

# The **STANDARD BEARER**

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE



## **SPECIAL ISSUE**

### **THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH**

"...God, who might perfect his people in a moment, chooses not to bring them to manhood in any other way than by the education of the church."

"...our weakness does not permit us to leave the school until we have spent our whole lives as scholars."

John Calvin

*Institutes of the Christian Religion*

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## MEDITATION

# Love for the Church

Rev. Carl Haak

*"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love Thee." Psalm 122:6*

Do you love the church?

Love for the church is the mark of a Christian. Devotion to the church of Jesus Christ is the duty as well as the privilege and born again desire given to the child of God. The reason for this is to be found in what the church is: she is the bride of Christ, the dwelling place of God, the mother of believers, the body of Christ. Therefore a believer in Christ loves

the church as he loves Christ.

It is a noteworthy and beautiful thing that the Psalms are filled with this idea of love for the church. If we were to confine our search of this love to the Psalms only, we would find sufficient material in which to discover that the Old Testament saints loved the church. We are well acquainted with this idea by our singing Sunday after Sun-

day from the *Psalter*. How many times in our lives have not we gathered on Sunday mornings in the various sanctuaries across the land to sing from Psalm 84: "How lovely, Lord of Hosts to me the tabernacles of Thy grace; O how I long, yea, faint to see Thy hallowed courts, Thy dwelling place; for Thee my heart and spirit sigh, for Thee, O living God, I cry." And again the versification of Psalm 87, "When the Lord shall count the nations, sons and daughters He shall see, Born to endless life in Zion, and their joyful song shall be, Blessed Zion, All our fountains are in Thee."

But there are many more examples. Consider Psalm 137, the mournful cry of the captives in Babylon who sat down and wept when they remembered Zion. Jerusalem was a pile of rubble, her honor lay in the dust, her people were scattered, and the public worship of Jehovah on Mt. Zion had been stamped out. Their captors jeeringly required of them a song of mirth and joy. Yet their harps could not comply. No mirth, no joy was possible while they were separated from the church. And in Babylon they make a vow: "O Zion fair, God's holy hill, wherein our God delights to dwell, Let my right hand forget her skill If I forget to love Thee well...let my tongue from utterance cease, If any earthly joy to me Be dear as Zion's joy and peace." What love for the church! It is a love which prompts the Old Testament believer, speaking at the end of the psalm, to call upon God to curse and destroy those who jump up and down with glee over Zion's low estate (Edom). "Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones."

Remember David, how he made God's house his care, as revealed in Psalm 132; how he swore before the mighty God of Jacob that he would give no rest to his eyes nor seek any earthly pleasure until he found a habitation fit for Israel's mighty God. Recall how the glory of the church is so beautifully described in the conclusion of the psalm, as versified in *Psalter* number 367: "Thou, the Lord, hast chosen Zion, Thou hast ever loved her well; This my resting place forever, Here, Thou sayest, I choose to dwell."

This love for the church found in the Psalms is perhaps best summed in Psalm 122: "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go up into the house of our God." Psalm 122 is a song of degrees, that is, a song which the Old Testament pilgrim would sing as he journeyed across Canaan en route to Jerusalem. In the Psalm, David makes the welfare of the church a matter of sincere prayer before God: "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem." He takes upon his lips the vow, "And for the house of God the Lord, my care shall never cease."

Beautiful, isn't it? The Psalms portray the love of

a believer for the church as a "longing for" and a "sighing after." All earthly joy was forfeited for Zion. They were willing to forsake friends and kindred, goods and life itself for the church. They traveled to Jerusalem in joyful tunes of praise. They wept and fell into depression when separated from God's house. And repeatedly, they pledged undying love for her.

Does this love characterize the church today?

Does this same devotion belong to us?

This warm love for the church expressed in the Psalms stands in bold contrast to the current cold indifference evidenced in much of the church world. Men and women are filled with apathy towards the church. They arrogantly claim no need for the church, and they attack those who love the church. They loudly proclaim allegiance to the Cross of Calvary; they insist that they are members of Christ's universal body, but they despise, ignore, and ridicule the instituted church. "The Bible is enough," they claim, and besides, "the church cannot save you." They say that the organized church, which displays the three marks of the true church, the pure preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of discipline, is old-fashioned, out of date, and a relic of the past.

Such people hate Christ. They hate Christ because they hate His body which is the church. Anyone who despises or speaks scornfully of the local church, which manifests the marks of the true church, speaks scornfully of Christ. We may justly apply the contrasting style of the Apostle John: "He that loveth not the church institute which he hath seen, how can he love the church universal which he has not seen?" "He that says he loves Christ and hates His body, the church, which is the gathering of believers and their children under the pure preaching of the Gospel, is a liar."

But our love for the church can fall far short of the high standard set forth in God's Word! We are not always running and jumping with the love which we are in duty bound to show to the church of Jesus Christ. Church attendance can become a drudgery, a mere habit involving no conscious spiritual thinking and preparation. Sunday mornings in our homes often reveal an attitude far poorer than the one conveyed in the versification of Psalm 122: "My heart was glad to hear the welcome sound, The call to seek Jehovah's house of prayer." We easily seek our own interest and recreation above the church. We find little time for the church and her activities which seem to interfere with our busy calendar. How sharp we can be in criticism of the church. The notion lurks within us that respect for the officebearers of the church applies only when

we agree with them, but when we disagree they are open season to ridicule. Nominations for elder and deacon find us unwilling to serve. We can become harsh in our judgments of the members of the church, and when we are offended, we think we can live independently from the church, not needing the communion of the church which is the life of the saints.

It is not for nothing that David makes the whole matter of love for God's church a matter of prayer! The sin of our flesh is always to live independently and selfishly. We always stand in need of the prayer which beseeches God to grant us His grace so that the flame of love for Christ's body may burn brightly as it should.

Why must we love the church?

We love her because God loves her. There is nothing dearer to the heart of God than His church. No writer can ever capture in mere words that love of God. God's love for the church is an eternal love rooted in Himself. This is exactly why the Old Testament saints loved Zion, because God loved her and held Zion as altogether precious and lovely. In His love for the church, God elected her in eternity according to His sovereign good pleasure. He chose each individual member of the church; and He chose a certain, definite number. But He chose the church as a body as well. "But now hath God chosen the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him" (I Cor. 12:18). In eternity God fashioned in Christ a beautiful body in which the place of every member was decreed, a place which that member alone can occupy. And with this eternal love of election, that love wherewith He loves Himself, God loves the church.

The love of God for His church is revealed in all of its brilliance and splendor at Calvary. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us...not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (I John 4:9, 10). God's great love for the church is seen in that He gave His only begotten son for her so that He might redeem her to Himself. Upon the basis of the Cross of Calvary, God made the church the body of Christ. With the same love that He has for the Head, which is Christ, so He loves the body of Christ which is the church.

If Calvary does not show us the love of God for the church, nothing will. If Calvary does not teach us how precious the church is to God, we will never learn. God loves the church in His eternal, sovereign, particular, unchanging, saving love. She is altogether His. He chooses her, He redeems her, He gathers her, He defends her, He preserves her. The church is God's and is the object of His love. We ought to love the church because God loves

her.

We must love the church because she is our Mother (Gal. 4:26). Tenderly God through the church has fed and nurtured us spiritually so that we have grown up into Christ. He has instructed and clothed us by her in His Word. From earliest infancy God has protected us in the bosom of the church. It is an ugly thing when a man turns against his mother. Honor thy mother, the church! We ought to love her for all that God has given us through her.

We must love the church because of what we enjoy through her. God is pleased to have the voice of His Son heard there through the official preaching of the Gospel. In the Gospel we hear the soothing voice of the Good Shepherd calling us who labor and are heavy laden to rest. In the same preaching we receive the authoritative declaration that our sins are forgiven. In the church we enjoy the communion of the saints which is a slight foretaste of eternal life. We ought to love the church for all the blessings we enjoy in her, blessings which are found nowhere else.

How do we show love for the church?

We love her by faithfully attending her worship services and by being active and lively members. When our Belgic Confession was written many Christians, fearing the fierce persecution which raged against Calvinism, refused to join the church. Article 28 of the Confession was written for the purpose of condemning those who for any reason would separate themselves and live independently from the true church. "We believe...that no person of whatsoever state or condition he may be, ought to withdraw himself, to live in separation from it; but that all men are in duty bound to join and unite themselves with it..." Our membership is to be wholehearted. We must use the talents God has given us for edifying the body. We must sing with all our hearts in the worship services, making melody to God. We must diligently attend to the Word of the Gospel. We must faithfully attend the activities of the church. We must seek out the members to comfort and instruct one another in the truth.

There are many ways in which true love for God's church will manifest itself. It will be seen in love for the members of the church, for one cannot separate between the body and its members. It will become evident in dedication to the truth of God's Word upon which the church stands. It will be manifested in a respect for the development of the truth by the church in the past, especially as we have that development in the three Reformed Creeds. Love for the church will be revealed by faithfully training our children to seek the church

and to live out of her.

Great blessedness is to be found in loving the church. "All they that love Thee shall prosper well." This prosperity refers to the conscious enjoyment of salvation in Jesus Christ. In a hearty love for Zion we will experience the fellowship of God Who dwells within the church and the fellowship of Jesus Christ, Who is the King of the church. What is more, we shall prosper in the enjoyment of the communion of the saints which is, in principle, the life of Heaven.

Love for the church is as a seed that is sown. It sprouts and brings forth fruit. Oh, when we sow in disgust and contempt for God's church, another kind of fruit is produced: a bitter fruit. Then we will see our children standing by the sidelines of the church and joining in the cries of the children of Edom, "Rase it, Rase it even to the foundation thereof" (Psalm 137:7). But when love for the body

of Christ lives in our homes and dominates our lives, then by God's grace, the fruit is that we will see joyful sons and daughters singing with us, "Blessed Zion all our fountains are in Thee."

How blessed are they who dwell in Zion. Their prosperity extends even to the church victorious, the church at rest.

Do you love the church? Delight now in the house of God and sing in your heart the songs of Zion.

"Blest are they who dwell within Thy house,  
Their perfect strength Thou art;  
Their joyful praise shall never cease,  
Thy ways are in their heart.  
Their tears of grief, like early rain,  
Sweet springs of joy shall fill;  
With strength renewed they journey safe  
To Zion's holy hill."

