

**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

THE STANDARD BEARER

SPECIAL REFORMATION ISSUE

Calvin on the Anabaptists

When the light shining from on high in a measure shattered his (Satan's) darkness... he began to shake off his accustomed drowsiness and to take up arms. And first, indeed, he stirred up men to action that thereby he might violently oppress the dawning truth. And when this profited him nothing, he turned to stratagems: he aroused disagreements and dogmatic contentions through his catabaptists (anabaptists) and other monstrous rascals in order to obscure and at last extinguish the truth.

—"Prefatory Address to King Francis"
in the *Institutes*

The Reformed Confession on the Anabaptists

Therefore we detest the error of the Anabaptists, who are not content with the one only baptism they have once received, and moreover condemn the baptism of the infants of believers, whom we believe ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant.

— *Belgic Confession*, Article 34

The Reformed Conflict with Anabaptism

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In This Issue ...

In his editorial Prof. Engelsma asks concerning the conflict with Anabaptism whether the threat of it today warrants even the *attention* of a Reformed church, let alone the devoting of an entire issue of the *SB* to its errors. Answering the question in the affirmative, he goes on to demonstrate that the *spiritual* descendants of the Anabaptists not only are still to be found, but in fact "dominate the American religious scene."

The truth of that will, we trust, become abundantly clear as you read the various articles in this special issue. For the Anabaptists of the 16th century were far more than simple "re-baptizers"; and the spirit of Anabaptism in the 20th century is found not only in the Amish but within the very churches which go still by the name Reformed.

From Prof. Hanko's "History of Anabaptism" we learn that the Anabaptists' rejection of infant baptism, though it was the one important issue which united all Anabaptists, was by no means their only errant view. There was first of all the Anabaptist dream of a kingdom of heaven established on this earth. Rev. Slopsema addresses that, from the positive point of view, in his "Meditation" on John 18:36. Rev. VanOverloop treats the Anabaptist insistence on believers' baptism. Rev. Ron Hanko argues that a rejection of infant baptism is by implication a denial of the doctrines of sovereign grace. Mr. Gerald Kuiper demonstrates that the Anabaptists' views regarding the necessity of re-baptizing those who were baptized as infants came in turn out of their view of the church, which they defined, not as a gathering of believers and their seed, but as the community of regenerated believers.

Rev. Bruinsma, by dealing in this issue with the Anabaptists' errant view of Scripture, lays the groundwork for a treatment of their teaching concerning the means of grace. Rev. Cammenga shows that Anabaptism's low view of offices in the church, as well as its independentism, has not only survived to the present but thrives in Reformed circles. And, finally, Rev. Koole distinguishes carefully between the Anabaptistic notion of world-flight and what we know as the life of the antithesis.

No wonder the Reformers considered the Anabaptists to be worse enemies than Rome.

D.D.

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Meditation

Rev. James Slopsema

The Kingdom Not of This World

Jesus answered, my kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.

John 18:36

The Jewish leaders have brought Jesus to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor.

The charge these leaders bring against Jesus is very serious. Jesus perverts the nation. He forbids the people to give tribute to Caesar. He says that He is Christ, a king (Luke 23:2).

In the privacy of his own room Pilate asks, "Art thou the king of the Jews?"

In response Jesus answers, My kingdom is not of this world....

In this answer Jesus, first, acknowledges to Pilate that He is a king. For He speaks of His kingdom. However, Jesus also assures Pilate that His kingdom is not the kind of kingdom that Pilate and the Jewish leaders envisioned. It certainly is not an earthly kingdom that will rival the government of the Roman Caesar. For His kingdom is not of this world.

How important this is for us to consider!

This kingdom is of extreme importance to the born-again believer. Being born again in Jesus Christ he is

a member of this kingdom. In this kingdom he finds his salvation.

However, there are many misconceptions that have arisen about this kingdom, which lead the saints away from the kingdom and their salvation. These misconceptions all deny that the kingdom is not of this world.

We do well, therefore, to sit at the feet of Jesus as He teaches us of His kingdom.

* * * * *

My kingdom is not of this world.

This means that Jesus' kingdom does not originate out of this world, does not find its source in this world.

By the world Jesus means the world of ungodly men and women with all its earthly wealth and might as well as its ungodly ideas, philosophy, wisdom, learning, and rhetoric.

From this world have arisen almost all the kingdoms of history. Some kingdoms have arisen out of sheer military might, as marching armies overthrow strongholds and subdue nations to the rule of one man. Other kingdoms have arisen out of the charm and rhetoric of golden-tongued orators who have promised good things to the masses. Some have arisen out of material resources and wealth, and still others out of a combination of these elements.

Jesus indicates that none of this is true of His kingdom. His kingdom does not arise out of human might or wealth or rhetoric or wisdom.

As proof of this, Jesus points out to Pilate that were His kingdom of this world, then would His servants fight, that He should not be delivered to the Jews.

We must remember the situa-

tion. The Jewish leaders were plotting Jesus' demise. They had arrested Jesus during the night. Now they have brought Him to Pilate to be condemned and executed. From a human point of view the situation was desperate for Jesus.

Were Jesus' kingdom of this world, He would definitely have commanded His servants to fight that He not be delivered into the hands of the Jews. Were His kingdom to arise out of worldly power, certainly now would be the time for His servants to take up the sword. But Jesus had forbidden this. When Jesus had been arrested the previous night, Peter had taken up his sword to defend Him. The result was that the servant of the high priest lost his ear. But Jesus had rebuked Peter, commanding him to put up his sword. Certainly Jesus' kingdom is not of this world.

If Jesus' kingdom is not of this world, from what then does it arise?

It arises out of that which the world despises and dismisses as of no account. For Jesus' kingdom arises, first, out of His death on the cross.

Remember, Jesus' death was imminent. He had been brought before Pilate, the Roman governor, by the Jewish leaders. Serious charges of treason had been leveled against Him. On this very day Jesus will be publicly condemned to death as a threat to the Roman state and be executed by crucifixion.

What good, much less a kingdom, can possibly arise from the execution of this Jesus of Nazareth, who flourished for a few years among the people and now has fallen in disgrace? For this reason the cross of Jesus became a stumbling stone to the

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Jews and foolishness to the Greeks (I Cor. 1:23).

Yet out of this shameful death, which the world dismisses as nothing, Jesus' kingdom arises.

Closely related to this, Jesus' kingdom also arises out of the *preaching* of the cross. After Jesus' death and resurrection the church preached the cross. The great apostle Paul indicated that in his preaching he came not with enticing words or the wisdom of men but he knew only Jesus and Him crucified (I Cor. 2:1ff.). Down through history the true church has proclaimed the gospel of the cross: there is full and free salvation in the cross of Jesus to all and every one who believes.

If the cross is foolishness to the world, so is the preaching of the cross. Consequently, the apostle Paul speaks of the foolishness of preaching (I Cor. 1:18, 21). Were the church to proclaim the wisdom and ideals of mankind, the world would listen. But the preaching of the cross the world dismisses as sheer nonsense!

Yet from this preaching arises the kingdom of Jesus!

* * * * *

In harmony with the fact that Jesus' kingdom is not of this world is the fact that it is not earthly in nature.

This certainly is the implication of Jesus' remarks to Pontius Pilate. The Jewish leaders charged Jesus with seeking to establish an earthly kingdom that would rival and eventually overthrow the Roman empire. With that concern Pilate questions Jesus whether He is the king of the Jews. In response Jesus assures Pilate that His kingdom is not of this world. The very clear implication is that neither, therefore, must His kingdom be conceived of as being an earthly kingdom.

