year and then the next she realized I was serious and this is how I came to be a missionary rather than a pastor. I have done just about everything in the realm of Christian professions, being an evangelist, an administrator, a theologian, and a teacher. But one thing I have never done is pastor a church, though I have done a lot of preaching.

R R J — Gene, did you pastor a church?

M E O — When I finished Western Seminary (RCA) in Holland, Michigan, some of my teachers advised me to go on to school. One of my teachers was the Reformed theologian Albertus Pieters, my greatest teacher incidentally, who had

spent thirty-two years in Japan as a missionary before he had to come home because all four of his daughters had tuberculosis. Pieters told me to go to the University of Chicago, which was very liberal at the time. He said, "You'll be able to take it and see the great differences." I didn't take his advice and went to Princeton Theological Seminary instead. Princeton had a new doctoral program, the head of which had been a professor at Western Seminary, a man named John Kuizinga. I was in the middle of that program when we got into World War II. I didn't know what to do so I consulted with several of my professors and they told me to stay with the program. "We need teachers," they argued. I said, "But I don't want to teach." So they said, "If you go into the Church we need pastors with extra training too, so stay with the program." So I stayed. I also took care of the church of one of my closest friends, which was located just outside Princeton. My friend became an Army chaplain and was captured and killed as a war prisoner. That really shook me up. I served that congregation as the stated supply minister for two years and four months. Before that I had preached as the summer pastor in a Presbyterian church in southern New Jersey. I also preached there during the year. Those are my only two pastoral charges. I was never the installed pastor of a church. After World War II, Hope College needed a chaplain and a teacher to fill a position so I took it.

R R J — John, what year did you enter Western Seminary and was Eugene one of your professors?

I J H — I graduated from college in 1950 and then went to New Brunswick Seminary, our other Reformed seminary in New Jersey. I had a future brother-in-law who went there as well. And Howard Hegeman, who was a powerful preacher and scholar in his own right, had been our religious emphasis week speaker at Central College. He also leaned on me to try New Brunswick Seminary, where I went for a year. I was not entirely at home there so in the fall of 1951 I transferred to Western Seminary in Holland, Michigan. I did not realize it at

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the time but Eugene had just begun to teach full-time at Western. Prior to that I didn't know what I wanted to focus upon. It was partially through Gene that I came to love theology. The passion that he had and the way he related to contemporary issues all influenced me. He was famous, or infamous, for breaking into the middle of a lecture and saying, "Boys (we were all men then) . . . " He would then tell us about some issue that exercised him and would get off on that for five minutes before we would get back to the subject at hand. Later I ended up doing my doctorate with Karl Barth and I also studied with Emil Brunner in Japan. As I have told a number of people over the years, my theology was learned at Eugene Osterhaven's knee and these other people only sharpened it and forced me to think through other issues in a more critical way. The faith, the theological position that I hold, is still the theology that I learned from Eugene Osterhaven back in the early 1950s.

R R J — Given the passion with which he taught, did you begin to desire to teach theology because of this influence?

I J H — No. Remember what I said earlier. I was only thinking of mission work at that time. The mission board secretary, Luman Schaeffer, who was in charge of the Far East field, had been a missionary in Japan before and after the War. He said, "I think you are cut out for student evangelism." That made sense to me. I didn't think in terms of graduate study until that same man, Lumen Schaeffer, suggested to me that during our first furlough (in those days you took a furlough every five years) the Board would give me some extra time and it would be good for me to get a doctorate because I would be more effective in evangelism. He felt if I did this, it would allow me to teach part-time in one of the Japanese universities instead of standing outside the gate, so to speak. So that was when it was first suggested to me that I should do graduate work, but this was not with the idea of teaching at all but rather with the hope that this would make me more effective in evangelism as a missionary.

I have never told Gene this before, but he didn't encourage me to do graduate study. In fact, no one at Western encouraged me in this direction even though I think I had earned straight A's. I heard Gene later say, somewhat to my chagrin since he said it publicly, that I was the best theological student he ever had. But Gene never told *me* that. I guess he thought it might go to my head or something.

R R J — We have to pursue this one [laughter]. Gene, what did you see in John as your student? Why didn't you tell him how good a student he was?

M E O — I don't believe I *ever* lavished praise on my students [laughter]. I didn't want to make them conceited in the slightest way.

I J H — This is the Dutch style!

R R J — Yes, there is a bit of that in my own background, I think.

M E O — That's in our family. You don't even praise your own children too much because you are afraid you might spoil them. But John was an excellent student, I well recall. I could tell that he loved what he was thinking about. He also had a very fine intuitive grasp of the subject. He had a good solid analytical mind that could take things apart and put them back together again. He was a hard worker, very diligent. I knew all that. But we also had some other excellent students in that class of 1953, some fine thinkers.

R R J — Any other theologians in that class?

M E O — Well, there was one who got his Ph. D. at Edinburgh and there were several others who were excellent theological students.

I J H — Another was Elton Bruins, who did a Ph. D. at New York University, and then taught at Hope College for years, and the man who got his doctoral degree in Edinburgh went on to be president of a Lutheran college and then taught at the University of Michigan. We had about thirty students in the class, about half of them veterans of World War II. We had our fifty-year reunion in 2003.

R R J — Eugene, how did you end up at Hope College in the first place?

M E O — I had an offer from Hope College to teach, a year before I actually came here. I really didn't know what I wanted to do at that point in my life. My mentor, our committee chairman on post-graduate studies, who was also head of the department of systematic theology at Princeton, said, "Do *not* take that job." (He had taught at Hope himself some years before.) He added, "Many of these church-related colleges will go under after the War is over. You'll get a job. I'll see that you get a job but don't take that one."

So, I turned the offer down. But a year later I changed my mind and took it. In fact this professor said, "Go ahead and take it." This is an interesting thing—but here is a great man, a great scholar, very loyal to Hope College most of the time, but he was telling me I should not teach there. He didn't want me to go under with the college. As it turned out, the college became a first-class institution.

R R J — The years after the War were a boom for most colleges. The work of both European and Japanese missions had a real growth spurt after the War. It seems to me that one obvious reason was that Christian soldiers who had seen those parts of the world had a new vision for reaching them with the gospel. These same young men came home, went to college, and returned to serve in these various areas. Though neither of you served in the Orient during the War. Is this observation true?

M E O — I saw it firsthand to be very true. When I began at Hope College in 1945, as the chaplain and the only Bible and religion teacher, I had many servicemen coming back and taking my classes. In the fall of 1945 we had about 400 in the college and in the spring of 1946, by the end of the War, we had about 1,200. Many of these had been servicemen. And many of them had a great passion to make their lives count. Many of them went on to seminary and others became strong Christian business and professional people. It was a great help to me to see how some of these fellows felt who had been in military service. Some of these men had been wounded and some had been prisoners of war.