*Psalter 225*

## Editor's Notes

This is the second of our special issues in the current volume. You will find it to be different from some of our earlier special issues, which have been of an informative and reportorial nature. This issue is devoted entirely—with the exception of the back-page news column—to one doctrine, the doctrine of the church. This does not mean that it is a complete treatment of the doctrine of the church in all its aspects: for it is not, and does not intend to be that. Such an undertaking would require far more space than one issue of our *Standard Bearer*; and, in fact, due to the length of some of the contributions, we have not even been able to carry in this issue all that we first planned.

Why, you ask, did we choose this doctrine? We did so, first of all, because we believe there is no little degree of ignorance concerning this subject; and we want to contribute toward correcting that ignorance. We did so, secondly, because there are several practical problems—and temptations—with

respect to our faith concerning the holy catholic church; and God's people should be equipped to face these problems and should be ready to give an answer also to others with respect to various aberrations which are becoming increasingly common today. This is one of the reasons why we have included such things as a treatment of the marks of the church, the electronic church, and para-church organizations.

We express a word of thanks to all those who contributed to this special issue.

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Time and space did not permit the inclusion of news and information about the institution of the Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore. Watch our March 15 issue for some special articles about this. We plan to carry the Resolution of Membership, a History of the GLTS (now the ERCS), and an eyewitness report from Elder Dewey Engelsma.

## The Institute and Its Importance

*Rev. Ronald Hanko*

It seems sad that the church, at least in its institute form, should be so universally despised, as it is today, even by those who are members of it. For us as church members, that is very much like

biting the hand that feeds us. Nevertheless, the blame for such an attitude must not be laid completely to the charge of those who act and speak so disdainfully toward the church or churches of

which they are members. There certainly is, in that respect, an overriding need for instruction regarding the church and membership in it. Yet it is easy to be sympathetic with those whose attitude toward the church arises out of severe disappointment. To use the figure once again, the fault is often with the hand that feeds. It is not surprising that many church members are disillusioned with the church institute when all they have ever received from it are a few scraps of theological garbage.

But all that does not change the fact that such an attitude is very wrong and that a situation as we have described is absolutely intolerable in the church of our Lord Jesus. How can the church do her work when she is not only despised by the world but by her own members, and how can the members of the church be faithful and fruitful in their calling when they cannot co-operate with the very church in which God has given them a place? In so far as such a situation affects every one of us, let it be our prayer that God will use these words to remind us of the place of importance that the church institute ought to have in our lives, that we may seek to return to our first love for the church of our Redeemer.

Though our Reformed fathers do not agree with the Romish idea of the church institute, they do speak very strongly of its prominent place in the lives of Christians. Our own Belgic Confession says:

Since this holy congregation is an assembly of those who are saved, and that out of it there is no salvation, that no person of whatsoever state or condition he may be, ought to withdraw himself, to live in a separate state from it; but that all men are in duty bound to join and unite themselves with it; maintaining the unity of the Church; submitting themselves to the doctrine and discipline thereof; bowing their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ; and as mutual members of the same body, serving to the edification of the brethren, according to the talents God has given them. (Article XXVIII).

Nor is this emphasis confined to our Dutch Reformed tradition. It is found just as clearly in the Westminster Confession of Faith:

The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel . . . consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. (XXV, ii).

It is from the same viewpoint that Calvin compares the church institute to a school which our weakness does not allow us to leave until we have spent our whole life as scholars (Institutes, IV, 1, iv). In the same place he calls it the mother of believers through which we enter life, are nourished and governed until we become like the

angels.

In order to understand this emphasis we must see what is meant when we speak of the institute of the church and that there is Scriptural ground for that language. Scripture does not always use the word church in the same sense, and thus from the very beginning of the church various distinctions have been made with respect to the church, such as the church militant and the church triumphant, the visible church and the invisible church, and so also the distinction between the organism of the church and the institute. These are, of course, not different churches, but the one church of Christ Jesus looked at from different viewpoints.

When we speak of the church as organism, then we are really talking about what Scripture calls the body of Christ as that is gathered out of all nations and throughout all history and united to Christ by a living bond of faith. The word organism implies that this church is spiritually alive in Christ, in that the rich and glorious life of Christ flows down from Christ as head in the Church which is His body.

The institute of the church describes that organism as it comes to manifestation, takes on a certain form, and becomes visible in this world. So it is that in connection with the whole idea of the institute we speak of congregations and denominations. It ought to be immediately obvious, too, that the organism and the institute do not completely overlap. The institute may include in its walls hypocrites and unbelievers who are not part of the organism of the body of Christ. So too the institute is subject to reformation, and it is even possible that an institute or even the institute may be scattered and destroyed (as will perhaps be the case in the last days), something which cannot happen to the organism. From that same viewpoint it is possible that there be different institutes for one reason or another, without denying the essential unity of the organism.

A working definition of the institute would be, then, "the assembly of those who through the external Word, the use of the sacraments and Church discipline, are joined together into one external body or society" (Leiden Synopsis, XL, 32; quoted from the *Reformed Dogmatics* of Heinrich Heppe).

There are many Scripture passages which speak either directly or indirectly of such an institute form of the church of Christ. There are those passages such as Acts 5:11, Romans 16:4, I Corinthians 11:16, 16:1, and Galatians 1:2 which speak of specific congregations or groups of congregations as churches. Then there are passages which make it clear that these gatherings involve a *formal* assembly and fellowship of those who make profession of faith in Christ (Acts 2:42, 11:26, I Corin-

thians 11:17, 18, and Hebrews 10:24, 25). Most important of all, however, are those passages which show us that it is the offices especially which give form and shape to the institute (Matthew 18:17, Acts 4:23, and Ephesians 4:11-13). It is the church as institute, therefore, which through its offices worships, exercises discipline, administers the sacraments, and preaches the Gospel.

The fact that the institute has a certain form or shape is connected exactly with the fact that it is a manifestation of the organism of Christ's body. Even as there is perfect order and harmony in the spiritual body of Christ of which every believer is a member, so also the fellowship of saints on earth ought to reflect that order and harmony. That is the point that Paul is making in I Corinthians 14:40 when he demands that everything be done decently and in good order in the church.

This orderly form is necessary in order that the church on earth may realize her calling to be a light shining in the darkness of this world. The institute implies that particular *arrangement* of gifts, powers, offices, and services through which the church can respond to its calling in an orderly way. From that angle we can also see the importance of the offices in the institute. The church is a congregation of believers, and the calling of the church is the calling of believers in their office of believer. When believers come together to do their calling then they do that through the offices of pastor, elder, and deacon which Christ has instituted. Thus it is that offices, as they give the institute its particular shape and form, are not separate from the office of all believers, but the means which the King of the church has given through which the believer may realize his calling as God's prophet, priest, and king in a decent, orderly way.

That is why the matter of church reformation is always so very serious in the church institute. When the church institute has so declined that the believer can no longer exercise his responsibility through the offices in a meaningful way, then it is high time that the institute be re-formed or that the believer seek reformation by joining himself to a church fellowship in which he is able to perform the duties of his Christian calling in the way that God has appointed for him to do that, that is, through the church and in the church.

The matter of the offices also leads us directly to the importance of the institute itself. Those offices are essentially the offices of Christ, our chief Prophet, our only High Priest, and our eternal King. It is through His offices as they are reflected in the church that His saving power is revealed. That power is the power to teach, first of all—to teach the knowledge of the one true God, which knowledge, as John says (17:3), is the very essence of

eternal life. It is also the power to rule the conduct of the people of God with the perfect law of liberty and to defend the Kingdom of God against the assaults of the powers of darkness. And it is the power to make known the everlasting and free mercy of Jesus Christ in the care of those who are needy. And it is exactly in order that these things may be done in an orderly fashion, and in order that Christ Himself in His offices may be present with the church that He has given the church its institute form and its offices as part of that form.

That is, therefore, the reason why we as Reformed churches have always stressed membership in the visible church. The institute is a necessary part of the believer's life as the way in which he is savingly joined to Christ. He simply cannot function in an orderly and effective way in the office of believer apart from the institute. Membership in the institute is not voluntary in the sense that a man may feel free to join or not join himself to it as he sees fit. The word of God to anyone who confesses faith in Jesus Christ is, "forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is" (Hebrews 10:25). One who cuts himself off from the institute cuts himself off from the living organism of the body of Jesus Christ and from the saving power of His offices.

Our confessions are not wrong when they say that apart from the visible church there is no hope of salvation. Acts 2:47 makes it very clear that the church on earth is manifest as a visible society of the people of God, and that salvation involves membership in that church: "the Lord *added to the church* daily those whom He had ordained to eternal life." Just as my arm or my hand cannot live apart from my body, so the members of Christ wither and die spiritually when they cut themselves off from the fellowship of His body in the visible church.

It is sometimes asked if one can be saved without being a member of the church, and there are those who answer, "Yes," and who even say of themselves, "I am a member of *the* Church and do not need to be a member of any particular church or congregation." That answer is very wrong; but so is the question, because it is too abstract. The question is not of what God can do, but of what He does do, and then also a question of my responsibility with respect to what He does do. What He does do is unmistakably clear from Acts 2:47; and then my responsibility is also unmistakable: "those who separate themselves from the same, or do not join themselves to it, act contrary to the ordinance of God" (Belgic Confession, Article XXVIII).

By joining ourselves to the institute church we "come unto mount Sion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an in-

numerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus

the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel" (Hebrews 12:22-24).

## Parachurch Organizations

*Prof. H. Hanko*

If one were asked to define what is the main characteristic of the church in the 1900s, what is that one feature of her life in this century which sets the church apart from the church in other centuries, that unique trait which stands out from all others as definitive of the church in modern times, most people would probably say: ecumenism. The church has, in this century, been especially busy with merger, been occupying her time and efforts in the cause of unity, and has stressed this aspect of the church's life more than any other. While ecumenical pressures have eased a bit in the last ten years or so, and while the hard realities of ecclesiastical life have muted the strident cries for unity which were echoing throughout the world a decade or two ago, the idea of church merger is still alive and well in the thoughts of church leaders.