This needs to be emphasized in light of the trend in the church to conceive of the kingdom as being earthly in nature. Some speak of a 1,000 year reign of Jesus on the earth after a rapture of the church and a seven-year tribulation period for the Jews. During this reign Jesus will rule, from David's throne in Jerusa-

lem, not only over the Jews but also over the nations. The Temple worship will be restored. The modern state of Israel is also viewed as God's preparation for this earthly kingdom of Jesus.

Others there are who envision the kingdom of Jesus being realized on the earth before Jesus returns. This kingdom will arise not only out of the preaching of the gospel, but also out of Christians entering into every area of life (politics, education, business, etc.) to bring the world under the control of Jesus.

Still others speak of no literal return of Jesus at all. They also deny the existence of heaven and hell. Heaven and hell are simply conditions we make for ourselves on earth. They envision a heaven on earth in which all the ills that have plagued mankind down through history will be forever eradicated. They intend to achieve this utopia through education, medicine, technology, litigation, and the like. Another key ingredient in all this is the wonderful example of Jesus. All will follow His principles so that this heaven will in effect be the kingdom of Jesus.

All these earthly views of Jesus' kingdom, however, fly directly in the face of the simple fact that Jesus' kingdom is not of this world.

If Jesus' kingdom is not of this world, the clear implication is that it is heavenly and spiritual in character.

This does not mean that Jesus' kingdom is less than real. It is very real. Jesus established this kingdom upon His ascension into heaven. In harmony with this, Jesus' kingdom is centered in heaven. Hence, it is called the kingdom of heaven. When Jesus comes again His kingdom will displace all the kingdoms of the world and of men and stand eternally in the new creation.

That Jesus' kingdom is heavenly and spiritual means that this is a kingdom in which He rules in the hearts of His people in grace and salvation.

Ever since the fall of mankind into sin the heart of man has been ruled by the devil. The result of this rule is that natural, fallen man hates

God with all his heart and walks only in sinful rebellion against God's law. This can only lead to man's eventual destruction in hell.

Jesus, however, has established a kingdom in which He conquers the hearts of those whom the Father has given to Him. Through a great work of grace Christ breaks the spiritual dominion of the devil and enthrones Himself as Lord and King. The result is a wonderful transformation so radical that it is called a new birth. Through this spiritual rule of Christ His people are filled with love for the Lord their God. Willingly they walk in His commandments. Joyfully they live a new life of friendship and fellowship with the ever blessed God. All this is, of course, only begun in the earthly pilgrimage of this life; it is made complete in eternity.

Obviously this kingdom and spiritual rule does not arise out of earthly might and wealth or human wisdom and rhetoric.

Such a kingdom can arise only out of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and out of the preaching of the cross. For through His suffering and death Jesus paid the price of sin, which is the only basis for such a great salvation as being delivered from the dominion of the Devil and being brought under the gracious rule of Jesus Christ. And it is through the preaching of the cross that Christ sees fit actually to change our hearts and enthrone Himself as Lord and King.

* * * * *

For this kingdom we must fight.

Peter's mistake in drawing his sword at Jesus' arrest was not that he fought for Jesus and His kingdom. His mistake was that he fought for an earthly kingdom and thus fought in the wrong way.

The kingdom of Jesus has enemies and will continue to have enemies until Jesus comes again to destroy them. These enemies are the devil and his host which have gained spiritual control over the world of fallen mankind.

We must fight these evil forces, first, by persevering in godliness. The devil seeks to destroy the kingdom by

leading us away from our Savior and thus destroying the good work of God in us. The devil hopes to accomplish this through the many temptations he places before us every day. Were the Devil to succeed in leading so much as one saint away from Jesus, the kingdom of Jesus would be ruined. And so we fight for the kingdom by resisting the wiles of the devil and persevering in our salvation.

But we also fight for the kingdom by gaining others to Christ. The

kingdom can not be complete until all the elect of God are brought under the spiritual domain of Jesus Christ. Consequently, the devil fights furiously to keep the elect under his control, so that the kingdom may suffer ruin. Our calling is to fight for the kingdom by gaining others to Jesus Christ.

In this great battle we cast aside all human weapons so that we may arm ourselves with the one spiritual

weapon Christ has given us: His Word. The word of the cross is the power of Jesus' kingdom. In that word the members of the kingdom find the power to persevere in the face of the devil. Through that word others are gained to Christ, as many as are ordained to eternal life.

Let us fight, therefore, for Jesus' kingdom with the sword of the Word.

And since we fight in the shadow of the cross, we fight with the assurance that the victory is ours! □

Editorial

The Enemy on the Left

Anabaptists?

Who are they?

And does a Reformed church have to bother itself with them?

Are they such a threat to the Reformation faith as to warrant devoting an entire issue of the *Standard Bearer* to their errors?

Our people must know that the Anabaptist heresy is alive and well. Indeed, it is thriving as never before. Of the two great foes of the faith of the Reformation in history, Roman Catholicism and Anabaptism, Anabaptism is by far the more serious danger to the faith today. Every Reformed Christian worthy of the name is on his guard against Rome. But many are swept away, almost unawares, by the seductions of Anabaptism.

Part of the problem is that the people do not know that the great Reformation of the 16th century had to struggle to the victory of a sound, truly Reformed church against enemies on the left as well as against the enemies on the right. The foe on the right was Rome. The foe on the left was Anabaptism. Historians have wrongly called the Anabaptists "the

left wing of the Reformation." This name is wrong because it describes the Anabaptists as part of the Reformation movement itself. Although the Anabaptists followed Luther and Zwingli out of the Roman Catholic Church, they were not part of the movement. For immediately they also separated from the Reformation churches. They went out, as John writes in I John 2:19, that they might be made manifest that they were not of the Reformation.

The Anabaptists were not "the left wing of the Reformation" but the enemies of the Reformation on the left. They were not the "radical Reformation" but a radical departure from the Reformation.

The Reformers regarded them as worse enemies than Rome. Luther declared that the Anabaptists were further removed from the gospel than Rome and that if he had to choose he would rather return to Rome than become Anabaptist. The Reformer of Scotland, John Knox, agreed. In his "A Warning against the Anabaptists," he wrote:

But of the other sort (the Anabaptists—DJE) ... the craft and

malice of the Devil fighting against Christ is more covert, and therefore more to be feared; for under the color and cloak of mortification of the flesh, of godly life, and of Christian justice, they have become privy blasphemers of Christ Jesus ... and manifest enemies to the free justification which comes by faith in his blood.... the general consent of all that sect is that God ... has no sure election, neither yet any certain reprobation, but that every man may elect or reprobate himself by his own free will.

What was it about Anabaptism that made it abhorrent to the Reformers?

The Anabaptists were a diverse lot. They ranged from the pacifistic Menno Simons to the mad millennialists of Munster. Almost in wonderment, the Reformers spoke of the "marvellous and manifold divisions and bands (of Anabaptists)." What they all held in common was the rejection of infant baptism. This meant that all those who had been baptized as infants were required to be re-baptized as adults. Hence their name, "Anabaptists," that is, "Re-baptizers." Their rejection of infant baptism was not an incidental matter to the

Anabaptists but the chief article of their religion. In a letter to Thomas Muntzer, Conrad Grebel railed on infant baptism as "a senseless, blasphemous abomination, contrary to all Scripture." The very first article of the document that comes closest to being an Anabaptist statement of faith, the Schleithem Confession of 1527, repudiates infant baptism as "the highest and chief abomination of the pope."

The rejection of infant baptism involved the denial of the covenant, both as regards the inclusion of the children of believers and as regards the unity of the old and new testaments. It also meant the denial of original sin and total depravity. A leading Anabaptist, Pilgram Marpeck, wrote, "When the children grow in the knowledge of good and evil, only then do sin, death, and condemnation come into play."