I J H — To me the remarkable thing was that of these thousands of people who went to Japan as missionaries after the War, many of them were veterans. Some had fought against the Japanese. It was something of a miracle, they would tell me, that they could now go back and seek to witness to and serve the Japanese people against whom they had fought so bitterly.

R R J — In the light of recent history we already see some things happening in terms of people going into Afghanistan

and Iraq. It does make you wonder what God has planned for these people who have suffered so much.

John, you referred to your seminary class having its fiftieth anniversary celebration this year. Share with us a memory or two from the days you spent at Western Seminary as a student. What difference did the seminary make for you? Sometimes people say seminary kills piety and in the end it becomes a cemetery. What happened during your years in Holland as you prepared for ministry in Japan? Seminary did not harm the faith of either one of you from what I can see. So, what difference did seminary make?

I J H — Those were some of the happiest years of my life. We had a few older men who were not perhaps first-class scholars but they were very godly men. And then we had people like Eugene. We also had some younger scholars in both Old Testament and New Testament who taught us to think critically and to deal with the Scriptures honestly. These were people, like all the rest of the professors, who believed that the Bible was the very Word of God and thus treated it with utmost reverence. My classmates, about half of whom were veterans, were of the same sort. Even though the age difference was sometimes considerable (I was twenty-two when I began), there was a rich fellowship among us. In no way did my seminary experience undercut my personal faith. We had prayer fellowships and other gatherings that fed our faith and this was a time of real spiritual growth as well as intellectual development. I never saw the two standing in opposition to one another.

R R J — What is your overall impression of seminary education today, and what is its present contribution to the Church? You both live here in Holland, Michigan, and share in the life of this seminary community in your retirement. What do you see happening in seminary education in North America in general?

I J H — I only retired five years ago and still teach occasionally. I have an office at the seminary and work with graduate

students from overseas in the Th. M. program. I would say that Western is a far better seminary all around today than it has ever been. Not only is it better academically than when I was a student here but it is more focused on ministry and community than it has ever been. We have more students being integrated into real church life than we have ever had. They do not simply spend a few hours each week in a church working with youth or teaching a Sunday school class. And the emphasis upon community and the high percentage of our students who attend chapel regularly and the large number in prayer fellowships all indicates health to me. About half our students live in housing nearby and there is prayer in the various living places too. I sense a fresh warmth and a relationship between professor and student that is just outstanding. Western Seminary is better and stronger than it has ever been. I thought it was pretty good when I was president but I think it is even better now. I tried to reach out and connect with faculty and students. We had real collegiality. Western Seminary is producing people who will become fine ministers and servants of the Church. We are presently attracting excellent students and we are growing every year.

R R J — Eugene, most of our readers will know very little about the Dutch congregations and groups that make up the Reformed family. There are two major groups that came out of this Dutch immigration, the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church. Tell us a little about the history of this particular movement so our readers can relate to your particular background and experience.

M E O — The Reformed Church in America, I say with a little pride, is the oldest denomination in America with a *continuous history*. Our first church was organized on Manhattan Island in 1628. Even before this there was a bit of activity in Albany, up the Hudson River at what was then called Fort Orange. Our Church was very orthodox from the first. It followed the Church order of the Synod of Dordt. We had some outstanding ministers in those early years. Some did work

among the Mohawk Indians. Theodore Jacobus Frelinghuysen (1691-1747) was a Dutch Reformed evangelist in the first awakening who worked among the Raritan River Valley in four parishes in that area. I was ordained in the Third Dutch Reformed Church of Raritan and served that church. One of Frelinghuysen's descendants, Joseph S. Frelinghuysen, was an ex-U.S. senator and a member of the church I served there. A lot of the families in that congregation could trace their family back to these earliest settlers. And our Reformed Church went through various awakenings too, not only the Great Awakening. In 1801 there was another awakening that impacted us. Then, in the middle of the nineteenth century, an awakening started in a prayer meeting in a Dutch Reformed Church in New York City.

In the mid-nineteenth century there were some Dutch immigrants who thought that the Eastern Reformed Church was liberal and that New Brunswick Seminary was not as orthodox as it should be. Albertus C. Van Raalte, who was the leader of the Dutch Reformed migration to Michigan, was convinced otherwise. There were three of the faculty at New Brunswick who could speak Dutch with Van Raalte and he got to know these men well. He was thoroughly convinced that the seminary was still sound. In my own reading I found out that people like Philip Schaff were also convinced of the same. No, the Eastern Reformed Church was not liberal. There were a couple of scholars who felt that some of the churches in Albany had been touched by the influence of New England Unitarianism. I haven't found that to be true. Our Church has always been quite conservative.

R R J — Where, then, did the division come that created the Christian Reformed Church? What was the time frame of the division and what was the issue that brought this about?

M E O — The Holland classis joined the Albany Synod of the Reformed Church in America in 1850. The whole classis, eight churches at the time, joined as one. They were convinced that the RCA was a good solid Church, such as the old Church had

been back in Holland. But by 1853 some disgruntled Hollanders in western Michigan, having had a history of controversy in the old country, expressed unhappiness with Van Raalte. They thought he was too much of a big boss. These people decided to have their own prayer group. There was a small group here in Holland, Michigan, and another in Vriesland, about ten miles away. Then there was another one about nine miles from here. These people were very fearful of Americanization. I am positive that the real issue was the spread of Americanization. I have translated the Vriesland consistory minutes from Dutch into English. Some of my ancestors were really involved in this conflict. Some were fierce in their loyalty to the RCA and a few went along with the group in Vriesland that began in the 1850s.

By 1880 there was trouble about freemasonry. Some of my own ancestors moved out of the RCA into the new Christian Reformed Church. They felt that it was a mistake that the Reformed Church did not condemn freemasonry. The RCA synod, in 1881 or 1882, said that this was up to local elders to decide this issue.

I J H — Weren't there earlier issues that fomented the split, quite apart from personalities, issues like hymn-singing? That was part of this Americanization. They didn't sing only the Psalms but also hymns. The other thing was the requirement in the early days that you preach on the basis of the Heidelberg Catechism in both the morning *and* the evening services. Some of these RCA congregations were only doing this in the morning service. The evening service became a kind of evangelistic service in some churches with a biblical homily instead of a doctrinal sermon. This also upset many people.

R R J — So, when did the division finally come?