Another feature of church life in this century, running a close second in importance to ecumenism, is the rise of parachurch organizations. No other period in all the history of the church has seen such a proliferation of parachurch organizations as our century. Sooner or later one, if he is at all interested in the church, comes face to face with the question: What about these organizations? Are they good, bad, indifferent? What ought we to think of them? Ought we to join them when the occasion is present?

What is a parachurch organization? The question is not all that easy to answer, for the lines are not always sharply and clearly drawn. The word itself, "parachurch," means, "alongside the church." It refers to organizations, therefore, which are in some way related to the church, especially because of their interest in and concern for spiritual matters, but which are nevertheless independent of the church. J. Alan Youngren, in the November 6, 1981 issue of *Christianity Today*, defines parachurch work as that which is a "not-for-profit, organized Christian ministry to spiritual, mental, and physical needs, working outside denominational control."

Although educational institutions are specifically excluded from consideration by the author, he does have a broad definition which could conceivably

include such institutions as Pine Rest Christian Hospital, and World Vision, which is one of the largest Christian relief organizations in the world.

While it is certainly true that parachurch organizations can include all such organizations, it is also clear that a certain distinction has to be made here. This distinction arises out of a common yet very important distinction in the nature and idea of the church. All theologians in the Protestant tradition since the time of the Reformation (and including even the pre-reformers, Wyckliffe and Hus), made a distinction between the church as organism and the church as institute. The former refers to the church as organism and the church as institute. The former refers to the church as the body of our Lord Jesus Christ to Whom the church is organically united and with Whom the church composes one unity. To this church belong only the elect; the attributes of the church (her holiness, unity, catholicity, apostolicity) are attributes of the organism. The institute, however, refers to the church from the viewpoint of her institutional and organizational form. God has willed that the organism of the body of Christ, as it exists on earth at any given time, come to visible manifestation in institutional form. This happens when the believers, functioning in the office of believers, appoint officebearers (preachers, elders, and deacons) through whom the church performs the work which Christ has given her to do: preach the Word, administer the sacraments, use the keys of the kingdom in the discipline.

Two things have to be said about this. The one point to be made is that the organism of the body of Christ *must* come to institutional manifestation. This is the calling of the church which she must perform in obedience to the command of the Scriptures. And, in fact, only when the church assumes institutional form can the church perform her God-given task. The organism cannot preach or administer the sacraments. Only the institution can do this. The other point is this: the individual believer walks as a living member of the body of Christ in the world. He must do this in all the relationships

of life: in his home, at his place of work, in his country, in his relationships to his fellow saints and the ungodly around him, etc. All this walk and all this calling are his as a *member of the body of Christ*. But this is not the institute. The believer must train his children in the ways of the Lord; must honor and respect his employer; must submit to the magistrate; must witness to the world about him; must help the needy and ease the suffering of the sick. All these things he is called to do. But this is not the institute.

Not only is he called to do these things, but he may even join with other Christians of like faith to do these things in common. He may form a Christian School Society and establish a Christian school to teach his children. He may form an organization to establish a clinic to help those with mental problems. And he may do this with many others because he cannot do it alone. He may even form some kind of organization in which he cooperates with others of like faith to help the poor and needy. There is nothing wrong with this as such, and, indeed, he has a calling before God in many of these areas of Christian endeavor. But this is not the institute.

Parachurch organizations, therefore, which engage in these activities are surely not to be condemned. They belong to the calling which comes to God's people to walk as living members of Christ. Whether or not all such organizations, such as World Vision, e.g., are faithful to the Scriptures in their work and are Scriptural in their theology is another question, into which we shall not enter. The idea is not necessarily wrong, but the carrying out of the idea in actual fact may be very wrong.

But all these activities are possible for the believing child of God only because he is a part of the church institute. In a very real sense it can be said that the church institute is the mother of believers. From her the believer is born; at her breast he is nourished through the preaching of the Word and the sacraments; in her fellowship he grows up; to her welfare he devotes his life. In her arms he dies. The point that needs stressing is exactly that all the believing life of the Christian is possible because the Christian is fed and nourished, instructed and strengthened, encouraged and rebuked by the institute. Without "mother's" constant attention, he would not be able to walk in any respect as a believer in the world.

But there are other parachurch organizations. These are also for fellowship, but these differ from the organizations mentioned above because these organizations, while operating independently of the church, nevertheless claim to *perform the work of the church*.

Most probably parachurch organizations had their inception in the formation of independent mission societies, especially in England, societies which were not only organized to encourage the people of God to support mission work, but organizations which did, in fact, send out missionaries. It was not, however, until the last century or so that the number of parachurch organizations proliferated. And in proliferating they assumed many different forms. Some were organized for mission purposes; some were formed with a view to "saving souls" or bringing about revival; others were formed as substitutes for the church.

It was especially during the sixties that parachurch organizations for young people became common. Perhaps it was the spirit of rebellion and what is sometimes called "counter-culture" which persuaded numerous young people to abandon denominations and churches and to become part of various youth movements. Apart from the far-out hippie organizations and "Jesus people," some of the more familiar parachurch organizations are: Youth for Christ, which is mainly interested in high school students, has organizations on about 1000 campuses, and has recently broadened out to include Young Life, which is mostly urban and is quite socially oriented; Campus Crusade, found mostly on college and university campuses; InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, which is known for its famous missionary conventions in Urbana; Navigators, primarily concerned with the men and women in the armed forces; Fellowship of Christian Athletes, which makes a great deal of the analogy between the Christian life and sports activities. Perhaps the best known of all parachurch organizations is the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, which sponsors especially the Billy Graham crusades. These are, however, only a few. It has been estimated that the total number of parachurch organizations may exceed 10,000.

What makes people join such organizations? Many studies have been made to try to answer this question—studies, as often as not, which are sponsored and financed by worried ecclesiastics who see their membership rolls dwindle as the churches are abandoned in favor of these organizations. These studies, as is true of almost all such studies, have come up with a variety of answers. There is little point in listing all or even some of these answers here, although they range from the close spiritual bonds established in these organizations to the frontier mentality of the American people.

Whatever may be the true reasons, however, two truths stand out, and that so clearly that a high-powered study is not needed to learn them. In the first place, it is certainly true that there is little or no understanding today of the truth concerning the

institute of the church. It is at the command of Christ that the church is organized as institute, and to this institute is entrusted the task of the church: the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of discipline. (I need not go into detail on these points, because Rev. Slopsema has discussed them in a recent article in the *Standard Bearer*, which at this writing is going to be continued.) This means that only the institute of the church through her offices can preach, administer the sacraments, and exercise discipline. No Classis or Presbytery can do this; no Synod or General Assembly, no self-appointed organization of young people bent on winning souls for Christ, no independent mission organization, no foundation for revival, no association for crusades. Only the church can preach.

Furthermore, it must be emphasized that the preaching is absolutely indispensable for salvation. This is the teaching of Romans 10:13-15: "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in Whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of Whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!"

And so: it is wrong for an organization to operate independently of the church, but nevertheless to perform the functions of the church. Those who do this go against the will of God and must expect

God's disapproval upon them. But it is equally as wrong for people, young or old, to abandon the church for fellowships, organizations, communes, and the like. God has ordained that we be saved within the church. We must not be wiser than God.

Secondly, one main reason why so many leave the church and seek fellowship or a part in the work of the church outside the established church is that they have become thoroughly disillusioned with the church. This is not always their fault. They have been fed pabulum and pap for the meat of the Word; they have been summoned to social action rather than sent to the cross for forgiveness and pardon; they have been entertained by two-bit entertainers who think the way to draw crowds in the church is through movies, guest speakers, plays, special musical numbers, etc., etc. And people, wearying of it all, have forsaken churches which have no understanding of their calling and have sought fellowship and spiritual food in para-church organizations. I am not excusing people, for the Word is still being preached in churches faithful to their calling. But the guilt rests heavily upon the church which makes herself wiser than God and is no longer content to instruct God's people with the lively preaching of the Word.

So all the solutions to the problem of the para-church organizations lie in the church being faithful to her calling to preach the Word. The hungering and thirsting souls of God's people shall then find rest and peace and be nourished unto life eternal.

## The "Electric" or "Media" Church

Rev. G. Van Baren

In past years a great deal has been written about the so-called "electric" church. By this is meant those religious broadcasts that come on radio and television each week. Their number, it seems, is boundless. One can find, especially on Sunday, a constant barrage of religious programming: from local church services to brief messages designed for special instruction of the listener. There are, in addition, a surprising number of Christian radio stations and television stations which broadcast daily the gospel message in word and song—at least these profess to do so. Many of these broadcasts are supported by the listening audience, although also

local churches and even commercial concerns support others.

The first religious broadcast on the new medium of radio was made on January 2, 1921 from the Calvary Episcopal Church of Pittsburgh, Penn. Today, there are an estimated 130 million people who listen on a Sunday morning to one or more religious broadcasts. It is claimed that 47% of the population of the United States listen to at least one religious program a week. Over 500 million dollars are spent annually on religious broadcasting. (The above figures were culled from the book: *The Electric Church*, Ben Armstrong, author.)

The success stories of some of the television religious broadcasts are widely known. There is Robert Schuller with his *Hour of Power* television broadcast from the "crystal cathedral" in Garden Grove, California. This is a church of the Reformed Church of America. The membership of this congregation grew from zero in 1955 to more than 8,000 in 1979. Those who have heard Schuller, with his "possibility thinking", can understand how such a broadcast has wide appeal. It does not, however, present the full message of the gospel. It is rather a program designed to make the listener feel good.

Another famous program is the *Old Time Gospel Hour*, with its messages by Jerry Falwell, the leader of the Moral Majority movement. The broadcast comes from the Thomas Road Baptist Church at Lynchburg, Virginia. It claims more than six million viewers in the U.S. The broadcast began in 1956 by the church which then had but thirty-five adult members. In 1978 its membership was 15,000.

There are, too, various denominational broadcasts, coming for the most part over radio. There is the Lutheran Hour, the Back to God Hour, the Words of Hope (Reformed Church), and many others. We have our own small contribution: The Reformed Witness Hour, which has been aired now for over 39 years. Some of our church services are also aired: and on a regular basis by our South Holland, Illinois and Lynden, Washington congregations.

It is this "electric" or "media" church which has aroused considerable controversy both within and outside of the churches. There is an attempt by the non-Christian to still these broadcasts or place greater restrictions on them. But also much disagreement arises within the churches concerning the value of such programming.