With one voice, the Anabaptists preached the false gospel of salvation by free will. Such was the place of, and so did they stress, good works in their teaching that they denied, if they did not set aside entirely, justification by faith alone — the heartbeat of the Reformation and the cornerstone of the biblical gospel. The first article of the confession of faith of Anabaptism's leading theologian, Balthasar Hubmaier, was, "Faith alone makes us holy (German: *Fromm*, that is, 'pious') before God." Thus he clearly expressed Anabaptism's radical difference from the Reformation. For the Reformation, the first article of faith is *righteousness* by faith alone, a righteousness that has nothing to do with man's works but consists of the imputation to him of the obedience of Christ. For Anabaptism, the first article is man's own holiness, a holiness that does not have its source in a preceding justification.

But the Anabaptists had little use for sound doctrine, and none for creeds. Their concern was instead the Christian life, good works, spiritual experience, and a holy congregation.

Running strongly through the movement until the debacle at Munster dampened its ardor was a

revolutionary spirit. Not only did the Anabaptists despise and reject civil government as the epitome of the godlessness of the world, feeling free to overthrow government whenever this was deemed necessary and possible, but they also yearned to overturn the entire established order. Fueling this fire was the dream of establishing the kingdom of heaven here and now. The saints must rule. The "Fifth Monarchy" of Daniel's vision must become an earthly reality through the efforts of the saints.

It should surprise no one that both the *Institutes* of Calvin and the Belgic Confession had as one of their main purposes to disassociate the Reformed churches from Anabaptism.

Non-Roman Catholic religion in America is overwhelmingly Anabaptist.

It is, however, the urgency of the conflict of the Reformed faith with Anabaptism in our day that needs to be sounded and appreciated. If one thinks only of the physical descendants of the Anabaptists, the Hutterites in South Dakota and the Amish in Indiana, he will regard the notion of a conflict as nonsense. But let him consider that the spiritual descendants of the Anabaptists dominate the American religious scene. Non-Roman Catholic religion in America is overwhelmingly Anabaptist. It rejects infant baptism; the covenant; total depravity; justification by faith alone; and sovereign, gracious predestination. Its gospel is salvation by free will and good works. It is anti-doctrinal and anti-confessional. It spurns the unity of the church as manifested in a denomination. It is individualistic; experience-centered; and millennial, dreaming the Anabaptist dream of the thousand-year, carnal reign of Christ on earth.

There is even in some quarters the surfacing of the latent Anabaptist

characteristic of revolution. The latter-day Anabaptists are willing to resort to force against the state over their church-schools, over abortion, and over other laws that they judge oppressive and unjust.

These churches call themselves evangelical or fundamentalist. In fact, they are Anabaptist.

The preachers who are the successors of Karlstadt, Muntzer, Grebel, Hut, and Joris are Graham, Hyles, Falwell, Ed Dobson, Hybels, and the entire charismatic swarm.

In one of history's ironies, the Anabaptists who once skulked in woods and fields, the outlaws of society, now worship in huge cathedrals and command the attention, and even deference, of the president.

The Reformed churches are wide open to the Anabaptist influence. They eagerly adopt Anabaptist doctrines and ways. In Grand Rapids, Reformed people flock to the Anabaptist services. Reformed consistories welcome the popular Anabaptist preachers to their pulpits.

A recent account in a Reformed periodical of a convention of supposedly young Calvinists read like the description of a wilder Anabaptist evangelistic meeting: invitations to children of the covenant to walk the aisle to embrace Jesus for the first time; music calculated to stir the emotions; arms waving in the power of the Spirit; and even a ritual of Christian hugging. And the leaders in the denomination approve. All that remains is to rebaptize as adults, repudiating infant baptism. This is coming.

Is the warning against Anabaptism urgent in our day?

Anabaptism has almost extinguished the light of the Reformed faith rekindled by the Spirit of Christ at the Reformation.

But not quite. And not ever.

There are still confessional Reformed churches that maintain the life-and-death conflict of the Reformation with the Anabaptist radicals. Among them are the Protestant Reformed Churches. This too is an irony of church history. For the beginning

of the existence of the PRC was that they were cast out as "Anabaptistic." "Doopersch," their adversaries shouted. It was a ridiculous charge. Denial of common grace was supposed to lead to "world-flight." In their response, *Niet Doopersch Maar Gereformeerd* (Not Anabaptist but Reformed), Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema dismissed the pitiful accusation as mere "mud-slinging."

"World-flight" is absolutely not our view. Exactly the opposite is our view. We exactly are determined not to go out of the world. It is exactly our intention to abandon not one single area of life. We have exactly called to God's people that it must occupy all of life. Only, we are deter-

mined that this people of the Lord, which is His covenant people, shall not forsake or deny its God in any area of life. In every sphere, that people has been called to live out of grace, out of the one grace, by which it has been implanted into Christ "World-flight," therefore, is not applicable to us.... If by "world" you mean "nature," you see clearly that we do not separate nature and grace, but everywhere want to live out of grace. And if you mean "world" in the evil sense, we do not take to flight from the world, but fight the good fight to the end ...(my translation of the Dutch).

Let it be known that the Protestant "Anabaptist" Reformed Churches contend as sharply with the

Anabaptist churches as they do with Rome. Like Rome, the Anabaptists are false churches. This is the official Reformed judgment upon them in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession.

In this conflict, we renounce the physical means that were once sinfully used against the wretched Anabaptists—drowning, fire, and sword. Those weapons accomplished nothing anyway, except to spread the heresy.

We use the weapon of the Word of God, the Word of free, sovereign grace in the covenant.

Precisely the same weapon with which we contend with Rome. □

— DJE

The History of Anabaptism

Prof. Herman Hanko

The Reformation of the sixteenth century was a mighty work of God by which the church of Christ was preserved through church reformation. To the student of history, it never ceases to be a wonder how God brought about this reformation and kept it on a steady biblical course. Not only were the Reformers giants of theology who successfully combated the errors of Rome in doctrine, worship, church government, and the Christian life, but they also successfully steered the church away from radical movements on the left which threatened the Reformation almost from the beginning.

These radical movements joined themselves to the Reformation and seemed at first to have an important role in the battle against Romish error. But they were intent on leading Protestantism in a direction wholly

contrary to Scripture. It would have been easy and was often tempting to the Reformers to incorporate such radical movements within biblical Protestantism. To reject them splintered the churches of the Reformation badly and opened the Reformers to the charge that by abandoning the authority of the pope they tore to pieces the unity of the church of Christ. And so often these radical movements seemed to be standing for all the right things.

Nevertheless, it is part of the wonder of God's work that the Reformers succeeded in opposing Rome on the right and the radical Anabaptist movement on the left.

The Anabaptist movement at the time of the Reformation was an extremely diverse movement.¹ Although all Anabaptists agreed on certain ideas, they disagreed violently

on other issues. And within the separate branches of the movement, controversies led to many schisms and splinter groups. For the purposes of this article, we will divide the movement into three branches.

Carlstadt and the Zwickau Prophets

The Lutheran Reformation reached a climax at the Diet of Worms when Martin Luther, the fearless Reformer of Germany, stood alone and defenseless before the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, the princes of Germany, and the higher prelates and theologians of the Roman Catholic Church to take his stirring stand on the basis of the Word of God. After the Diet, Luther found refuge for a while in a castle at Wartburg.

During Luther's stay in Wartburg, certain men within the Lutheran camp began to push their radical ideas in Wittenburg. They were dissatisfied with the slow progress of the reformation, especially in purging the church of the remaining elements of Romanism: vestiges of the mass, pictures, icons, altars,

Prof. Hanko is professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

¹ Balke speaks of seven different branches of Anabaptism. *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, Willem Balke (Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1981), pp. 2-4.

monkery, colored-glass windows, and such like things. Without Luther's calm guiding hand on the tiller they saw their opportunity to destroy all the hated elements of Romish practices. They unleashed in the city a wave of iconoclasm. Their followers went through the city and into the churches smashing everything which displeased them and introducing practices which, while in keeping with Reformation ideals, were being introduced slowly by Luther as he sought to bring the people to an understanding of the Word of God. The leaders were Andreas Carlstadt and Justus Jonas.