M E O — The division formally came in 1857 when 113 heads of families, in Graafschap, Michigan (just five miles outside of Holland), left the RCA. There were eight reasons given. The first was the singing of 800-plus hymns. Another

reason had to do with some of the Sunday school materials they didn't like. They also didn't like Van Raalte's friendship with the Methodist minister in Holland.

I J H — Yes, they were simply too ecumenical before the word ecumenical became popular.

R R J — It sounds like the twentieth century. Not much has changed.
I J H — Gene, I never heard of eight reasons. I only knew three of them.

M E O — No, there were eight listed in the minutes of the April 8, 1857, classis meeting of Holland.

R R J — Could these churches leave and take their property with them?

M E O — Yes, they left and took their property. For example, the old First Reformed Church here in Holland is now called the Pillar Church. The majority of the people in that congregation left in 1881. They could take the church property with them because of state law.

I J H — That was Van Raalte's church, so they had to start and build another church just a few blocks down the street.

M E O — After Van Raalte passed away in 1876, the church was without a pastor during this time. His successor, who had to put the church back together, was Roelof Pieters, the father of the famous Dutch-American theologian, Albertus Pieters. Actually, 500 families left the Reformed Church in America in Holland, Michigan, between 1880 and 1882.

I J H — In the next year, or shortly thereafter, they founded Calvin College and Seminary in Grand Rapids, whereas Hope College had already been formed in 1866.

The Reformed Church in America has played an unusual

role as far as denominations go in the United States. One of the reasons we are small is that for a couple of centuries we only used the Dutch language. The other thing is that we are an evangelical and confessional Church but we have also always been ecumenical. We belong to the World Council of Churches (WCC), the National Council of Churches (NCC) *and* the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). We have had strong pressures, from time to time, to leave the WCC or NCC because of their liberal bias. However, we have stayed in them and, in fact, we have provided leaders for these organizations. Arie Brouwer, an RCA minister, was one of the top three leaders in the World Council of Churches. Brouwer was also the executive secretary for the National Council of Churches. So we have played this unusual role in being the conservative evangelical wing within the larger ecumenical movement.

R R J — John, you've mentioned ecumenicity as important in an evangelical and confessional church. Some will not easily understand those how two ideas can remain together. These comments are particularly interesting to me, especially in the light of the beginning of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in the early 1940s. Harold John Ockenga wanted to give Evangelicals a united voice in America, in distinction from the voice of the NCC and WCC. In very recent years some RCA congregations have affiliated with the NAE to give them a stronger evangelical voice as well. This has caused some consternation among the older leaders in the NAE. The original intent of the founders of NAE was to *not* allow such dual affiliation. John, please comment on this. Am I correct in these observations?

I J H — Yes, you are quite right. There has been some tension in the RCA, particularly at the turn of the twentieth century. One could say that some of our Eastern churches were more liberal. They were more clearly affected by secularism than the Midwestern churches that inherited a warmer piety from later reformation movements in the Netherlands. There was a piety

and conservatism in the Midwest. We used to speak of the liberal East, which by most standards was not that liberal, but the growth in the RCA has been in the Midwest, and the far West as we have expanded into areas like Colorado, California and the Southwest. I think it might be fair to say that the majority of our churches would feel more at home in the NAE than in the NCC. Yet there is enough of this kind of ecumenical spirit among us that we feel have a witness to make within all these circles.

This also relates to an issue we have with the Christian Reformed Church. It is a pretty fundamental issue really. It is our attitude toward Christian schools. They have had a stronger Kuyperian influence in this area, by way of the Netherlands. They want to have Christian schools, whereas we feel we should be more involved in public education. We felt that since public education was for the whole society we should make an influence in this setting and not leave it to secularists. There has been this kind of separatist stance which comes out of an antithesis between the Church and the world. We've never had this kind of approach. It is interesting to note that Abraham Kuyper himself said that the whole of this world belongs to Christ as Lord. You have this ambivalence in Kuyper. In our case we are committed to the public schools even though there are areas where the public schools have failed miserably and our people will then be found in schools founded by the Christian Reformed Church.

R R J — Eugene, you wrote in one of your books, *The Spirit of the Reformed Tradition*, a whole chapter on Reformed Christianity and the social order. In that chapter you talk about this business of Christian education. You interact with the idea of Christians in the public schools. You wrote this chapter several decades ago. Does your vision still hold and what, if anything, has changed since you wrote this chapter? I am particularly interested in the whole area of the Reformed Christian in the social order and in culture.

I have come to feel more and more the importance of a Christian education on all levels as I have seen the culture shift so violently. This is true not only on the college level but on all levels. — M E O

M E O — I remain much interested in those questions. I myself am a product of the public schools in Grand Rapids, but in high school I took a year of Bible survey taught by a Congregational minister. I do not know if such a course is still taught or not, though it is quite unlikely. I had some Christian teachers at Union High in Grand Rapids that I well remember for their Christian emphasis in class. One of them was a member of Central Reformed in Grand Rapids, a senior woman teacher who would speak in class about what Jesus would say and do. I don't think that there was such a strong antipathy toward Christianity as we see today in public education. One of my own children is a graduate of the public high school here in Holland and the other three graduated from Holland Christian High School. I have come to feel more and more the importance of a Christian education on all levels as I have seen the culture shift so violently. This is true not only on the college level but on all levels.

As an example, J. J. Riemersma, the principal of the Holland public high school, was an elder at Hope Reformed Church. He said that if it were no longer possible to hold chapel services at Holland High School he would quit. I even led chapel there in the past. In some of our public schools there were catechism classes where ministers would teach. Of course that's no longer possible because of American pluralism. I feel now that we should be consistent in our view of

Christian education, so my wife and I contribute every year to the Holland Christian School Association.

I J H — Does this mean you no longer hold the standard Reformed Church position on public *and* private schools? Have you reversed your position over the years?

M E O — No, I believe that we should do all that we can for public education, too. We should try to make our influence felt. I am not anti-public school at all. I believe, with A. A. van Ruler that theocracy is not totally bad. I wish that everyone confessed that Jesus Christ is Lord! I realize, however, that in a plural society you can't have that, but I don't believe that as a Christian I must mute my witness in the *public sphere*.

R R J — I would like to add, for the sake of personal reflection, that I have a son who is deeply involved in evangelism in the public schools. This surprises many when they hear it. One of the great misunderstandings is about what you can and can't do in public schools today. There has been a great deal of litigation, involving the First Amendment, and a number of court decisions that actually favor Christians *properly* using the public schools for after-class time. School clubs are allowed, and if we have a vision of mission there *are* opportunities here that we have simply not taken advantage of as believers. I've even seen Christian parents send their own children to private Christian schools while they teach in the public schools as Christians who want to live and witness in the wider culture. They believe that is a calling, their *vocatio*.