That many of these broadcasts are appealing is evident from the fact that they attract a wide listening audience and millions of dollars of listener support. In fact, most of these programs could not possibly continue without the millions contributed by the listeners. Even most of the religious stations, whether radio or television, are maintained through listener contributions. There is something which attracts people to this sort of thing.

The complaint is heard that the "electric" church takes away from regular church attendance. Perhaps. However, in the book mentioned above, the author claims that in the United States, with its many religious broadcasts, four out of ten people attend church at least once a month. In Britain, where religious broadcasts are severely restricted, only one out of 14 attend church once a month. His

conclusion is that the many religious broadcasts in our land in fact promote regular church attendance.

Several points ought to be made about religious broadcasting. Without evaluating each individual broadcast, it can be pointed out that religious broadcasts provide the means to reach areas and countries which otherwise never heard the gospel. The transistor radio brings to the very poorest of the poor the means to hear the Word. In places where no missionary has ever set foot, there Scripture can still be presented. In countries where the preaching of the Word is forbidden, still many can hear by way of radio.

Even within our own land, many who do not or can not come to church have heard the Word. Some who had never set foot in church, have turned on their radios and have heard truths of Scripture. Many shut-ins also make use of such broadcasts when they are unable to attend church personally.

Also for our churches the "electric" church has proved to be a means of reaching out to present the truths of God's Word as these are proclaimed in our own churches. Though sometimes the response is disappointing, there is evidence that many do hear and listen. More work could likely be done also in this field by our own churches in order that the gospel might be presented clearly and emphatically in a world where compromise and apostasy seem to be the order of the day.

But what of the objections, sometimes strenuously presented, to the "electric" church? One objection is the question of money. The "electric" church drains off a vast sum of money—estimated to be well over 500 million dollars annually. Questions are raised: if local churches had access to such amounts of money, what additional work could they not do in their own areas and in the field of mission work? In fact, do not the local churches actually suffer because funds otherwise contributed to them, now go to the persuasive television preacher? There are many churches which have a great struggle to survive—while many TV preachers seem to wallow in affluence. They are able to build crystal cathedrals and vast educational complexes.

For the faithful child of God, there ought to be no problem. The problem would likely be with one who is unstable, one who fails to understand his responsibilities given in Scripture. Such an one could be easily swayed to support the unnecessary and questionable by an eloquent preacher on radio or TV. The faithful Christian understands the place of the church of Christ on the earth. He knows his responsibility to support this cause of God's kingdom too. Therefore, within our own churches I have seen no evidence that any local church suffers be-

cause of the "electric" church. The child of God must wisely use of his possessions that God's Name may ever be glorified.

A second complaint is that the "electric" church provides a substitute to regular church attendance. There are those who easily stay home from church—and listen to "church" on television or radio. And no doubt this is often the case. The "electric" church has become the excuse for violating the fourth commandment in more ways than one. It becomes a "vacation" church—when one wants to vacation in a place where he can not serve God in church, then he can convince himself that a radio sermon serves the same purpose. Some would travel on Sunday—while listening on their car radio to the "electric" church. This way, one can get the best of two worlds: vacation travel and church at the same time.

Where the "electric" church is thus abused, this abuse must be condemned. It must be pointed out again that the faithful Christian understands the place of church: its fellowship, the preaching of the Word in the congregation of God's people, the opportunity to give for the poor and the kingdom there. Whatever purpose the "electric" church serves, the Christian knows that it can never be a substitute for the gathering of God's people each Sunday.

There are, however, two other serious concerns with respect to the "electric" church. The first is the easy and pervasive way the lie can be spread. The "electric" church has all kinds of preachers: from pentecostals to arminian. These men who speak are effective, fluent preachers. Those that come not with the truth of God's Word, yet come in His Name (or claim that they do), deceive many un-

stable souls. Many become followers of men—but not followers of Jesus Christ. It is this which remains a constant threat to Christians not well versed in the Word of God.

But there is a second matter related to the above. The media can easily be used by the antichrist and his followers to set up a religious organization second to none. One is impressed by what a few men have accomplished in but few years in their television ministry. Think of a Schuller or a Falwell. What an "empire" these men have built in just a short time! Can you then imagine one man, combining the persuasiveness of all these presently on TV, able to attract millions by his "message," able to raise vast sums of money—appearing regularly on TV? What such a man could do in the way of uniting churches, helping the needy, establishing "Christianity" as a popular religion! A popular religion making use of the modern developments in communication would be considered the ideal which men had long sought. There is not only regular TV, but also now cable TV and satellite communications. With all of these, the ends of the earth could be reached. Many would sit at the feet of one leader, eagerly listening to all he had to say. And I strongly suspect that this will happen too.

This is not to frighten the child of God. All of these things must be, until Christ comes again on the clouds of glory. In fact, it seems to me that the "electric" church and the media used, is itself a reminder to us how near to the end we actually are. Though others have said this in the past ages too, never have so many means been available to be used by one world power and one church to accomplish that prophecy of Scripture that antichrist would come. Be ready and watch: the end draweth nigh!

## The Institute and the Office of Believers

*Rev. J. Slopsema*

There are especially two errors into which many believers have fallen in the exercise of the office of believer. The one error is to seek to exercise the office of believer apart from the institution of the church. The other error is to fail to exercise this office because of the institution of the church. Both errors must be avoided at all costs. To fall into either error is detrimental to the spiritual welfare both of the church and the individual saint.

Every believer in Christ holds an office in the

kingdom of God called the office of believer. He holds this office only by virtue of his faith in Christ. In Lord's Day 12 the Heidelberg Catechism teaches that our Saviour is called Christ because He is anointed of God. This anointing implies two things. It implies, first of all, divine appointment. As the anointed of God, Christ has been eternally appointed or ordained of God to the three-fold office of prophet, priest, and king. But in the second place this anointing implies qualification. Having been

ordained by God to this three-fold office, Christ is also qualified by the Holy Spirit to perform the duties of this office. And so, according to our Catechism, Christ as the anointed of God is our chief prophet, our only high priest, and our eternal king. The Catechism, in this same Lord's Day, however, goes on to teach that by faith we are members of Christ and thus partakers of His anointing. If you will, by faith in Christ we too become prophets, priests, and kings in and under Christ. The viewpoint here is that Christ exercises His duties as prophet, priest, and king through men. This is realized in the sphere of the kingdom when Christ calls His people out of darkness into light and through the gift of faith brings them into spiritual connection with Himself. In this way they become partakers of Christ's anointing. They become prophets, priests, and kings in and under Christ. This is the office of believer that every born-again Christian occupies by virtue of his faith.

As an officebearer in God's kingdom the believer has certain duties to perform. As prophet his duty is to speak the Word of God. The basic idea of the prophetic office is not that of foretelling the future but of revelation. A prophet is one who speaks on the behalf of God. He is one who is filled with the true knowledge of God and can not help but speak that which God has revealed to him. In this manner Christ is the chief prophet of God. It is especially through Christ that God has revealed Himself as the God of salvation. This revelation of God in Christ has been infallibly recorded for us in the Scripture through an act of divine inspiration. As prophets of God in and under Christ it is our calling to speak that same Word of God recorded in Scripture. That Word must live in our heart. And that Word we must proclaim with our mouth.

As king the duty of the believer is to rule under Christ. The idea basic to the office of king is that of rule. This Christ does as our eternal king. We are able to distinguish in the rule of Christ two aspects. There is first the rule of His might. This is the rule of Christ over the world in general and over the ungodly. The ungodly refuse to bow the knee to Christ and acknowledge Him as Lord. They walk rather in rebellion against Him. But Christ rules over them nonetheless, using even their rebellion and disobedience to fulfill His purpose. In distinction from this, Christ rules over His people in grace. This means that in the power of His grace Christ smashes the rebellious hearts of His people. In the power of His grace He also changes them so that they love Him and seek to do His will as willing and obedient servants. From this it certainly follows that as kings of God under Christ it is our calling first of all to rule ourselves. By nature we are rebels against God who can not and will not serve Him.

And that spirit of rebellion still resides within our sinful nature. As kings in Christ our first calling is to rule over ourselves in the power of grace so that we subdue our sinful nature and thus walk in all obedience to God and His Christ. As kings under Christ, however, it is also our duty to rule over one another mutually. We certainly have a calling to be our brother's keeper. Our concern must not be just with our own walk of life but also with that of the brother. Hence, there is a mutual supervision which we must exercise over one another in the household of faith as kings under Christ.

Finally we are also priests under Christ. An essential element of the office of priest is the showing of mercy. This Christ certainly does as our eternal highpriest. According to Hebrews 2:17 Christ is "a merciful and faithful highpriest in things pertaining to God." As our merciful highpriest Christ delivers us from the depths of our misery and exalts us to a state of blessedness and joy. He does this not only through the redemption of His cross but also through His continual intercession before the throne of God whereby He brings upon us all the blessing of God. We too are priests in and under Christ. As priests of God we must show mercy to those in need, especially to the poor. We are to do this by comforting them with God's Word and by alleviating their poverty with material gifts.

At this point we may begin to discuss the institution of the church. The institution of the church is the church from the viewpoint of its special offices. From the Scriptures it is apparent that from every communion of believers Christ calls certain men to be prophets, kings, and priests in a special sense. These prophets, kings, and priests are called by Scripture ministers, elders, and deacons. The question arises: what is the relation between these special offices in the church and the office of believer? Every believer in Christ is a prophet, king, and priest. Why then are there in the church these special offices of minister, elder, and deacon? The answer is that God will have us exercise our office of believer only in connection with and through the special offices of the church.

The institution of the church with its threefold office of minister, elder, and deacon is all important for the believer. Thus, for example, it is only through the offices of the church that one can attain the office of believer. For, as we have seen, the office of believer is a matter of sharing in Christ's anointing by faith. But faith in turn is dependent on the offices of the church, upon the preaching of the minister and the rule of the elder and the benevolence of the deacon. Apart from the threefold office of the church we have neither faith nor the office of believer. In harmony with this it is also the will of

God that the believer exercise his office only in connection with and through the offices of the church. Apart from the offices of the church it is impossible for the believer to exercise his office.