They were soon joined by men from Zwickau led by Nicholas Storck, Marcus Stubner, and Thomas Munzer. These "Zwickau prophets," as they came to be called, were radicals who combined an inward mysticism with a destructive radicalism. They relied heavily on dreams, visions, and direct revelations; they rejected infant baptism; they were chiliastic, i.e., they were of the opinion that the millennium had dawned and that it was their calling to establish the millennium of the kingdom of Christ here on earth. Wittenburg was in an uproar, and hasty and urgent letters were sent to Luther to stop the stampede.

While the Elector forbade Luther to return, fearing for Luther's life, Luther felt compelled to return to Wittenburg and, in a series of eight powerful sermons preached on eight successive days, put all the radicals to flight and restored the peace of the city. It was a remarkable demonstration of Luther's powerful pulpit preaching and a proof of his contention that the Reformation could not be accomplished by rioting and insurrection, but only by the power of the Word of God. Munzer was later instrumental in the Peasant Uprising and died at the hands of the armies sent out to quell the insurrection.

The Munster Debacle

The Reformation had come early to what is now The Netherlands, and Anabaptism had been introduced into

the Lowlands by Melchior Hofman as early as 1530. Hofman was a strange man and an erratic thinker. He also was strongly chiliastic, expected momentarily the return of Christ, and relied heavily on special revelations. He made use of fanciful and allegorical interpretations of Scripture to promote his views.

But two men, followers of Hofman, introduced what was the most radical form of Anabaptism on the continent into The Netherlands. They were Jan Matthys, who claimed to be Enoch, and Jan of Leyden, who claimed to be King David. Accepting all the strange views of Hofman, they determined to establish the kingdom of heaven, with its center in Munster, which they called the New Jerusalem. They reached the pinnacle of their power in 1535 and 1536 when, within the walls of Munster, a community was established which practiced adult baptism, community of goods and wives, and a church which relied more upon revelation through special visions given the leaders than through the words of Christ in Holy Scripture.

The city was attacked by the forces of the emperor, overcome, and destroyed, with the citizens put to flight or death. The horrible experiment of this radical wing of Anabaptism lasted but a short time.

This fanatic branch of Anabaptism was condemned by other Anabaptists, even in the Lowlands. The successors of the Anabaptists, without the fanaticism of Munster, were followers of Menno Simons. These were the beginnings of what today is known as the Mennonite Church.

Our Belgic Confession, which often mentions Anabaptist errors, was written with the Anabaptists of the Lowlands in mind, including the followers of Menno Simons. The views of Menno Simons receive special attention in Article XVIII, for it was Menno Simons who taught that the human nature of Christ did not come from Mary.

The Swiss Brethren

The wing of Anabaptism which

went under the name of "The Swiss Brethren" was the least radical of all. It repudiated especially the violent excesses of the Zwickau Prophets and the followers of Jan of Leyden.

The movement had its beginning in Zurich.² In this city Ulrich Zwingli was pressing his reformatory work. Here too certain men were not satisfied with a slow reformation and were impatient with those who counseled carefulness. The chief leaders were Conrad Grebel (often considered the founder of Anabaptism), Felix Manz, George Blaurock, Simon Stumpf, and Balthasar Hubmaier. Zwingli, in keeping with current views on the relation between church and state, wanted the City Council of Zurich to be in control of reform.

When at a public disputation in October of 1523, the Council decided in favor of Zwingli and his followers, the men who opposed him separated themselves from the Swiss Reformer to establish their own party.

While the immediate issue was the question of the speed of reform and the support of the magistracy, other issues soon arose. In rejecting the control of the Council in reformation, these men went further and established the principle of separation between church and state. But the defense of this position led to more radical positions. Grebel himself denied the legitimacy of the oath for Christians,³ the propriety of Christians going to war, and the use of the civil courts in matters of dispute among Christians.

The goal of this movement was the establishment of a Christian community, separate from the world, in which the principles of the kingdom of heaven, especially as outlined in our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, were practiced.

² Some claim that the entire Anabaptist movement began with these men. Others claim that the Wittenburg iconoclasts were the beginning.

³ Cf. The Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day XXXVII, which was written in answer to the Anabaptists.

The question of believers' baptism, in distinction from the doctrine of infant baptism, came almost immediately to the fore. It was first introduced by Wilhelm Reublin, a pastor of a church in a village near to Zurich. This denial of infant baptism became the one great issue between Anabaptists and the other branches of Protestantism. The denial of infant baptism was based partly upon the fact that the Anabaptists could find no New Testament proof for it and partly on the fact that they considered it to be an innovation brought into the church by the "Antichristian Romish Church."

When the Anabaptists were expelled from Zurich, they gathered as a hunted handful of people. At this meeting Blaurock begged Grebel to baptize him with "true Christian baptism." This was done, and Blaurock then proceeded to baptize the others in the group. From that time on, no children were baptized and all baptized adults were re-baptized.⁴

In the decades following, the Anabaptists became evangelists who

traveled throughout Europe spreading their views. They found ready ears in many places and Anabaptism became a constant thorn in the side of the true reformation.

The price the Anabaptists had to pay was great. They were hunted, imprisoned, tortured, killed. They met in private homes, woods, and caves. They suffered untold hardship. They were put on the rack, roasted in the fire, drowned in the rivers and lakes, beheaded, tortured almost beyond endurance. Yet their views continued to spread.

Closely connected with their views on believers' baptism was their position of a pure church, their emphasis on holiness and godliness in life, and their opposition to any support of the secular magistrates in ecclesiastical affairs.

Other doctrinal aberrations soon appeared in their thinking. They considered the sacraments to be of mere symbolic value. In keeping with all baptistic thought, they considered the Old Testament to be so distinct from the New that it was of lesser authority than the New for Christians. Some practiced community of goods in an effort to restore the church to the purity of apostolic times. This was

especially true of the Anabaptists in Moravia, who, under the leadership of Jacob Hutter, founded the Hutterites. Hans Denck, an Anabaptist in southern Germany, anticipated later Arminian thought with his teachings that the atonement of Christ was universal in its scope, though efficacious only for the elect.

Because the denial of infant baptism was the one great doctrinal point which united all Anabaptists, it was this doctrine which received the most attention from the Reformers. In Switzerland especially, under the leadership of such men as Zwingli, Bullinger, and Myconius, and over against Anabaptism, the doctrine of the covenant of grace (with its corollary in the unity of the Old and New Testaments) was first developed. Here too we have a remarkable demonstration of God's wise providence in using error to promote the cause of the truth.

Between the extreme of Anabaptism and the corruption of Rome, the Reformers had to steer their way. That they did so successfully is due to the sovereign grace of the Holy Spirit of Christ, who leads the church into all truth. □

⁴ Hence the name, Anabaptism, which means: Re-baptism.