Well, lets change directions again. John, you wrote a book, *On Being Reformed*, more than twenty years ago. One thing that was quite influential in my own life was the way your book addressed some common misunderstandings of the Reformed faith. Share one or two of these misunderstandings with us and tell what was behind your writing this way.

I J H — As a missionary in Japan we worked in a broadly ecumenical context. We had a lot of independent faith missionaries and there were people from many different traditions. Some of these became very good friends. We were working with the United Church of Christ and there were also some very liberal missionaries there. I would encounter some strange, or at least it seemed to me they were strange, misunderstandings of what it meant to be Reformed and wanted to define my position. One of the things we ran into when our children were going to a Christian academy, where six or seven mission boards supported the program (and the CRC was the most liberal of the groups, which tells you how conservative it really was), was the problem of how other Christians regarded our Reformed doctrine. Some of these people regarded us as liberal for a number of reasons, one of which was that we represented a confessional Church. They felt that if you had confessions and took them seriously it meant you didn't take the Bible seriously. One of the misunderstandings, then, was the role confessions played in the Church.

Another misunderstanding was that when people would hear I was from the Dutch Reformed tradition they would come up with the TULIP acronym and say, "You believe in total depravity. You believe all people are as bad as they can be." This common misunderstanding is found even in some Reformed circles. But as Cornelius Plantinga, now the president of Calvin Seminary, says in one place, this does not mean that your non-Christian neighbor is always going to be beating his child and his dog, as if these people had no common grace as we would call it. We would point out that the very phrase "total depravity" is not even used in John Calvin's writings or by the Canons of Dordt. This is not to say they didn't take sin seriously, for they had a radical view of sin. But Calvin also had a view of the gifts that God has given to people, on what I call the horizontal level. He says in *The Institutes* (Book 2, Chapter 2), that in the realm of the arts and sciences God has given many gifts to people and if we despise those gifts—and he is talking about non-Christians as well as Christians—we despise the Spirit of God who gave them. This is in contrast with the vertical realm, when it comes to our salvation. There Calvin has this lovely statement where he says,

"the greatest of geniuses are blinder than moles." That helped me a lot. Total depravity is really about how the whole person is touched by sin—the will, the affections or the heart, depending on how you look at the human constitution. What this doctrine is really about is that we are totally unable (total inability is a better way to say it) to understand the will and ways of God when it comes to salvation.

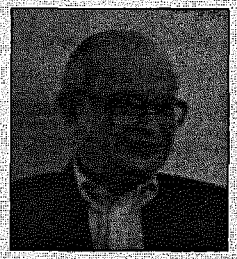
Another misunderstanding of Reformed Christianity I experienced for the first time in the early 1970s when I was still in Japan, revolved around my first encounter with charismatic Christians. They had a great impact upon my life and helped me to rethink my understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in my life and the Church. This has often been neglected in mainline and orthodox churches. The misunderstanding is that we have little or no appreciation of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Reformed tradition. I like to point out that historically this was not so. Calvin was rightly called "the theologian of the Holy Spirit." And then Abraham Kuyper wrote a powerful tome on the Holy Spirit. The Puritans were also essentially Reformed and they wrote a great deal about the Holy Spirit as well. So what I end up saying in that chapter is that we have a bigger and broader theology of the Holy Spirit than even the Pentecostals. We see the Holy Spirit at work in the world, in the Church, and in the individual. But we can learn a great deal from the Pentecostals because they help us once again think through the gifts of the Spirit. We balance that off, I hope, with emphasis on the graces of the Spirit.

So, in each case where these various misunderstandings existed I had to admit that where there is smoke there had to have been a fire at some point. This is particularly true with regard to the legalism that has often haunted the Reformed tradition.

R R J — Eugene, you wrote *The Faith of the Church: A Reformed Perspective on Its Historical Development*. This is a theology but it is a book that is not put together as a systematic theology, at least in the way we usually think about it. As I read it I get the

sense that you were a *professional* theologian, if I may use this term in its best sense, who wrote for the academy, but you also wrote for the whole Church. Tell us about the role of theology and theologians in the whole Church. What difference does theology really make for a single lady who wants to follow Christ faithfully and would like to find a Christian husband?

M E O — I believe, as has been said often, that theology is "faith seeking understanding." It is an attempt on the part of the simple, humble Christian to understand what it means to believe in God or to understand who Christ is, the God-man. What about the person and work of the Holy Spirit and the application of salvation to my soul? Theology is an attempt to think, if I dare use the word, systematically (by which I mean logically and maybe sequentially) about what I really believe and why I believe it. I think that a theologian doesn't have to have a lot of schooling or even be a learned brilliant person. A theologian is anyone who takes seriously their faith. He wants to *know* what it means. I also believe that good wholesome theology is not only concerned with the intellect but with the whole person. I appreciated some of the emphases of existentialism thirty years ago. We have to not only know and under-



The more I am immersed in Calvin the more I seek to emulate that piety, and thus I see that the purpose of good theology is to produce godliness. There is this strong strain of Reformed theology that has this emphasis upon growth in holiness as its goal. — I J H

stand what we think but we have to be affected in how we feel about such things and how we act. So, I taught systematic theology and sometimes said that all it really amounts to is systematized thinking about what God had revealed to us. People who think about their faith are going to try to put it into some kind of system. I learned that early on, especially from the great Princeton theologian, B. B. Warfield.

I J H — This is something that I have appreciated so much in Calvin. As you may know Calvin is, so to speak, "my thing." I've written several books on Calvin's thought. I did my doctoral dissertation on Calvin and the law of God. A revised version of my dissertation *Calvin's Concept of the Law,* was published in 1982, and more recently I published *Calvin's First Catechism: A Commentary.* What I've come to appreciate is John Calvin's concern for *pietas* (piety, or godliness). In *The Institutes* he points out in the second edition that they were written to increase godliness or piety. The more I am immersed in Calvin the more I seek to emulate that piety, and thus I see that the purpose of good theology is to produce godliness. There is this strong strain of Reformed theology that has this emphasis upon growth in holiness as its goal. We shouldn't think that the Wesleyans have the corner on this emphasis. And it is here that the "third use of the law" comes in as well. This strong spiritual and practical concern in Calvin must be seen then in *The Institutes.* He was writing this to help new evangelical Christians understand what the faith was all about. A few nights ago I taught, for the second time, a course on Calvin's spirituality for a Dominican center in Grand Rapids. Half of the people in that class were Catholics and the rest were various kinds of Protestants. It encouraged my heart to see how they warmed up to the Calvin who is concerned above all about developing a godly people and a holy Church.