This relation between the office of believer and the threefold office of the church is easily demonstrated. First, there is the prophetic office. As stated earlier, the basic idea of this office is to know God from His Word and to proclaim that Word. This is the calling and duty of every believer as prophet. Nevertheless, the individual believer can not fulfill that obligation alone, as an individual, apart from the body of believers and the institution of the church. There are those who attempt this. They strike out on their own as self-proclaimed preachers of the gospel having no connection with the institution of the church. But they commit a grave error and fail miserably as prophets of God. Their work carries away neither the approval nor the blessing of God. The believer can function as a prophet of God only as a member of the church institute where there is the office of the minister and the pure preaching of the Word. For it is through the official preaching of the Word that the believer first of all exercises his office of prophet of God. It is primarily through the minister whom we call and support that we speak the Word of God as prophets. Through our minister and his preaching we speak that Word of God first to ourselves but then also to others. And that Word is the power of God to salvation. But our duties as prophets of God go beyond preaching. We must in the power of that preaching also continue to speak God's Word individually. We must speak that Word to the members of our family and to those of the household of faith. But we must also proclaim that Word to those outside the church who are lost in the darkness of unbelief. This is commonly called witnessing. A grave error of many in the church is to think that this is unimportant. Consequently they fail to bring the Word of God to their neighbor. They hear the preaching of the Word but fail to bring that same Word to others. In this they fall short as prophets of God. Nor do they carry away God's approval.

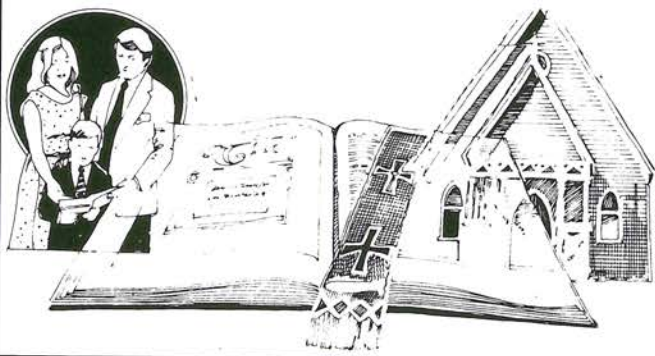
These same general principles we may now also apply to the kingly office. As kings under Christ in God's house we must rule ourselves and mutually rule over one another as fellow believers to the end that we subdue our sinful nature and walk in all obedience to God. It is true of course that this does not always directly involve the elders of the church. Each one of us must through prayer fight against our own sinful nature. And according to the command of Christ we must often go to the erring brother alone to admonish him and seek his repentance. This we do as kings of God. If we fail to do

these things we are remiss in our duties as kings. Nevertheless, this must all take place in the context of the rule and supervision of the elders of the church. God has charged the elders of the church to rule over the lives of God's people. They do this by setting forth the Word of God as the sole standard for doctrine and life. And they maintain that Word through the exercise of Christian discipline. It is furthermore our calling as believers in Christ to submit ourselves to the good rule of the elders. And when our fellow believer falls into sin and refuses to repent under our admonition he must be reported by us to the elders for the official discipline of the church. In this way we as kings rule both ourselves and one another through the elders of the church. And this is our calling before God. We can function as kings of God in Christ only in connection with and through the elders of the church.

And the same idea also holds true for the priestly office. As priests it is our calling to show mercy to the poor and those in distress. We are to do this by bringing them the comforting words of the Scripture and by alleviating their physical needs with alms. And as priests of God it certainly is our calling at times to do this individually. Nevertheless, this is never to be done apart from the work of the deacons of the church. It is especially through the deacons that we exercise our priestly office. We do this by providing the deacons with alms in abundance that they may have to give to the poor.

Are we faithful in the execution of our duties as officebearers in God's kingdom? Let us not seek to exercise our office apart from the institution of the church. Nor let us fall into the error of failing to exercise our duties as prophets, kings, and priests, using as an excuse that this is the duty rather of the minister, elder, and deacon of the church. Let us rather seek to exercise our office in connection with and through the offices of the church to our salvation and the welfare of the church.

### *Take time to read The Standard Bearer*



# The Church and the Sacraments

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Jehovah, the faithful covenant God, has entrusted into the care and keeping of His church the sacraments. They, along with the preaching, are ordained by God as official means to be used in the church in order to strengthen and nourish her members in the grace of God. The church is called upon, therefore, to guard and use the sacraments in such a way. This calling she dispenses with great joy, for these sacraments are to her very precious and of utmost significance. Certainly in the day and age in which we find ourselves—an age in which the preaching and sacraments are considered relics of the past—we must renew our appreciation for what God in His love has given us.

The sacraments are of absolute necessity in our faith and life. Our Reformed fathers recognized this fact too. So important are the sacraments that they have become one of the marks by which the true church of Jesus Christ may be known. A church which does not administer the sacraments is *not* a true church of Christ. So important are those sacraments! They are a means unto spiritual life!

It is for that reason that Christ has instituted them for official use in the church. Here is a fact which we may never overlook: Christ has *instituted* our sacraments. If we ignore this, then there will be no limits to what we constitute as sacraments to be used in our worship in the church. Christ, however, instituted, i.e., officially established as fundamental rites in the church, our sacraments as we have them today. They are two: the Lord's Supper and Baptism. These are the only two instituted by Christ for official use in His church (Matt. 26:26ff. and Matt. 28:19). Now it is not the purpose of this article to defend and explain each of these sacraments in particular. Many pages of many books have been devoted to explaining the administration and significance of each of these sacraments. We consider, on the other hand, just why it is they are so precious to us.

The sacraments are visible signs and seals which strengthen and confirm the faith of God's people. If we are at all concerned about the growth of our faith, if we care about becoming and remaining spiritually strong, if we desire to be assured of our salvation, then we will understand the great value of our sacraments. They are gifts of God to us which, if used properly, will result in great spiritual growth in the life of the individual believer as well as in the life of the church as a whole. So often that can be forgotten. Then, to those who employ them, they become mere customs and superstitions. The

question is: *how* do they confirm and strengthen our faith? Is it not hard to believe that, merely by eating and drinking some bread and wine or by witnessing the sprinkling of water on the head of an infant, our faith will be confirmed and strengthened? How is that possible? It is of extreme importance that we do not fall into the error of the Roman Catholic Church at this point. The church of Rome claims that there is grace in the very elements of the sacraments themselves. When I eat and drink the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper in some miraculous way I eat and drink grace, and as a result I am strengthened in my faith. It is almost like popping a pill. If I need to relax I pop a tranquilizer into my mouth and soon my tension drains from me and I am able to relax—automatically. Despite my own tension my body relaxes. The Romish church maintains that by eating bread and drinking wine or by having water sprinkled on my head my faith is automatically strengthened. Despite my own spiritual condition, my faith miraculously grows. It takes no more effort to be strengthened in my faith than the mere physical eating and drinking of bread and wine or, easier yet, merely passively lying in my father's arms while someone sprinkles water on my head. This kind of reasoning, however, leads us into what the Heidelberg Catechism calls "an accursed idolatry." We then worship the elements of the sacraments as if they have in themselves power to effect grace and salvation. We must have none of this.

The sacraments confirm and strengthen the faith of God's children as signs and seals of the grace of God's covenant.

As signs our sacraments represent in a visible way something which is invisible. Perhaps we would understand this better if we were to use an illustration. When we travel by car, along the road we see many different signs. Each of those signs speaks of something which we do not yet see. For example, I see a sign which speaks of a restaurant which will appear in the next few miles. I do not see the restaurant but I know it will soon appear because I have seen the sign which speaks of it. Our sacraments as signs represent visibly that which we do not see. For example, we partake of the bread and wine in our celebration of the Lord's Supper. These are visible signs of something invisible to us, namely, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When we eat and drink of the bread and wine we do not literally see the death and resurrection of Christ but we are reminded that they

are real, that Christ died and arose for us. Just as when we see that sign of the restaurant our thoughts are directed to the restaurant and what it offers, so also when we partake of the elements of our sacraments our thoughts are directed to the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior. When we witness the sacrament of Baptism and partake of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper we are assured that just as certainly as we see that sprinkling of water and receive and hold the bread and wine in our hands, we also do as certainly receive by faith the washing away of our sins through the death and resurrection of Christ. In that way our faith is confirmed and strengthened. These signs direct our faith to the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross for us; and as we think upon that we grow spiritually.

Nor must we overlook the fact that these sacraments are seals. A seal is a visible guarantee of the genuineness of that which receives the seal. It is a promise made by one in authority that what is received is authentic. For example again, when one graduates from school his diploma is stamped with the seal of the state in which he graduated. Without that seal the diploma would be invalid. With it the state guarantees that it is genuine. The sacraments are seals of God to His children. They guarantee the promise of the gospel, the forgiveness of sin, and life everlasting through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. The sacraments are God's promise to His people that being washed in the blood of Christ they are justified and that they will indeed receive their eternal reward.

In this way the sacraments are signs and seals of God's covenant with His people. Baptism witnesses and seals to them that God incorporates them into His eternal covenant of grace and adopts them for His children and heirs. The Lord's Supper, in turn, witnesses and seals to them that they belong to and are nourished in that covenant of grace. And as

God's children think upon these things, as they contemplate the mercy and grace of God, they grow spiritually stronger and stronger in their faith and in their knowledge of God and salvation. That is what makes our sacraments so precious to us! We need them! We thank God that He has provided these means whereby we might behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord! They are definitely means whereby we become partakers of the spiritual blessings of God's grace. As partakers of these blessings we "are changed into the same (Christ's, WGB) image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord (II Cor. 3:18)."

There is one other truth which cannot be overlooked. Our sacraments are precious to us only because the Holy Spirit works through them. They are always surrounded by the Word, and the Holy Spirit Himself through that Word works within us the knowledge and confidence of faith. Without the work of the Holy Spirit in the celebration of our sacraments the truth and assurance which they convey would fall upon dry and dusty soil. But He works in us as we witness Baptism and as we partake of the Lord's Supper so that the truth and assurance conveyed in them becomes real in our hearts. We lay hold of the promise of the gospel and we make it our own. We love it and cherish it. We consider that gift of salvation the most precious thing in the world to us. That is what the Holy Spirit accomplishes in our hearts by means of our sacraments. If He did not, then those sacraments would not be all that dear to us.