The Anabaptist View of Church and State

Mr. Gerald Kuiper

Elsewhere in this issue we are introduced to the history of the Anabaptists. In the light of that history it is clear that the Reformers regarded them as great enemies of the Reformed church. John Calvin was aware of the danger they posed to the

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church and he was persuaded by Farel and others in 1544 to write against them in a pamphlet entitled, "Brief Instruction for Arming all the Good Faithful Against the Errors of the Common Sect of the Anabaptists." This pamphlet was translated and edited by B.W. Farley, and published by Baker Book House in 1982 in a book entitled *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Liber-*

tines. Calvin in this pamphlet responded to the seven articles of the Anabaptist Schleithem Confession which was written in August of 1527, primarily by Michael Sattler, an Evangelical Anabaptist. John Knox, also, in 1557 wrote in his "Letters to His Brethren, and Lords Professing the Truth in Scotland" a brief essay entitled "A Warning Against the Anabaptists," edited by Kevin Reed

and published in 1984 by Presbyterian Heritage Publications. In this essay Knox exposed the erroneous views of the Anabaptists in regard to salvation, the doctrine of the church and the sacraments, their doctrine of God, and their mistaken notion of free will. Zwingli also battled the Anabaptists in the church in Switzerland. The dangers these Reformers saw in the Anabaptist movement to a great extent remain today — Perfectionism, Free-Willism, and Separatism.

In this article we will examine the controversy between the Reformers and the Anabaptists regarding their concepts of church and state. We find that it was primarily due to the Anabaptists' view of church and state that they insisted on rebaptism or adult baptism only. To understand this we have to recognize that the "Bruder (Brothers)" or "Swiss Brethren," as the Anabaptists called themselves, regarded the high point of Christianity and the church to have lasted from the time of the apostles to the time of Constantine. They believed that the Edict of Toleration in A.D. 313 was the beginning of the downfall of the church because this Edict made the Christian religion a "permitted cult." Soon after that, Constantine made Christianity the *only religion*. Leonard Verduin, on page 95 of his book, *Anatomy of a Hybrid*, states the following: "All that happened was that the roles were reversed: the Christian faith now occupied the place from which the ancestral faith had been expelled. Whereas Christianity had been persecuted hitherto, it now found itself in the position to do some persecution of its own, which it began at once to do." Verduin maintains that Constantine had the keys for opening and closing churches' membership lists. He built churches at public expense, made the "Lord's Day" a holiday, paid money to church officers, and constructed an "iron curtain" about the church by refusing to allow the Donatists in Africa to separate from what they believed was a corrupt church.

When Constantine excused the clerics from paying taxes he did so because "their conduct of the greatest worship toward the Divinity will, in my [Constantine's] opinion, bring immeasurable benefit to the commonwealth" (from a letter quoted by Verduin, p. 99). Shortly after, Constantine proclaimed the death sentence for those who attended a *conventicle* (a non-public gathering for religious purposes). The assumption was that these conventicles were gatherings of heretics. Thus "heresy" became sedition, or crime against the state. Verduin calls this the "new sacralism." Membership in the church became forced by the state and Verduin states on page 104 that "what had happened is that the church as *Corpus Christi* (the body of Christ) had given way to *Corpus Christianism* (the body of the christened)." The idea of mission work was not to preach and let men accept or reject the Word, but to *compel* men to join the church. This destroyed for them their concept of free will. The Anabaptists then maintained that, since preaching was virtually eliminated, passive submission to the sacraments became dominant. The Lord's Supper for *believers only*, they saw replaced by the mass, in which *everyone* partook. Baptism for all infants became mandatory by the ruler of the parish. Shortly after this, "rebaptism" was punished by death for anyone who did it or partook in it. In "Christendom," good standing in the state required good standing in the church and *vice versa*. Thomas Aquinas further declared that heretics not only deserved to be excommunicated from the church, but also should be removed from the world of men by death. Then, to complete the ruin of the church, the Synod of Toulous in 1229 forbade translations of the Scriptures into the vernacular and prescribed punishment for anyone possessing a copy.

History, therefore, had intertwined the church and the state so that they were inseparable. When the Reformers refused completely to separate from the state which the Anabaptists called, at best, sub-

christian, and at worst, of the devil and demonic, the Anabaptist movement began. The birth of Anabaptism has been traced by some to Switzerland in the dispute between Zwingli and Conrad Grebel and Simon Stumpf. Whereas Zwingli wanted the city council to speak concerning the abuses of the mass, Grebel and Stumpf insisted that a decision concerning the mass could not be made by the council, "for the decision has already been made, the Spirit of the Lord decides" (p. 91, *Protestant Concepts of Church and State*, by William R. Estep). Estep explains on page 194, "For the Anabaptists, the most damaging element in the fall of the church was its alliance with the state. When church and state were joined, the church ceased to be the church." As a result, Grebel and Stumpf and their followers separated from the church

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and formed conventicles, communities of those whose religious experience denoted their conversion. There they formed a brotherhood in which they felt they could practice the virtues of regeneration such as joy, love, forgiveness, and humility. This separation from the Reformed church produced tension with the state, for the Anabaptists defined the church as the community of regenerated believers over against the idea of the "visible" and the "invisible" church.

Some of the Anabaptists became further hated for using the holy kiss, for anointing feet, for wearing veils, and for refusing luxuries through simple clothing. According to Article One of the Schleithem Confession, baptism was only for those "who have been instructed in repentance, who believe that their sins have been blotted out by Jesus Christ, and who want to walk in His resurrection." Article Two established "the Ban" to be used

against those "who have been baptized, but who ... have fallen into some error inadvertently without intention." This led, of course, to perfectionism in the church. Article Six deals with the Anabaptist view of the Magistrate. "We hold that the sword is an ordinance of God, *outside the perfection of Christ*" (italics mine, GK). Their members were not allowed to fight, to hold office, or to take an oath. Although most Anabaptists paid taxes and even prayed for their authorities, their refusal to fight or hold the office of magistrate made them hated. They held to a radical dualism. Estep, on pages 94-95, quotes from the Schleithem Confession to illustrate this dualism. "The government magistracy is according to the flesh, but the Christians' is according to the Spirit; their houses and dwellings remain in the world, but the Christians' citizenship is in heaven; the weapons of their conflict and war are carnal and against the flesh only, but the Christians' weapons are spiritual, against the fortification of the devil. The worldlings are armed with steel and iron, but the Christians are armed with the armor of God, with truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and the Word of God."

Calvin and Knox both condemned the perfectionist leanings of the Anabaptists, and their use of the ban by which they expected a perfect church on earth. Calvin's concern was not for the purity of the church in itself, but rather was motivated by a respect for the greatness and the glory of God, and a concern that rather than being banned, the member who has gone astray should be brought back to the proper path. John Knox spoke of those who "will join themselves to no congregation, except that which is perfect in all things." Calvin and Knox both held to the idea of the "Visible" and the "Invisible Church" and point out that it is not the free will of man that determines membership in the church, but the work of God in the heart of the sinner as the Spirit turns his heart to Christ. Knox and Calvin (especially Calvin) spoke of God's sovereign decree of election,

and referred to many biblical cases such as Abraham's lie, David's adultery, and the like. Therefore, the Reformers maintained it was wrong of the Anabaptists to separate themselves because of sin in the members of the church. Calvin, in his *Treatise Against the Anabaptist*, spoke of this when he said concerning the Anabaptists: "Therefore do they separate themselves from holy churches, in the which the doctrine is purely preached, taking this color, that they will not be partakers of that pollution which is done there; because those which have deserved are not banished." Calvin said that each member of the church must be responsible for self and leave the rest to God. Calvin states also on page 61 of his *Treatise Against the Anabaptists*: "We, to the contrary, say that a Christian ought certainly to be sad whenever he sees the Lord's Supper being corrupted ... to the best of his ability, he ought to work to see that such does not happen. Nevertheless ... it is not lawful for him to withdraw from communion Rather he ought always continue to worship God with the others, listen to the Word, and receive the Lord's Supper as long as he lives in that place." The Anabaptists, however, maintained their own conventicles, their emphasis and doctrines largely dependent not on creeds but on the leader who happened to be in charge.