R R J — John, I am sure you know this history so would you remark on the comment often made that the earlier Protestant Reformers were not missionary minded. In Calvin's case,

(Luther is a bit different here given the context of what happened in Germany), this seems to be anything but true. He trained hundreds of men to go into France to preach the gospel.

I J H — There is a certain incongruity here because Calvin misunderstood the Great Commission and for some reason did not see it as clearly as Zinzendorf and a later generation did. But, as you have noted, Calvin was really engaged in a great missionary endeavor training pastors in Geneva to go back into France, and to other countries. He also sent a small band to Brazil. Perhaps this was the first Protestant overseas missionary endeavor. This band of missionaries was all massacred. Whether it was that they didn't have the resources, or that the seas were still commanded by the Roman Catholics, they seem to have missed the larger vision of missions to the whole world. But, as you have pointed out, Calvin's work in Geneva was really a missionary outpost that trained people to spread the evangelical faith throughout the Western world.

R R J — I would like to come back to the role of education in your experience. I am interested in where you did doctoral work and why. Eugene, tell us about your doctoral work at Princeton.

M E O — At Princeton my major professors were John Kuizinga, who was in Western Michigan at Hope College and Seminary earlier. I also had Joseph L. Hromadka, from Prague, who was in this country eight years and then went back home after Hitler's defeat. He became dean of the Commenius School of Theology in Prague. I also had Otto A. Piper, a German refugee professor. I got very close to Piper. He was from the Church of the Prussian Union of 1816. We got to know him so well that we called him "Uncle Otto" for awhile. He died at Princeton. I also took three courses with Dr. Frederick William Loettscher, professor of Church history, who had begun teaching at Princeton back in 1908. I had to take a Latin exam from him.

R R J — When did the division at Princeton Seminary take place and J. Gresham Machen leave?

M E O — That happened in 1929-30. The Machen controversy was still very much in the minds of my older professors in the 1940s. For example, William Park Armstrong, who been the leader of the conservative group at Princeton, had written a little booklet about the illegality of what was happening when the two boards were dissolved and one board was organized at Princeton. Armstrong was on the conservative side of the debate. He started teaching at Princeton in 1899. He was only teaching a few graduate students when I was there in the 1940s. Loettscher had been there during all the troubles as had Andrew Blackwood, the homiletics professor. I remember Blackwood's wife talking to me once about those years. It was still fresh to many of these folks.

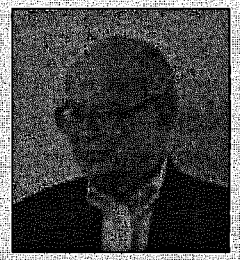
R R J — Some of these professors would have been old enough to have known B. B. Warfield.

M E O — Yes, yes. They knew Warfield and thought very highly of him. The head janitor once told me how wonderful a man Warfield was personally. He described him as a soft and gentle man. His theology doesn't read exactly that way. It is more scholastic, I think, written in a more logical way of expression. He must have been a truly wonderful person and a devout man, which you don't see as strongly in his writings.

I got my doctorate in 1948. I decided to write on the knowledge of God in the theology of John Calvin. I did this largely because not much had been done on the subject. I was also interested because of the Barth-Brunner controversy regarding natural revelation that raged at the time. I was reading this stuff, too, and brought some of that into the latter part of my dissertation. Is there any general revelation or not? Barth said, "No, no, nothing like that."

I J H — When you listen to Eugene talk you will hear various foreign language phrases slip into his conversation. He is famous for that. He not only speaks Dutch and German but some Hungarian. In his devotions he reads in Hebrew, Greek and Dutch.

M E O — Dr. Kuizinga had the most influence on me, even more so than Hromadka, who I got to know so well and at whose home I took several courses in his study. But Kuizinga arranged the doctoral program at Princeton and was chairman of the committee. Those of us who were in this program had to take language examinations in five languages: Hebrew, Latin, Greek, German and one other. I was taking my fifth one in French, which I had taken in college and had prepared before to use. He said, "No, no. You do yours in Dutch." I told him that I did not know Dutch, which was about 95% true. He said you can learn it like everything else. So the next year I studied Dutch and did much of my reading in Dutch. I am very thankful now that I learned it. I can say that one of the smartest things I ever did in my life, by God's grace, was to submit myself to Kuizinga when I felt like rebelling and maybe even quitting the program. I said, "No, I can't quit. God's put me here for some reason and I must complete this work" [laughter].



I believe very strongly in the providence of God, which for me is not simply a doctrine but a very powerful influence in my own life. I can't account for a lot of things apart from the mysterious providence of God. — I J H

R R J — John, you noted earlier that you were on the mission field (Japan) in the early 1950s. You were going on a furlough

and decided to use that time to work on doctoral study. But even before you went to work on your doctorate you had a relationship with Emil Brunner, who had come to Japan. You had met him and a friendship began at that point.

I J H — Well, I believe very strongly in the providence of God, which for me is not simply a doctrine but a very powerful influence in my own life. I can't account for a lot of things apart from the mysterious providence of God. We arrived in Japan in the summer of 1953. One month after we arrived Professor Emil Brunner and his wife arrived, which I didn't know about at the time. He was to be the first visiting professor of Christianity and ethics at the newly-formed International Christian University (ICU) in Tokyo. This was very exciting to me. I had read some of Emil Brunner in my course work in America that I had taken with Gene Osterhaven. One of the last papers I had written was a critique of Brunner's view of creation because he didn't take it very literally. I reacted against that just as I had in another paper I wrote in the seminary about Karl Barth. I was influenced by Cornelius Van Til's view of Barth at that time. But lo and behold I ended up doing my doctoral work with Karl Barth in the 1950s.

Those first years we were in Japan we went to language school, Monday through Friday. We had no Japanese before we arrived. We had our Saturdays free and Emil Brunner, recognizing this, offered a course on Christianity and existentialism, which was a very relevant subject since Japanese students were now reading Sartre and other nihilistic philosophers. Some were even committing suicide. It was a tough time in Japan, being only eight years after the end of the War. So Brunner offered this course and said it would be given in English and there would be an interpreter in Japanese. The invitation was largely for missionaries and Japanese pastors, and a few other ICU students. I think about a hundred of us went out to west Tokyo every Saturday morning for those lectures. And then he invited twenty people to join him in a seminar. Somehow I managed to get into that as well. Professor Brunner spotted that some of us were even more interested in theology and had a better background than most, and, thanks to my excellent training at Western, I must have impressed him. So, along with about five other people, we were invited to meet in his home every month and discuss theological issues in general. Despite my reservations about certain aspects of his theology, and those reservations remained, we became very good friends. Had he not resigned his position at the University of Zurich to come to Japan as a missionary theologian I might have done my doctorate with him. We tried to work out something in Japan but it wasn't feasible.