Let us as a church of Jesus Christ maintain our sacraments in all their purity. Let us cherish them and guard them for the welfare of our faith and souls. Then we will remain faithful to God's Word and will maintain the second mark of the true church of Christ. Let us love our sacraments! They are a necessary part of our continued spiritual life!

## The Marks of the False Church

*Rev. David Engelsma*

"...As for the false Church, she ascribes more power and authority to herself and her ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit herself to the yoke of Christ. Neither does she administer the sacraments as appointed by Christ in His Word, but adds to and takes from them, as she thinks proper; she relieth more upon men than upon Christ; and persecutes those, who live holily according to the Word of God, and rebuke her for

her errors, covetousness, and idolatry. These two Churches are easily known and distinguished from each other."

-Belgic Confession, Article 29

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The "problem" of the article of our Confession of Faith quoted above is its absolute distinction between the true church and the false church. It does

not speak of purer and less pure churches, of manifestations of Jesus' Body that vary in degree of faithfulness and doctrinal purity; but of "two Churches," the true and the false. Applied to the present situation of many, separated churches (denominations), the article might seem to teach that one particular institute is the only true church, while all the others are the false church. Such an interpretation of the article has been given by certain Reformed in the Netherlands; and, now and again, voices have been heard in the Protestant Reformed Churches expressing this position.

It is helpful for understanding the Confession's teaching concerning the false church to have clearly in mind the reference of "true Church—false Church." By the true church is not meant the invisible Body of Jesus Christ. If this were the reference, the article would be distinguishing between the one, invisible, true church of Christ and the one, invisible, false church of the Devil. Some have tried to escape the difficulty of the article's "true Church—false Church" distinction by resorting to this explanation. That this is not meant is plain from the Confession's admission that the true church has hypocrites mixed in with the good, which cannot be said of the invisible church of Christ. Also, the article makes plain that it refers to a church that has marks which we can see: preaching, sacraments, and discipline—a visible church, therefore.

Neither is this article primarily concerned with our duty to distinguish between believers and unbelievers. It is the case that true members of the church have a certain mark that sooner or later also distinguishes them from hypocrites, namely, a living faith. It is not, however, the point of this article to speak of the distinction between true and false members of the church, i.e., believers and unbelievers ("we speak not here of hypocrites, who are mixed in the Church with the good...").

The article refers to the true institute of the church and the false institute of the church. The purpose of this article is the practical one of calling believers to membership in a true congregation and denomination and warning believers against membership in a false congregation and denomination. In order that believers may discern the true and the false, the marks of both are set forth. That this is, in fact, the subject is evident, first, from the mention of "the body and communion of the true Church"; second, from the fact that it is the institute that preaches, administers sacraments, and exercises discipline; and, third, from the fact that it is the institute that always has hypocrites mixed in with the good.

In any discussion of the false church, it is important to note the clear teaching of our Confession

that the true church is never pure in the sense that all members are true believers. In the New Testament church, as among the Old Testament congregation, "they are not all Israel, which are of Israel" (Romans 9:6). It is also important to remember that the living members of the true church are not perfectly, or even nearly perfectly, holy. On the contrary, there "remain in them great infirmities." (Cf. also the Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 114) This is important to keep in mind because there always are sects which wickedly break with the true church, as though she were the false church, because they see hypocrites in the church and because they do not find the lives of the members of the church as holy as they would like them to be.

Calvin warns against this: "Thinking there is no church where there is not complete purity and integrity of conduct, they, through hatred of wickedness, withdraw from a genuine church, while they think they are shunning the company of the ungodly" (*Institutes*, IV, I, 13). No one may despise, or leave, the church because wicked men appear in it; nor may anyone reject a church as false church because the members, including the officebearers, are sinful men. Calvin is correct when he analyzes this separatistic spirit and action as "excessive moroseness (which) is more the result of pride and a false idea of sanctity, than genuine sanctity itself, and true zeal for it. Accordingly, those who are the most forward, and, as it were, leaders in producing revolt from the Church, have, for the most part, no other motive than to display their own superiority by despising all other men" (*Institutes*, IV, I, 16).

The false church is an assembly that has the name and appearance of the church of Jesus Christ, but which has so apostatized from the Word of God, or corrupted it, that Christ is not present in her preaching, sacraments, and discipline as Head and Savior, so that His Spirit does not work faith, or give salvation, through these activities of the church. There may be children of God scattered among false churches, but this is in spite of the work of these churches; and these children of God must leave.

Mohammedanism is not a false church, but a pagan religion. The Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and the Unification Church of Moon are not false churches, but cults. But a Protestant church with an orthodox tradition; a smiling preacher with Christ always on his lips; and a congregation that bends over backward to show warmth and friendliness for Jesus' sake (especially to new members) which denies the Godhead of Jesus and atonement of sin in the blood of the cross and which teaches social salvation by human works is a false church.

It is exactly the name and semblance of a Chris-

tian church that pose a threat to God's people and that make the warning against the false church necessary.

Holy Scripture sounds this warning. Matthew 7:15 tells us to "beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." Where there is false prophecy, there is a false church. John 10:1 speaks of a pretender-shepherd of the flock of Christ "that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way." Commenting on this text, Calvin explains: "For if they who are called shepherds attempt to lead us away from Christ, we ought to flee from them, at the command of Christ, as we would flee from wolves or thieves; and we ought not to form or maintain intercourse with any society but that which is agreed in the pure faith of the Gospel." Before the second coming of Christ, Antichrist will sit as God "in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (II Thess. 2:4). This takes place through the diligent, seemingly Christian labor on his behalf of the "false prophet" (Rev. 13:11ff.; 19:20).

The identifying mark of the false church is that she lacks the marks of the true church, i.e., the pure doctrine of Holy Scripture, a pure administration of the sacraments; and the exercise of church discipline in the correcting of sin. Rich in the incidentals of size, ecclesiastical reputation, earthly influence, religious ritual and busyness, and pomp (which, alas, fascinate many professing Christians in every age); she is destitute of the essentials of the Body of Jesus Christ in the world.

Still, she makes something of preaching, sacraments, and discipline. What she makes of them gives her away. She preaches another gospel than the gospel of salvation from sin by grace alone. She corrupts the administration of the sacraments by adding to the sacraments ordained by Christ, both as regards number and ritual; by taking away from the administration elements prescribed by Christ; by administering them to persons whom Christ judges unworthy; and, not least, by corrupting the meaning and truth of the sacraments in her teaching. She perverts the key-power of discipline, for not only does she refuse to excommunicate those who live impenitently in grossest disobedience to the Law of God, but she also turns in fury upon those who, in their zeal for holiness, rebuke her for her wicked doctrines and evil practices. In short, she is not founded on, subject to, or upholding the truth of God's Word, sacred Scripture. Not submitting, thus, to the yoke of Christ, she is not Christ's Bride, but a whore.

Since every believer knows the Word of God, it is easy for him to know and distinguish the false

church from the true church.

It is a mistake to identify one particular institute as the true church in distinction from all others which are then regarded as false. This is the position of Rome. Rome is the true church; all other churches are false. There might seem to be a softening of this hard line today. Rome calls the Protestants "separated brothers." The Second Vatican Council went so far as to refer to Protestant congregations as "Churches or ecclesial communities" and to say that "in some real way they are joined with us in the Holy Spirit" ("Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," Chapter II, 15). But Vatican II also insisted that Rome is "the Church," "Mother Church," and made clear that the "separated brothers" (read: "prodigal sons"! ) must return to Rome.

With the exception of Luther in his most fiery, and least attractive, moments, the Reformers did not take the position that all churches except one were false. At the time of our Confession, Protestantism had divided into Lutheran churches and Reformed churches. Calvin, Farel, Beza, De Bres, and other Reformed leaders recognized the Lutheran churches as true churches, as well as the Reformed churches (cf. A. D. R. Polman, *Onze Nederlandsche Geloofsbelijdenis*, III, pp. 351ff.).

Herman Hoeksema warns against a fanatical application of the "true Church-false Church" distinction: "This does not mean that the believer who takes this calling seriously (the calling to join himself to the purest manifestation of the church in the world—D.E.) imagines that no one is saved outside of the particular church in which he has his membership" (*Abundant Mercy*, p. 78).

The Roman Catholic Church is the false church. This was the intent of the description of the false church in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession, along with the Anabaptist sects. In a corresponding article, Article 28, the French Confession of Faith of 1559 expressly names "the papal assemblies," condemning them as "properly speaking...no Church," since the pure Word of God is banished from them, their sacraments are corrupted, or falsified, or destroyed, and all superstitions and idolatries are in them." It does, however, see "some trace of the Church...left in the papacy," so that Roman Baptism is recognized as valid Baptism. (Cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, II, 11.) The Reformed agree with Luther's judgment of Rome:

...it is evident that as the arch-whore of the devil they have abandoned the ancient church and its ancient bridegroom and have not only become apostate and heretical (for that word is too light and too honorable for such a hussy), but Antichrist and

'antigod,' indeed, the last and most shameless bride of the devil, setting herself up even above God (just as her bridegroom in heaven wanted to do)" ("Against Hanswurst," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 41, p. 205).

Rome preaches another gospel of righteousness by works, wreaks havoc with the sacraments, and is stained red with the blood of countless thousands of Waldensian, Huguenot, Dutch Reformed, and other saints. Although some treacherous Reformed congregations may pray for Rome as was done when the Roman idol came to Chicago not long ago, the souls of the martyred saints under the altar pray against Rome, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Rev. 6:10); and we do still pray, with heartfelt sincerity, the petition once found in the Anglican liturgy: "From the tyranny of the Bishop of Rome, and all his detestable enormities, good Lord deliver us."

Apostate, modernist Protestant churches are the false church. These are the churches that deny the Godhead of Jesus and the blood-theology of the cross; proclaim humanism and social improvement for a gospel; and, while nourishing in their bosom (and at the holy Table of the Lord) every kind of heretic, revolutionary, and scoundrel, bar from their ministry those men who cannot but submit to the commandment of God prohibiting the ordination of women, and harass, persecute, and drive out the godly.

Like the Anabaptist sects at the Reformation, the churches of our day which are founded on spiritual experiences rather than the Word of God and which proclaim their "baptism with the Holy Spirit" rather than the cross of Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of sins are the false church.