When the Anabaptists refused to serve as magistrates, they appealed to the example of Christ when He refused to be King and refused to judge. Regarding the Anabaptists' low view of the magistrate and their refusal to serve, Luther wrote the following: "Therefore, should you see that there is a lack of hangmen, beadles, lords, or princes, and find that you are qualified, you should offer your services and seek the place, that necessary government may by no means be despised and become inefficient or perish. For the world cannot and dare not dispense with it" (p. 39, Estep). Calvin was even stronger, when he stated concerning the office of the magistracy that rulers are

raised up by God, and that kings of Israel and even prophets, such as Daniel, handled the sword as part of their office. Moses also accepted this task in obedience to God. In his treatise against the Anabaptists, Calvin wrote the following:

We worship the same God that the fathers of old did. We have the same law and rule that they had, showing us how to govern ourselves in order to walk rightly before God. It thus follows that a vocation that was considered holy and lawful then cannot be forbidden Christians today, for a vocation is the principal part of human life and the part that means the most to God. From which it follows that we should not deny ourselves the vocation of civil justice, nor drive it outside the Christian church. For our Lord has ordained it and approved it as good for the people of Israel. And He has appointed His most excellent servants to it and even His prophets (p. 78, B.W. Farley).

Most of the Reformers believed they could call on the civil magistrates to judge evil-doers. Many Anabaptists were either banished or put to death in the 16th century on the basis of the old laws that those who re-baptized or attended conventicles could be put to death. In some cases excommunication became extermination. Article 36 of the Belgic Confession states that

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God appoints rulers for men so that all things may be "carried on among them with good order and decency.... He hath invested the magistracy with the sword, for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the protection of them that do well." Article 36 also states of the magistrate that "... their office is, not only to have regard unto ... the welfare of the civil state; but also that they protect the sacred ministry; and thus may remove and prevent all idolatry and false worship (italics mine, GK); that the kingdom of anti-Christ may

be thus destroyed." Our mother church, in the Acts of Synod in 1910, pointed out that this part of Article 36 supports the principle of an Established Church, and of State domination over the Church, and that history does not support that principle, because Scripture does not subject the Christian Church to the authorities of the State that it should be governed and extended by political measures. In Estep's book on Church and State he points out that separation of church and state as we know it presently, was largely due to the amendment in the United States constitution which states that Congress may make no law regarding the establishment of religion. Most Reformed denominations today believe it is the Christian's duty to be subordinate to government, to obey it, to support it financially and personally, to hold office if elected, and to pray for it. In return, the state should protect the church without interference in its doctrine and discipline (p. 57, Estep).

Regarding fighting in wars, it should be pointed out that Zwingli died while fighting, and both Luther and Calvin maintained that it was the duty of the citizen to fight in wars, although they both defined just wars as those wars which are fought for protection and self-defense. They maintained that wars of "aggression and pillage" are unjust, and that the Christian is to obey God rather than the ruler when told to fight (p. 42ff., Estep). Revolution against the established government was abhorred by the Reformers. Luther said that subjects are to suffer in love and self-sacrifice according to the pattern of Christ, while at the same time he reserved the right to reprimand the government when they saw "gross miscarriages of function by the political authority" (p. 55, Estep).

Today, when we see the charismatics, the perfectionists, the cultists, and the free-will "evangelicals," we have to apply the same remedies as the Reformers did.

Kevin Reed, in his book (pp. 16-18) on John Knox's pamphlet about the Anabaptists, states that we have to insist in the first place on true doctrine—not Free Will and Pelagianism, but predestination. In the second place, we have to insist that the church exists where the true marks are found, namely, "the Word rightly preached, and the sacraments rightly administered." In the third place, we guard against the spread of Anabaptist notions by proper examination of the teachers and leaders in the church. The conventicles of old continue today with the charismatic and the self-proclaimed evangelists who "hawk" the name of Jesus Christ. And finally he calls the church today to purity of life as well as of doctrine. He concludes, "There is no substitute for true doctrine and godly living. When these two elements are combined, the modern Anabaptists will be disarmed, and the church will again exhibit the beauty which is fitting for the bride of Christ, to the glory of the triune God" (p. 18, Reed). □

Rev. Ronald VanOverloop

Conflict with Anabaptists Infant Baptism

The Anabaptists (as distinct from Paedo-baptists) thought the Reformers stopped half-way, and "did not go to the root of the evil. Their fundamental doctrine was, that baptism is a voluntary act, and requires personal repentance, and faith in Christ. They rejected infant-baptism as an anti-scriptural invention. They could find no trace of it in the New Testament, the only authority in matters of

faith" (Philip Schaaf, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. VII, p. 607).

The Anabaptists believed that infant-baptism "was an invention of the popish Antichrist, and therefore invalid." (Philip Schaaf, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. VII, p. 529). Therefore the Anabaptists underwent the sacrament of baptism again. The "ana" part of their name means "again." Later they dropped the "ana" and became designated simply "Baptists."

The Reformers were very firm in the position that they did not need to be baptized again. Philip Schaaf declares that Luther "assumed a position to the Pope and his church similar to that of the apostles to Caiaphas

and the synagogue." Therefore, while rejecting the papacy, Luther "never doubted the validity of the ordinances of the Roman Church, having himself been baptized, confirmed, and ordained in it, and he never dreamed of being re-baptized or re-ordained" (Schaaf, p. 529). Later this position was expressed in a creed of the Reformation, the Belgic Confession.

Therefore we believe, that every man, who is earnestly studious of obtaining life eternal, ought to be but once baptized with this only baptism, without ever repeating the same: since we cannot be born twice. ...therefore we detest the error of the Anabaptists, who are not content with the one only baptism they have once received, and moreover con-

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demn the baptism of the infants of believers, whom we believe ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant..." (Article 34).

The Westminster Confession of Faith is just as direct, "The sacrament of baptism is but once to be administered to any person" (XXVIII - 7).

* * * * *

Further, the Anabaptists were seriously wrong in concluding that infant baptism was an invention of the popish Antichrist. Infant baptism did not begin with the Pope in the Roman Church. Consider the following quotes of men who lived long before there was even a bishop in Rome.

Pelagius, who was born about 330, developed a most terrible concept of salvation, but this well-traveled man said, "I have never heard of even any impious heretic who asserted that infants ought not to be baptized" and "Who can be so impious as to hinder the baptism of infants?"

Augustine, who answered Pelagius' heresy with Scripture, says about infant baptism, "The whole Church practices infant baptism. It was not instituted by councils, but was always in use." He also said "This (infant baptism) the Church has always maintained."

Origen was born about the year 184, only about 84 years after the apostle John had died. In his commentary on Romans he says, "For this cause it was that the Church received an order from the apostles to give Baptism to infants."

From these quotes (many others could be given) we can clearly see that infant baptism was not an invention of the popish Antichrist, but was obviously the common practice in the church of Jesus Christ already just after the death of the apostles.

* * * * *

Did the Reformers simply walk in the footsteps of the church fathers and of the Roman church without much study and thought? Absolutely not. They were much better students of Scripture than that. The Reformers and their faithful disciples (not all

with the name should really have the name) believed that the Scriptures teach paedobaptism.

A creed of the Reformation, the Heidelberg Catechism, gives as its first ground for infant baptism that which is the chief biblical defense for the baptism of the infants of believers: "they, as well as the adult, are included in the covenant and church of God." This is the essential ground for paedobaptism. The lambs of the sheep are in the flock as much as the sheep are.

We will prove this from Scripture later. First, we show that this essential ground for paedobaptism arises from an even more fundamental foundation, namely, *the unity of the covenant*, of the Scriptures, and of the people of God. Because the relationship between the Old and New Testaments is one of continuity (of promise and fulfillment), we can understand the continuing validity of the principles behind Old Covenant circumcision, which the Holy Spirit has transferred into the New Covenant baptism (confer Colossians 2:11,12). The covenant sign has changed because after Christ no more blood is to be shed. Now the water shows the forgiving and cleansing power of Christ's sacrifice.