Well, talk about the strange providence of God, I had a Swiss missionary friend whom I visited once in Kyoto, who apparently thought I was more inclined to theology than most American missionaries. As a result he said, "You ought to study with Karl Barth." I said, "I don't know any German and Karl Barth has never have heard of Western Seminary so my background would certainly not impress him at all." He said, "Don't worry, I'll write a recommendation for you. You write up a little resumé." He sent this off with his recommendation to Karl Barth. I said, "Well, what about the German?" He answered, "Well, leave your family in the United States (we had three children at the time) for six months and I will see if I can't get you into the Oscar Cullmann's *Theologisches Alumneum*, which was an international *Studentenheim*. He said you will have to speak German there since that is the rule of the house and the fourteen or so students there are from all over the world. Within a month I had a letter from Karl Barth saying that he was interested in my subject, which was Calvin on law and gospel. I was interested in this matter because I had been speaking at a lot of Lutheran missionary conferences and discovered that we and the Lutherans had a somewhat different perspective on the whole matter of the law. I then got a letter from Oscar Cullmann saying there was an opening and I was welcome to stay with them for the first semester, which was 1958-59. So I lived with Oscar Cullmann and his sister. Both were single and they had Italian maids who did all the work in their home. Breakfast was on our own. We had devotions every morning, led by Cullmann.

Cullmann and Rudolph Bultmann were, at that time, the two most famous New Testament scholars in the world. Of course Cullmann was the far more evangelical of the two. There were two tables around which we sat. Cullmann sat at the head of one and his sister at the head of the other. It was quite embarrassing at first because I had memorized one German sentence and knew nothing else. By the time I had spent this semester, and my family rejoined me with our three children, I could speak German. I ended up taking my oral examinations in German less than three years later.

Karl Barth was a most gracious professor. At first we spoke in English but later on he decided my German was good enough, so I attended his German lectures and took seminars with him as well. My minor was New Testament with Cullmann and I also did work in Church history. Talk about hard work. I have never worked harder than I did in those three years. I finished in record time, in less than three years, and was back in Japan again as a missionary by the summer of 1961. I finished a year before Barth's retirement.

R R J — During those three years you studied New Testament under Oscar Cullmann and theology under Barth. I have to ask, since readers may have impressions of both names, formed by the way teachers like Van Til responded to Barth's work. Tell us a little about these two men personally, both as Christian men who obviously made a deep and lasting impression upon you, and as thinkers.

I J H — Actually, Cullmann was from Strasbourg and had a Lutheran background, even though he lived in Basel for most of his career. He also taught in Paris and Rome as well. I don't think Cullmann has ever been as suspect in evangelical circles as Karl Barth.

R R J — Why is this? Was it because of Barth's epistemology and his view of revelation?

I J H — I think it was Barth's view of Scripture that created

problems in Reformed circles in particular and evangelical ones in general. As I mentioned earlier, when I was in seminary I was quite leery of Karl Barth. I was intrigued by him but cautious and unsatisfied, especially with his view of Scripture. Later a major concern of mine was his incipient universalism, which is still debated to this day. Barth himself denied ever being a universalist but his view of election almost drove him toward it. But what helped me, when I was still in Japan, was reading G. C. Berkouwer's *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*. I had already read some Berkouwer in seminary. He was a conservative Dutch theologian. I would say my theology is closer to Berkouwer's than any of the other major theologians of our own time. Again, Berkouwer was not uncritical of Barth, but showed how you could benefit from Barth's work. Barth was brilliant. He knew the Reformers and he appreciated Calvin. Despite his view of Scripture, which is more complicated than most people realize, I came to see that Barth treated Scripture with the utmost respect. He treated it as the very word of God. At times he would say it "became" the word of God but at other times he would say it "is the word of God." His position is much more complicated than is generally recognized. The point is that never have I had a professor who treated the Scripture with more reverence than Karl Barth. So Berkouwer helped me to see how one could study with Karl Barth, learn a lot from him, and benefit from him greatly, without becoming a Barthian. People who know me well do not accuse me of being a Barthian.

R R J — You recently wrote an introduction to Barth's little work on prayer that was re-issued in a fiftieth-anniversary edition. Tell us about that.

I J H — Well, the Barth Center did a series of conferences at three different places a few years ago. One was in Atlanta, one in Boston, and one in Holland, Michigan. (I quipped, "These were held at the three great centers of theology!") At the meeting here in Holland I was invited to give a paper on Barth and prayer. When this fiftieth anniversary of Barth's little classic

book on *The Lord's Prayer* was produced I was asked to contribute this lecture. (If one is suspicious about Barth, they should read this book and they will see quite a different Barth from what they might imagine.) My essay, along with several other pieces, is included as a kind of introduction.

R R J — One last Barth question. What was it like to study under Karl Barth?

I J H — I studied under an older Karl Barth so he was not quite the fiery apologist who attacked people as viciously as he was known to do earlier in his life. It was a real joy to work with him. I had no difficulties at all and even though we disagreed on Calvin's view of predestination, which was not my subject for doctoral work, and on the subject of natural revelation, which touched closer to my subject of the law in Calvin, Barth never forced me to change. A lot of professors would not let you do that but I had no problems with Barth.

R R J — Tell us a little about the story of how Barth and Brunner came to be reconciled because you were enabled to get them together.

I J H — When Brunner returned to Switzerland, we stayed in contact while I was doing the doctoral work with Barth. He was almost like a grandfather to our three children. Then I came to be quite close to Barth, too. He seemed to treat me with a bit more deference than other students, perhaps because he appreciated the fact that I was a missionary. He had a son who was a missionary in Jakarta. He had a great appreciation for the missionary movement. Because of that I was instrumental in getting Barth and Brunner together again. They had not spoken to one another for years. This was quite a historic encounter in 1960, which was shortly before they died (Brunner in 1966, Barth in 1968).

In Brunner's third volume of his systematic theology, which he finished while we were there, he inscribed it: *"To my son,* John Hesselink." He had lost a son in a tragic train accident before he came to Japan. Perhaps, in a small way, I fulfilled that role in his final years.

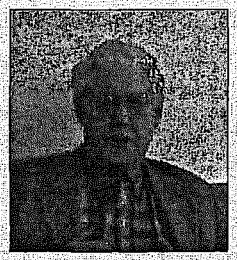
R R J — In Berkouwer's aforementioned volume on the theology of Karl Barth he refers to Van Til's large book on Barth. He says that Barth did not recognize himself in the analysis Van Til made of his theology. Did you ever talk to Barth about Van Til's work? What was going on here? Van Til was a very conservative apologist but he did not seem to understand Barth, at least as Barth understood himself.