The marks of the false church become horrifyingly visible in Reformed churches in Europe and in our land. There is the basic denial of the authority of the Word of God, Holy Scripture, not only in practice, but also in official declaration. By virtue of this fact, Jesus Christ is renounced as Head of the church and His yoke cast off. Instead of the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached worldly liberation (of females, blacks, the poor, homosexuals, and what not), or universalism, or salvation dependent on man's works and will. Instead of the things which Jesus has commanded are preached the commandments of men, as the rule of a Christian life. Churches profane the sacraments by admitting to them members who maintain doctrines and practices inconsistent with the name of Christians. The powers in the church, an arrogant hierarchy, puffed up by and jealous of their own authority, if unable to excommunicate the pastors and people who rebuke the church for her errors, persecute them with ridicule and various pressures; and govern the church, not according to the Word, but by pulling strings and shameful political maneuverings, so that their will is done.

This is not to say that they have become the false church, much less that there are not true churches among them; but it is to say that the apostasy from the Word of God in Reformed churches is the deadly serious matter of losing the marks of the true church and becoming the false church.

No one may join the false church for any reason. All those who are in a false church must leave, regardless of the consequences. And for one to leave the true church for a church which apostatizes is not only inexcusable carelessness and folly, but is also contrary to the ordinance of God. From the true church, "no man has a right to separate himself."

## The Marks of the Church and the Means of Grace

*Prof. Robert D. Decker*

A staggering and to many people a bewildering number of churches (denominations) have developed through the years since the time of the great sixteenth century Reformation. It is not our intention to discuss the reasons for this phenomenon. Rather, the question we face is: how does one determine which church is true? What characterizes a true, faithful manifestation of Christ's Body in the world?

It is not impressive sanctuaries and beautiful liturgies which characterize the true church. The number of members in a denomination has nothing to do with this question. Vast world mission and multimillion-dollar world-relief programs have no bearing on the question. Make no mistake, many of these are certainly legitimate concerns of the church. The church is commissioned by Christ to preach the gospel to all nations. And the church is

called by God to relieve the poor and needy. But these are not *the* marks by which God's church may be known in the world.

After asserting that everyone is bound by God to join himself to the true church the *Belgic Confession of Faith* speaks of its marks in these terms: "We believe that we ought diligently and circumspectly to discern from the Word of God which is the true Church, since all sects which are in the world assume to themselves the name of the Church.... The marks, by which the true Church is known, are these: if the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin: in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church. Hereby the true Church may be certainly known, from which no man has a right to separate himself.... As for the false Church, she ascribes more power and authority to herself and her ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit herself to the yoke of Christ. Neither does she administer the sacraments as appointed by Christ in His Word, but adds to and takes from them, as she thinks proper; she relieth more upon men than upon Christ; and persecutes those, who live holily according to the Word of God, and rebuke her for her errors, covetousness, and idolatry. These two Churches are easily known and distinguished from each other" (Article XXIX). Notice the clear, direct, and unequivocal language of this marvelous Reformed Confession. The marks of the true church are the preaching of the pure doctrine of the gospel, the maintaining of the sacraments as instituted by Christ, and the exercise of church discipline. By these marks the true church is "easily and certainly known, from which no man has a right to separate himself." The *Confession* flatly contradicts the notion of many today who make it appear as though it were extremely difficult to distinguish the true from the false church. The *Confession* also puts the lie to the notion held by many that it makes little difference which church a man joins. The true church is certainly and easily known by its three marks and no man has a right to separate himself from that church.

This is the language of the Bible. When the types and shadows, the sacrifices and ceremonies of the Old Dispensation were fulfilled in the cross and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour commanded the apostles and in them the entire church to go into all the world preaching and baptizing, making disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15; etc.). Having celebrated the last Passover in the evening before the cross, the

Lord instituted the Lord's Supper with its visible signs and seals of His broken body and shed blood. Jesus commanded us: "This do in remembrance of me" (Matthew 26:26-28; Luke 22:17-20; I Corinthians 11:23-30). That church discipline must be exercised is also abundantly evident from Scripture. The Apostle Paul admonishes the Corinthian believers not to keep company with fornicators (I Corinthians 5). Elders who rule well are to be counted worthy of double honor (I Timothy 5:17). Elders must possess definite qualifications for that office (I Timothy 3). Elders are called to shepherd the flock of God, taking the oversight thereof (I Peter 5:2). God's people are admonished to obey them that have the rule over them and who watch for their souls (Hebrews 13:7, 17). By these marks (the preaching of the pure doctrine of the Gospel, the proper administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of church discipline) God's church is known and distinguished in the world. Where these are found there the true church is. To join ourselves to that church is our calling. Our salvation and the salvation of our children depend on that!

Herman Hoeksema had this to say concerning the relationship among these marks: "...although each of them is important and must be present to indicate the true church of Christ in the world, they are nevertheless not to be viewed as three separate marks, of equal importance and without connection with one another. On the contrary, in a sense they are all comprehended and implied in the first, the pure preaching of the Word of God. For, first of all, the administration of the sacraments and the exercise of Christian discipline have no meaning without the preaching of the Word. They are subservient to the preaching. In the sacraments, holy baptism and the Lord's Supper, the Word of God is, as it were, presented in visible and tangible form. And the very power of true Christian discipline is the Word of God and its preaching. Besides, where the Word of God is purely preached in all its fullness, there the sacraments are not likely to be profaned, while such preaching is already in itself exercise of Christian discipline. Hence, we may say that the one all-important distinguishing mark of the true church is the pure preaching of the Word of God. Where the Word of God is preached and heard, there is the church of Christ. Where the Word is not preached, there the church is not present. And where that Word is adulterated, the church must either repent or die" (*Reformed Dogmatics*, p. 620).

The reason why the preaching of the pure doctrine of the Gospel is the chief mark of the church is clearly taught in Scripture. The church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets,

Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19-22). In Christ the building (church) fitly framed together grows unto an holy temple in the Lord. That foundation is the Word of God. Another foundation can no man lay! This is precisely why the preaching of the pure doctrine of the Gospel is the indispensable chief mark of the church. If anyone preaches another doctrine he is not building upon the foundation of Christ.

Still more, the preaching of the pure doctrine of the gospel is the chief mark of the church of Christ because it is the chief means of grace, the means by which Christ gathers His church out of the nations. The exalted Christ gave "...some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-13). This means that the office of the ministry (pastor-teacher) is the gift of Christ to His church. Christ gave the church the ministry of the Word so that it might reach its full growth and maturity in Him. By the means of preaching, Christ preserves His people in the world. He keeps them from being tossed about by every wind of doctrine brought by deceiving false teachers (Ephesians 4:14). In this same vein the Apostle Paul charges Timothy in the sight of God to preach the Word (I Timothy 4:1ff). The time is coming when they will not endure sound doctrine. They will heap to themselves teachers having itching ears. They will turn from the truth to fables. Timothy, therefore, must be diligent and faithful in the preaching of the inspired Word of God. That Word is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly

furnished unto all good works (I Timothy 3:16, 17). Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:27). The sheep hear the very voice of Christ. How can that be true today? The answer is: by means of the preaching of the pure doctrine of the gospel. Scripture says: "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in Whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him Whom (the word "of" does not appear in the Greek) they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent?" (Romans 10:13-15). One must call upon the name of the Lord to be saved. To do this he must believe in Christ, and to believe in Christ he must hear Christ. He must hear the very voice of Christ. Only Christ is able to quicken the hearts of His people so that they believe. The only way to hear the voice of Christ is by means of a preacher who is sent by Christ. The simple fact is that it pleases God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. God is pleased to use that means in order that no flesh may glory in His presence (cf. I Corinthians 1:21, 29.)

For this reason: "The pure preaching of the Word is the all-important mark whereby you may distinguish the true church in the world. We may also put it succinctly in this form: the church is where Christ is, and Christ is where the Word is preached and maintained in all its purity. Hence, it is the calling of all true believers to join themselves to the purest manifestation of the body of Christ in the world, a manifestation that may be known by the marks of the true church, viz., the pure preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, the exercise of Christian discipline. And of these three the preaching of the Word is the very heart" (H. Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p. 621).

## Book Reviews

**THE NEW CENTURY BIBLE COMMENTARY**, Editors: Ronald E. Clements (Old Testament) and Matthew Black (New Testament); Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. (Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko.)

I have a number of these commentaries given for review. Before making a few remarks about them individually, there are a few points to be made about the commentaries generally.

The set is a reprint of books published in England in the '70s, which is being produced by Eerdmans. All the volumes are not yet published. It is my personal judgment that they offer little which is not available in already published commentaries although they do bring recent Bible studies up to date. However, this is, in a certain sense, a disadvantage because, on the whole, they are not easily read by anyone who does not have a technical

training in the field of Bible study. Further, they are affected by neo-orthodoxy, although this is true of some more than others. The commentaries are written by different men.

While they all have rather extensive introductions which are quite interesting, the body of the commentaries are very brief and offer little help in the understanding of the text.

A consideration of individual books.

**THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES**, by William Neil; 270 pp. (paper)

Of the 270 pages, 60 pages are introduction and 6 pages are indices.

The neo-orthodox emphasis comes out, e.g., in the contention of the author that all the speeches recorded in Acts are the work of one editorial hand. There is no mention made of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

**ROMANS**, by Matthew Black; 191 pp. (paper)

While it is almost impossible to conceive of a commentary on Romans being contained in less than 200 pages, 30 of these is given over to introduction. The book is very technical and difficult to read. There is almost no exegesis given of such important passages as 1:19-32, 5:12-14, 8:29, 30, 9:9-19. Where exegesis is given, it is wrong and the author makes faith the ground of justification and denies original guilt. The author maintains that Paul assumes current rabbinical interpretation in several sections, an evidence of his neo-orthodoxy.

**GALATIANS**, by Donald Guthrie; 164 pp. (paper)

There are about 100 pages of commentary and 54 pages of introduction. The introduction is good and the treatment of the historical sections in Galatians is also quite good. But the doctrinal parts of this important book are very scantily treated. This author too maintains that Gal. 3:15, e.g., is evidence of rabbinical influence.