*...infants
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Once we understand the unity of the covenant, then we can see the Scriptures teaching and implying that the children of believers are included in the covenant and church of God along with their believing parent(s). God declared to Abraham, "the father of all them that believe" (Romans 4:11; cf. also Galatians 3:7), "I will establish my covenant between me

and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Genesis 17:7; cf. also Acts 2:39). When God gave His law to Israel and to us, then the fact that there is a commandment directed to the children of believers indicates that God considered them to be in His covenant and church. If there is still some doubt, the apostle Paul removes it when he addresses the Christian congregation at Ephesus as "saints, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus" and then later directs himself to the children of the congregation (6:1-3).

Let it be noted well that the infants of faithful believers are not baptized because these children are regenerated or presupposed as being regenerated. What is to be ascertained is not whether the child is regenerate but whether he/she is to be regarded as a member of the covenant, which baptism signifies and seals.

Those who are of age and who are from outside the sphere of the truth enter the covenant when they confess their faith in the Christ of the Gospel. Once in the covenant, their children come with them, for the children of one or two believing parents are "holy," that is "set apart from the world unto God." Therefore they are entitled to the sign and seal of the covenant. While repentance and faith is required of one of age and from outside the covenant before they are baptized, we administer the sacrament of baptism to the infants of repenting and believing parents because God commands the church to administer the sign to those in the covenant.

The child's membership in the covenant with their believing parents is because the family, not the individual, is the basic unit in Scripture. The promise is to us and to our children. Therefore, it is most natural to find the New Testament speaking of household baptisms (whether there were infants in them or not), in which all the household servants were baptized along with all the immediate family members. This is our answer to the request of the Anabaptists for a

biblical example of an infant being baptized. Anabaptists must give a biblical example of adult baptism being administered to someone who was born to and raised by believing parents. I would contend that they can find none.

Another creed of the Reformation, the Belgic Confession, Article 34—Of Holy Baptism, defends the baptism of the infants of believers on the basis of four grounds. First, because “the children in Israel formerly were circumcised, upon the same promises which are made unto our children.” Secondly, the children of believers “ought to receive the sign and sacrament of that which Christ has done for them” because He “shed His blood no less for the washing of the children of the faithful, than for adult persons.” Thirdly, “the Lord commanded in the law, that they should be made partakers of the sacrament of Christ’s suffering and death, shortly after they were born, by offering for them a lamb, which was a sacrament of Jesus Christ.” And fourthly, “what circumcision was to the Jews, that baptism is to our children,” for which reason “Paul calls baptism the circumcision of Christ.”

The Heidelberg Catechism adds that “the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is promised to them no less than to the adult.”

* * * * *

Paedo-baptism is accurately defined as the baptism of the infant children of faithful and vowing believers.

It is not just any infant who is baptized, nor is every infant of anyone on the church’s membership roles. This must be said loudly and forcefully, for many Baptists charge paedo-baptists with baptizing almost at random. We sadly acknowledge that some churches misuse the sacrament, baptizing quickly the infants of members even though they might never see the parents again. (Some Baptist churches however are just as quick to immerse everyone who comes forward and makes a decision.)

The proper use of infant baptism requires that the parents must be evi-

dently believers in their confession and walk. It is to be assumed that it was by means of a confession of their personal and subjective faith they became members of the local church, and that the content of their faith was in harmony with the objective faith of the Scriptures. This faith they must be willing to confess again publicly just prior to the baptism of their child. This makes as apparent as possible that they are believers.

That only the children of faithful believers are baptized is confirmed by the fact that the beginning of Christian discipline consists of what is called “Silent Censure.” This latter consists of prohibiting that person from participating in the administration of the sacraments. One who is under discipline is not permitted to have his child baptized. The proper administration of paedo-baptism in a truly Reformed church holds to the position that only the children of faithful believers are baptized.

There is more. Not only must the parents be evidently believers, but also they must be vowing believers. Before they are allowed to have their child baptized they are asked to make a vow. The content of this vow is the promise to train up their infant child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Of this vow they will be frequently reminded by the church in the preaching and by the elders in their on-going oversight of the congregation.

Let it be crystal clear that the proper exercise of paedo-baptism is not the baptism of babies at random. The proper administration of paedo-baptism is within the sphere of a church where the instruction and admonitions of the Gospel are always brought and where Christian discipline is being properly exercised. Note well that the three marks of the true church go together.

* * * * *

Some concluding observations.

The position of paedo-baptism is not to be taken to mean that *all* the children of believers are saved. Nor does it teach that *only* the children of believers are saved. God calls some

out of darkness later in their life. They are immediately incorporated into the covenant and have the promise of God that He gathers His people in their generations.

*“Believer baptism”
is not a safeguard
against baptizing
some who are
not elect.*

There is a charge made by Anabaptists against paedo-baptists that the former baptize willy-nilly, because there is no evidence that the one baptized has faith. We have two responses. First, Scripture requires that baptism be administered, not upon evidence of faith, but upon proof of membership in the covenant. And secondly, Anabaptists do not really hold to “believer’s baptism,” as they contend, but to “professor’s baptism,” for no honest Anabaptist would say that everyone they baptize is really and ultimately saved. “Believer baptism” is not a safeguard against baptizing some who are not elect.

Where paedo-baptism is properly administered, it is accompanied with the faithful preaching of the Gospel which includes the admonition to be ever repenting and believing. It is also accompanied with the proper exercise of Christian discipline. It is constantly being pointed out that the covenant obliges one to a new obedience. Also, those who are brought up within the sphere of the covenant but who refuse to repent, believe, and obey are disciplined; and their baptism is and will be a witness against them. This is a mighty force against the dangers of complacency and irresponsibility.

May God grant the grace that we, children of the Reformation, may be faithful to the proper exercise of paedo-baptism. □

Infant Baptism and Sovereign Grace

Rev. Ronald Hanko

And although our young children do not understand these things, we may not therefore exclude them from baptism, for as they are without their knowledge, partakers of the condemnation in Adam, so are they again received unto grace in Christ.

This passage from the *Form for the Administration of Baptism* that is used in the Protestant Reformed Churches very nicely sums up what we wish to show in this article, that is, that infant baptism is part and parcel of the doctrines of sovereign grace, and that a denial of infant baptism is essentially a denial of these doctrines of sovereign, irresistible, efficacious grace.

The point in the *Form for the Administration of Baptism* is that infants can be and are saved "without their knowledge" (Ps. 139:13, Jer. 1:5, Lk. 1:15, Mk. 10:13-16), and that they can, therefore, also receive the sign of that salvation, baptism, "without their knowledge." To put it differently, there is no other way to save an infant than by sovereign grace. He cannot make any response to the Gospel or its promises and therefore must be saved solely by the grace of God.

So, if an infant is to receive baptism as the sign of salvation, he must be baptized on some other ground than his *response* to the Gospel promises. He is incapable of such a response. He must, in fact, be baptized

simply on the ground of God's promise to be the God of His people and of their children (Gen. 17:7, Acts 2:31). And though on the basis of that promise we may certainly expect such a response from him in later life, neither his salvation nor his receiving the sign of that salvation depend in any way on that response.

The truth is, of course, that no one is saved by virtue of his response to the Gospel. Anything else is a denial of salvation by grace alone and without works. Yet, even those Baptists who believe in sovereign grace and salvation by grace alone say that a person's receiving the sign of that salvation depends on his response to the Gospel! He can receive salvation "without his knowledge," that is, even before he is able to respond, while he is still dead in sin, but cannot receive the sign of that same salvation in the same way. How inconsistent!