I J H — Van Til assumed that the influence of Kant and Hegel in Barth's theology poisoned everything. When Barth would say he believed in the resurrection as a historical event, as *Geschichte,* Van Til reacted. Since *Geschichte* does not mean literal history, as over against *Historie,* or factual history, he assumed Barth denied the resurrection. Of course Van Til was writing some of this before Barth's later volumes where he clearly uses the term "the empty tomb." Of course "the empty tomb" is "the empty tomb," no matter what word you use. Furthermore, Van Til caricatured Barth's theology and did not really try to understand him carefully at all. He called this, "The New Modernism," and said Barth was "a wolf in sheep's clothing." Barth could tolerate a lot of criticism but Van Til was more than he could handle. He referred to him as "that nasty man." There were evangelical theologians who came to appreciate Barth more and more as they read him. People like Bernard Ramm, Donald Bloesch, and others. In our time, where certain kinds of radical theology reign, Barth looks like an angel of evangelicalism. Two books have been written by evangelicals on Karl Barth and his relationship to evangelicalism, so I would hope your readers would read Barth himself and decide whether Barth is basically on the right side or not.

R R J — What would you recommend a person read first to get into Barth? Most would not likely start with his *Church Dogmatics.*

I J H — Well, you can start with Barth's magnificent little book on prayer we noted above. He wrote hundreds and hundreds of pages about prayer. Of course he wrote thousands and thousands of pages about almost everything but I have discovered he wrote a great deal about prayer. I discovered that when I did this paper I previously mentioned. The best thing may be what he called his "swan song." These are the lectures he gave at the conclusion of his career (1961-62). He decided that he would not finish his *Church Dogmatics* so he gave lectures titled *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*. One must not be misled by the term evangelical in this case because in German circles evangelical basically means Protestant. But it is an evangelical theology and contains a lot of the distinctive motifs of Barth, hoping to witness in a sort of pastoral way about prayer, loneliness, temptation and God's grace. This would be an excellent place to start.

R R J — John, you referred to Barth writing hundreds of pages on prayer. Eugene, I know from something you said earlier that prayer has been a real concern of your life. You have many stories of answered prayer in your life. What has prayer meant to you now that you are in your ninth decade of life?



I often think life is a struggle—even to develop a devotional life is a struggle. Discipline is such an important part of life. There need to be times when one prays, mediates, reads Scripture, etc. The older one gets the more this type of thing means. — M E O

M E O — When I think of my own prayer life I think first of my mother, who was a very strong prayer warrior. I also think of what Paul wrote in the fifteenth chapter of his letter to the Romans where he asked that the people *struggle* with him in prayer. I often think life is a struggle—even to develop a devotional life is a struggle. Discipline is such an important part of life. There need to be times when one prays, mediates, reads Scripture, etc. The older one gets the more this type of thing means. I also believe in what some of the older writers called contemplative prayer. I think it is essentially a praying as one thinks. There have been numerous times in my life when I have really struggled as I mentioned earlier. Prayer has been a very important part of my life in this respect. Even in having patience with my own fairly members whom I love so dearly, I have to pray for love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, self-control. I try to be diligent about this.

I learned a great deal nearly four years ago. I developed a terrible case of shingles at eighty-three years of age. I was told that it was poison ivy. I had a rash on my body. I suffered for over six weeks with intense pain. In fact three doctors, two of them specialists, told me mine was the worse case they had ever seen. The pain doctor warned me about suicide. I told him not to worry about that. I know the New Testament and the one who gave this to me. I was so ill that I had to cast myself on the Lord as never before. After this was over I told my wife, "What a blessing this has been from the Lord."

R R J — Finally, I would like to talk about your influence in my life and in that of this ministry. We are committed to the Reformed faith and a confessing Church but we also believe in a generous orthodoxy. We desire to cultivate a willingness to understand other people's positions and to do so with charity and generosity. We are committed to the whole Church and to catholicity. We see ourselves as very much a part of that expression of the faith. John, talk to us about your catholicity. Tell us something of your vision and of how this vision has worked itself out as you have ministered in a traditional Reformed context.

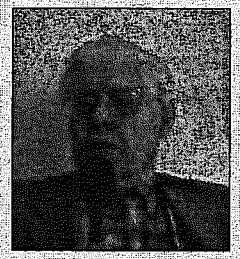
I J H — As I mentioned, going to Japan, within the rather narrow forms of the Dutch Reformed ethos I had experienced in Iowa, Nebraska, and Michigan I encountered a whole new realm. I had seen some of this in college but it was a rather small denominational setting. In Japan I suddenly encountered a whole new realm as suddenly I lived in a non-Christian nation and had missionary colleagues of every conceivable type, ranging from radical liberals who were little more than humanists to fundamentalists who felt that anyone who didn't toe their line was not really Christian. So I had to learn to live with that sort of thing as far as possible.

When I became president of Western Seminary, my inaugural address was "Toward a Seminary That's Catholic, Evangelical and Reformed." By *catholic* I did not mean Roman Catholic, of course. On the other hand, in Japan I was part of an ecumenical discussion group that met at a Catholic Center and also a book club kind of group. In both cases we had Roman Catholics in these groups and I found I had more in common with some of these Roman Catholics than I did with my more liberal Protestant brothers. It gave me an appreciation that you could find true faith within the Roman Catholic Church. So this has made me far more ecumenical, in the best sense of the word. I am not an ecumaniac by any means, but one who holds to the evangelical faith and is charitable and open toward others. I am willing to learn from Lutherans, Charismatics and Catholics, you name it. Therein lies my appreciation for what may be called *catholicity* in the best sense of the word.

R R J — I sometimes say when people ask me about how far this goes, and they want to figure out a specific agenda that anticipates where they will cross all their t's and dot all their i's, I can start with the historical question. I say: "Do you think that you will see Thomas Aquinas in heaven? Do you think St. Augustine will be there?" I will go from there to other figures. Often even the narrowest of conservative Christians will admit that such individuals will be in heaven. I then remind them that these people did not have the debates you are

engaged in now. They didn't have your confessions and traditions. In fact they hadn't even had the big debate yet on the nature of justification by faith, which came in Luther's time. Were they in the Christian Church? I find people are charitable with the deceased, but it's the living they have a hard time with often.

Gene, you represent this same kind of catholicity and you have thought about this for a long time. You've done serious theology within that same outlook toward the whole Church and the world. What are your thoughts?