**COLOSSIANS AND PHILEMON**, by Ralph P. Martin; 174 pp. (paper)

In this book even the introduction is technical and difficult to read. The doctrinal sections in Colossians are given scanty treatment and neo-orthodox influence is also evident here. E.g., wives need no longer obey their husbands in our modern culture (p. 119).

**THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW**, by David Hill; 365 pp. (paper)

Perhaps more than the others, this book is evidence of the commitment to form criticism. The historicity of many of the gospel narratives is denied. "These stories are constructed around a series of testimonies, and are, despite their sobriety of

tone, primarily instruments of theological statement rather than examples of historical description." The book is difficult to read and is of little value to one who seeks in Scripture the revelation of the God of our salvation in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**THE NEW CENTURY BIBLE COMMENTARY, THE GOSPEL OF MARK**, Hugh Anderson; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981; 362 pp. \$8.95 (paper). (Reviewed by Prof. Robert D. Decker)

**THE NEW CENTURY BIBLE COMMENTARY, EPHESIANS**, C. Leslie Mitton; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981; 232 pp., \$6.95 (paper) (Reviewed by Prof. Robert D. Decker)

The first of these commentaries, *The Gospel of Mark*, is a classic example of redaction criticism (a school of higher criticism). Neither author is committed to the doctrine of inspiration as held by us. According to Mitton, for example, Ephesians was not written by the Apostle Paul. Ephesians was written by some unknown follower of Paul and is a collection of Paul's main teachings and doctrines. The author leaned heavily on other Pauline writings, especially Colossians. The exposition in the body of the commentaries is both scanty and in many places in error. This is true of the doctrine of predestination in the doxology of Ephesians 1.

For the Reformed believer neither of these commentaries is of any value. Seminary students and professors who need to keep abreast of what is going on in higher criticism might find them useful from that point of view.

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## WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On February 21, 1982, our parents, MR. AND MRS. ALBERT VAN DEN TOP, celebrated their 35th wedding anniversary. We, their children, are thankful to our Heavenly Father for the Christian home and spiritual guidance they have given us. Our prayer is that God may continue to bless and strengthen them as they go down life's pathway together.

"Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord; that walketh in His ways." (Psalm 115:1)

Mr. and Mrs. John Wynia  
Brian, Lisa, Jennifer, Brent  
Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Van Den Top  
Lannette, Lavonne, Lori, Leah  
Mr. and Mrs. Robert Blankespoor  
Cheryl, Brenda, Rachel, Sharla, Kathie, Timothy, Daniel  
Mr. and Mrs. Wesley De Groot  
Bruce, Jill, Mark, Philip  
Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Hoksbergen  
Julie, Jonathan  
Mr. and Mrs. Duane Alsum  
Jayson, Eryn, Amber  
Miss Sharon Van Den Top

## CALL TO ASPIRANTS TO THE MINISTRY

All young men desiring to begin studies for the 1982-83 academic year in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches should make application at the March 18, 1982 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

Pre-Seminary Students:

A transcript of grades from high school and college (if any), a letter of testimony from the student's pastor or consistory, and a certificate of health from a reputable physician must accompany the application.

Seminary Students:

A testimonial from the student's consistory that he is a member in full communion, sound in faith and upright in walk, a certificate of health from a reputable physician, and high school and college transcripts must accompany the application. All applicants to the seminary department must have completed the equivalent of a four-year college education (125 semester hours) and must meet the course requirements for entrance to the seminary department. These entrance requirements are listed in the seminary catalog available from the school.

All seminary department applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student can not appear at the March 18th meeting, notification of this fact along with a suggested interview date must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

All correspondence should be directed to the Theological School Committee, 4949 Ivanrest Ave. S.W., Grandville, Michigan 49418.

Jon Huisken, Secretary

## NOTICE!!!

The Hull School Board announces that a teacher will be needed for the 2nd and 3rd grades in the coming 1982-83 season.

Those interested write to:

Mr. Ron Koole  
306 - 2nd Ave.  
Hull, Iowa 51239 or  
Phone 1-712-439-1060 (home)  
1-712-439-1113 (school)

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies Aid of the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church wishes to express its sympathy to a fellow member, Mrs. Phil Dykstra in the loss of her father, ALDEN STONER.

"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee." (Isaiah 43:2).

Rev. G. Van Baren, Pres.  
Mrs. George Hoekstra, Sec'y.

## WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On March 10, 1982, our parents, MR. AND MRS. JOHN VAN DEN TOP will observe their 30th wedding anniversary.

We, their children and grandchildren, thank them for the covenant instruction and Christian love they have given us. We thank our Father in heaven for sparing them for us and for each other. May His grace continue to go with them.

"For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting and His truth endureth to all generations." (Psalm 100:5).

Alan and Vi De Boer  
Bradley and Andon  
Steve and Lavonne Abma  
Jodi and Janae  
Marvin

## WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

March 17 will mark the 30th wedding anniversary of our parents, MR. AND MRS. GARRET FLIKKEMA. These many years God has blessed them together and in His faithfulness and love guided them along their pathway. He in His faithfulness has given them children and grandchildren, and we their children and grandchildren thank our faithful God for our parents and for what He has given us through them.

"The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel." (Psalm 128:5, 6).

Rev. Richard and Marcia Flikkema  
George and Denise DeJong  
Bill and Pat DeJong  
Jim Flikkema  
and five grandchildren

## WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On March 4, 1982, our parents, MR. AND MRS. HENRY HOLSTEGE will celebrate, the Lord willing, their 45th wedding anniversary.

We, their children, are deeply grateful to our heavenly Father that He has seen fit to bless us with these God-fearing parents, who have instructed us in His ways. We pray that God will always be near them and bless them in the years to come.

"For this God is our God forever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death." (Psalm 48:14).

Len and Marcia Holstege  
Jay and Arla Holstege  
Larry and Elaine Lubben  
Harv and Marilyn Holstege  
Clair and Tina Holstege  
and 19 grandchildren

# News From Our Churches

Our calling churches (Redlands, California and Isabel, South Dakota) continue to call undershepherds to come over and help them. From a trio of Reverends Engelsma, Kamps, and Kuiper, Redlands extended a call to Rev. Kamps, pastor of our Doon, Iowa congregation. Since that call was extended, Rev. Kamps has requested a two-week extension in his consideration of it. Isabel has called Rev. Moore of our Edmonton, Alberta congregation from a trio also including Reverends Kamps and Kortering. (Since the initial writing of this

column, we have learned that Rev. Moore has accepted the call to Isabel.)

\* \* \* \* \*

The following three unrelated news items come our way via Hudsonville, Michigan bulletins of December and January: First, "Radio: The consistory expects to begin broadcasting one of our sermons each Saturday at 9 p.m., beginning March 14, over W.J.B.L., F.M. Tell others about this coming broadcast." Since this news column should reach our west Michigan readers before March 14, I take this

opportunity to pass that information along to all our readers within the WJBL listening area.

Second, "Visitors: We expect to have with us this evening the Rev. Tom Reid and his wife from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland. The Rev. Reid is a U.S. citizen who is married to a young lady from France and serves a congregation in the Republic of Ireland. They have one young daughter who claims citizenship in three countries. We welcome this brother into our midst and pray God's blessing also upon them as they return this week to Ireland." If you would like to refresh your memory concerning the Association for Christian Education in Ireland of which Rev. Reid is treasurer, you should reread the September 15, 1981 *S.B.* news. Due to this association's interest in establishing parental schools in the Republic of Ireland, Rev. Reid arranged to meet with a number of Protestant Reformed teachers during his visit to the states. At that time he mentioned that the organization of which he is a part plans, the Lord willing, to open a school in the fall of 1983.

Third, "Writing? For those wishing to write a card or note to our missionaries during this season (or anytime, parenthesis mine C.K.), their addresses are: Rev. Arie den Hartog, 22N Block D, Pacific Mansion, River Valley Close, Singapore 0923. Rev. Steven Houck, 5737 Pine Ridge, Haslett, MI 48840. Rev. Ronald Van Overloop, 6875 Sunny Dell Dr., Hueytown, AL 35023. Rev. C. Hanko, 400 20th East, Apt. 2, Bradenton, FL 33505."

If I may, I'd like to add to that list Rev. & Mrs. Lubbers and Rev. & Mrs. Heys, Savanna La-Mar, Jamaica, West Indies.

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If you check this column of the past few *Standard Bearers*, you will find that the hottest news item in recent issues has been information leading up to the organization of the Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore. And now that they are organized we have some more news of interest, this time concerning those organizational activities in Singapore on January 24. For that special occasion a booklet entitled, "Institution of the Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore" was printed. In that booklet is found a lengthy history of the organiza-

tion, the last two paragraphs of which read as follows:

When one views the history of the ERCS until her institution, one cannot but confess that it is all of Sovereign Grace. From the beginning, God planted the seed which initially appeared as an ugly shoot. Trials and toil, hope and joy were the portion of this young band as they trod the pilgrim way together. As the tree began to take shape, God introduced the Reformed Faith at first in a trickle and then in its soul-overwhelming torrents. God had prepared a vessel of unworthy clay to bear the treasures of His truth.

On the day of institution, 24th January 1982, the members of the ERCS will read the Resolution of Membership together from their hearts, a unified confession of their calling to be formed into the Church of Jesus Christ. All that they declare, they shall endeavor to do, not by their own frail strength but by the Grace of God. God has led them thus far, who can doubt that God will lead them on until the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even so, come Lord Jesus. Amen.

Also in that booklet is a "Founder Membership List of ERCS" which numbers 101 persons (a Hope of Walker, Michigan bulletin says 102), 12 of whom are married. These members read at their organizational service the "Resolution of Membership" referred to in the above quotation. Following are the first two paragraphs of that resolution:

We, who in times past were without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world are now made nigh only by the blood of Christ; such that we who were once not a people are now the people of God; which had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. We confess according to the Holy Scriptures as from the depth of our own hearts that it is not of ourselves that we are thus, for we were dead, but of God Who by His Holy Spirit made us alive. Our boast is in God alone for it is by grace that we are saved, not of works; not of the power of our own will, but of God.

Seeing therefore that God Who chose us from before the foundation of the world is pleased to gather us as a Church, built upon the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets contained in the Holy Scriptures with Christ as the cornerstone, we seek to be joined to the same.

I believe in holy catholic church.