I could not do theology without thinking of it historically. As soon as I think of the doctrines of sin and grace I think of Augustine. When I think of the atonement I think of Anselm, whose little book, Cur Deus Homo, I have read at least three times and some sections much more often than that. And then, of course, I have benefited from Luther, whom Calvin called in one place an apostle. — M E O

M E O — I could not do theology without thinking of it historically. As soon as I think of the doctrines of sin and grace I think of Augustine. When I think of the atonement I think of Anselm, whose little book, *Cur Deus Homo*, I have read at least three times and some sections much more often than that. And then, of course, I have benefited from Luther, whom Calvin called, in one place, an apostle. He's one of my heroes. In my own experience I was part of a dialogue, right after

Vatican II, of a Reformed Presbyterian family of churches with Roman Catholics. There were fourteen of us, representing each side, and we met often over the period of six years. I got to know some of these Catholic leaders very well and some of them were wonderful Christian people.

On another occasion I lived for four months in an abbey. I got to know some of these Franciscan brothers there and some of the other brethren very, very well. Some of them were as evangelical as I, quite frankly. It may sound strange to a few people, but some of these men were extremely conservative. This included the Augustinians and others. I developed a broad attitude toward folk who are not members of the Reformed Church in America. I have great appreciation for John Wesley and George Whitefield, too.

R R J — Is there anything else that I missed that should be brought out?

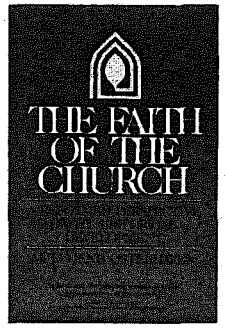
I J H — In regard to our relationship I mentioned that I was a student of Eugene Osterhaven. What I did not mention was that I came back twenty years later to become president of Western Seminary. We were colleagues then. He was still teaching theology and was now, of course, not a beginning theologian but a veteran theologian. So our time of being together ran from 1973 to 1985. When I saw that Gene was going to retire, I asked the board of trustees if I could resign as president and take his place in the theology department. One of the things I take as a great honor is to have been the successor of M. Eugene Osterhaven, Albertus C. Van Raalte professor of systematic theology. Our friendship continues to this day and now we serve on a committee that has the task of translating Dutch Reformed classics, and now more particularly spiritual classics in the Dutch Reformed tradition.

R R J — You took the position to teach theology after Eugene retired. Are there not a series of annual lectures that are given each year that honor M. Eugene Osterhaven?

M E O — Well, I have nothing to do with that except that my name is attached to it. Friends, upon my retirement, put together some funds for a lectureship that happens to be in my name. I am very happy that those funds are available since I believe heartily in special lectures. I have been very pleased by the lectures that have been selected. The last series was delivered by a Princeton theologian, Ellen Charry. She is a very able person. Her type of theology is mine, too. It is orthodoxy, not *mere* orthodoxy, but it is orthodoxy for a purpose, namely, for godly living.

I J H — Some of those lectures have been very noteworthy. Ellen Charry is certainly no mean theologian herself. We have also had the late missionary bishop, Lesslie Newbigin, who was here not many years before his death. And we had Wolfhart Pannenberg for the same lectures. We have had people of that caliber. These have been rich and stimulating lectures. These are usually given in the spring of each year and last for two days.

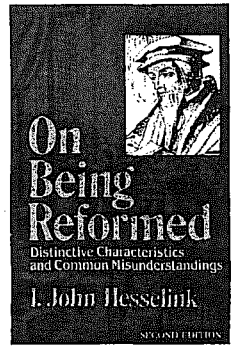
R R J — Thanks Eugene and John. It was a real pleasure to visit with you and I believe our readers will profit wonderfully by sharing in the wisdom that God has granted to you both over the course of a long and faithful life of service to Christ and his Kingdom.



Dr. M. Eugene Osterhaven received his B. D. degree from Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan and his Th. D. from Princeton. After serving one short pastorate he became a professor at Hope College and then at Western Theological Seminary. In 1952 he was appointed the Albertus C. Van Raalte professor of systematic theology at Western. After retirement from Western Seminary in 1986 Gene taught at the Presbyterian Seminaries in Dubuque, Iowa, and at Melbourne, Australia. He also taught at the

summer programs of the Winona Lake School of Theology in Indiana and the Young Life Institute in Colorado.

Gene was the author of several books, including a work on canoeing, one of his favorite recreational joys. His best known works were *The Spirit of the Reformed Tradition* (1971) and *The Faith of the Christian Church* (1982). He also served as the editor of Western Seminary's journal, *The Reformed Review*, and represented the Reformed Church in America in the Roman Catholic/Presbyterian Consultation after Vatican II. Gene was also actively involved in the World Alliance of Reformed Christians and had a deep interest in the Reformed Church of Hungary, which led to a long association with the work of Christ in that land.



Dr. I. John Hesselink, Jr., is a member of the Reformed Church in America and the Albertus C. Van Raalte professor of systematic theology emeritus, Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan. He received his B.A. degree from Central College (Iowa); his B.D. from Western Theological Seminary, and his Dr. Theol. Degree from the University of Basel, Switzerland. (The famous Karl Barth was his *Doktorvater* at Basel.) While serving as a missionary in Japan he studied for two years under the famous Emil Brunner at the International Christian University in Tokyo. He also did post-doctoral studies at the University of Chicago Divinity School, the Free University in Amsterdam and Oxford University in England.

Dr. Hesselink is the author of the extremely useful book, *On Being Reformed* (1983), which has been translated into Japanese, Korean and Chinese. He also wrote Calvin's Concept of the Law (1992), *Calvin's First Catechism: A Commentary* (1997), and the forthcoming *Sovereign Grace and Human Freedom* (Eerdmans, 2004). He has had essays, published in over twenty-five books, and articles in the *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith, Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition,* the

Biographical Dictionary of Theologians, the Dictionary of the Presbyterian and Reformed Tradition in America and the forthcoming *Cambridge Companion to Calvin* (2004).

John and his wife, Etta the parents of five children, served as missionaries in Japan for twenty years. John then served Western Seminary as president for twelve years. He was president of the Calvin Studies Society (1993-94) and acting president of the Karl Barth society of North America for several years. John formally retired as professor of theology at Western Seminary in 1998 and still teaches courses occasionally and works with the Th. M. students. He is a contributing editor for *Reformation & Revival Journal.*

On Being Reformed is available for $8.00, plus shipping and handling, from Reformation & Revival. Call (630) 221-1817 to order, or email to rrministry@aol.com. You may also order on our web site at www.reformationrevival.com.