*...only the teaching
of infant baptism
fits the doctrines of grace
and the truth that
salvation is by grace alone
without works.*

Baptism as the sign of salvation ought, therefore, to reflect the character of salvation, and indeed it does — especially the free and gracious character of that salvation God has given us in Christ. And it does that in a very wonderful and beautiful way when infants are baptized. In fact, it is our firm conviction that *only* the teaching

of infant baptism fits the doctrines of grace and the truth that salvation is by grace alone without works. And what a beautiful picture of sovereign grace it is when a tiny infant, not even aware of what is happening to him, receives the sign of God's grace and of salvation in the blood of Jesus.

It is really not enough, however, to say that baptism is the sign of salvation. It is, really, the sign of *baptism* — that is, what we call "baptism" is just the sign which points to some spiritual reality also called "baptism." Now we know that the real baptism (of which the water is the sign) is being washed from sin in the blood of Jesus. If we see that, then the truth becomes even clearer. That real baptism is *not* something that depends on our response, or even follows our response, but is "without our knowledge." Indeed, it was principally accomplished already at the cross, long before we were born. How fitting that the sign should match the reality at this point.

It is from this viewpoint that Mark 10:13-16 is sometimes used as a proof for infant baptism even though it does not mention baptism at all. The point is first that the children who were brought to Jesus were infants (the Greek word used indicates this as well as the fact that they were "brought"). Thus, without even the possibility of any kind of response from them Jesus grants them salvation; for what else is it, in coming to Him, being received by Him, and blessed by Him, but to be saved by Him? So the argument is that, insofar as these children received salvation "without their knowledge," the sign of that same salvation should not be

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withheld from them. How *could* it be withheld?

The *Belgic Confession* uses this same argument (Article 34):

And indeed Christ shed his blood no less for the washing of the children of the faithful, than for adult persons; and therefore they ought to receive the sign and sacrament of that, which Christ hath done for them.

The Baptist teaching is that repentance, faith, and conversion must precede baptism and that, therefore, baptism can and ought to be administered only to adults. This teaching is based on a misinterpretation of Matthew 28:19, 20 (and the parallel in Mark 16:15, 16), but is essentially Arminian and a denial of sovereign grace.

This is not to say that all Baptists explicitly deny the doctrines of grace. That simply is not so. In addition to those who frankly call themselves "Free-will Baptists," and those who without the name nevertheless believe in freewill, there are also many so-called "Reformed Baptists" who claim to hold both to the doctrines of grace and to "believers' baptism." Nor are we saying that such Reformed Baptists do not really believe in the doctrines of grace — only that their firm belief in free grace contradicts their equally firm belief in believers' baptism.

The bedrock of the Baptist teaching is the idea, gotten from Matthew 28:19, 20, that repentance and faith must precede baptism.

We would point out, first of all, in connection with this and other passages (Matt. 19:21; Acts 2:38; 16:30), that these passages do not say that faith or repentance must precede baptism. Even if it is true that faith and repentance must precede baptism, these verses do not say it. Nor is there any passage in all of Scripture which says that these things must precede baptism. If one argues that the order of the passage demands this, that is simply begging the question, for it may be and indeed is true that the order in these passages is important, but that does not prove that the order is a temporal order. It may simply

prove what everyone believes, that repentance and faith are more important than baptism. Following the Baptist reasoning, one might just as easily prove from II Peter 1:10 that calling comes before election!

*...the very idea
that one must believe
before receiving
the sign of salvation
and of entrance
into salvation
is implicitly Arminian*

Both of the texts only prove that repentance and faith as well as baptism are necessary for salvation.

In addition, the very idea that one must believe before receiving the sign of salvation and of entrance into salvation is implicitly Arminian — a denial of salvation by grace only. It is obviously Arminian to say that one must believe or respond to God in some way before one can be saved, but the Baptists go way beyond this and say that one must respond and believe even in order to receive that which is only a sign of salvation.

We are not saying by this that the sign of baptism does not in some cases follow upon faith. In the case of all adult converts it is necessarily so. We are only saying that it need not be so and that the Word of God does not say it must be so.

Even more important, in the case of the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:25-34), is the fact that on the basis of the faith of the jailer, Paul unconditionally PROMISED salvation to the man's household (though not necessarily to every member of the household) without even having met them. We fail to see why they should not *unconditionally* receive the sign of that salvation if salvation itself is promised to them unconditionally and sight unseen. Yet the Baptist insists that they could only have received baptism on the condition of their believing and repenting.

The denial of sovereign grace

that is implicit in Baptist teaching is probably also the reason why there always has been a strong anti-predestination sentiment among Baptists. As soon as one grants the doctrines of unconditional election and reprobation, i.e., that salvation depends *only* on God's free choice in election, then the promise of God that He finds His elect especially among the children of His people (Acts 2:39, Gen. 17:7) becomes a sufficient reason to baptize those children.

This is not to say, however, that those who teach infant baptism believe or have ever believed that *all* their children are elect. Nor is that the reason why they have all their children baptized. They only believe that God's elect are found among their children by virtue of His grace and promise and for that reason baptize them all, expecting, too, that baptism will work for the salvation of those who are elect and for the damnation of those who are not, that is, that baptism will have the same twofold fruit among their children that the preaching of the Gospel has, and all according to the purpose of God in predestination.

Baptism in general and infant baptism in particular, teach us, then, to "loathe and humble ourselves before God, and seek for our purification and salvation without ourselves" in the grace of God, so wonderfully revealed in the cross of our Savior. □

*... and he
shall be filled
with the
Holy Ghost,
even from
his mother's
womb.
Luke 1:15*

Anabaptism and the Means of Grace

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

What is to the child of God most precious in his life? To know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord..." (Jer. 9:23-24). This we believe with heart and soul. So did the Anabaptists. But what they meant by the knowledge of God and of Christ is "radically" different from what we mean by it as Reformed believers.

Reformed believers, from John Calvin on, have always emphasized that true knowledge of God has both a subjective and an objective aspect to it. We firmly believe and maintain that the Holy Spirit testifies with our spirits that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16), and that as a result of this internal testimony of the Spirit we are assured that "not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation are freely given by God ..." (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day VII, Q & A 21). But never do we divorce this subjective testimony of the Spirit in our hearts from His objective testimony to us in His Word (the Spirit of God being the divine Author of Scripture). What we believe in our hearts is exactly and only that which the Spirit has revealed to us in the Bible. There is no other Word apart from that Word. Therefore the true knowledge of God also consists in holding for

truth all that God has objectively revealed to us in His Word.

It was and is on this basis that the Reformed churches have always studied diligently the Scriptures in an attempt to know what the Spirit says to the churches. The result of such diligent study has been an objective, systematic development of the great doctrines of Scripture. These are truths of Scripture which generally are not to be found simply in one or two verses of the Bible, but must rather be gleaned from many different passages being pulled together. And since we certainly believe these to be the Word of God we emphasize the need to *know* these objective truths. They are important for our spiritual welfare, because without a knowledge of them, coupled with the work of the Spirit in our hearts, we would be unable to walk a godly life in this world. Doctrine and life are inseparable.

So say the Reformed.

The Anabaptists vehemently opposed such a view of true knowledge. That which constituted true knowledge was to them simply an inner, experiential knowledge of the heart and soul which had nothing to do with an objective, systematic development of the theology of the Scriptures by men. Books on theology were, in the mind of the Anabaptist, not merely useless but actually sinful and to be discarded. This was literally carried out by the extremists of Munster when on March 15, 1934 all books other than the Bible were thrown upon a pile and burned. Bernhard Rothmann, in his "Restitution," declared that, "since the apostasy first began through human writing and teaching by means of which the divine Scriptures were darkened, the Almighty has among us provided

that all writings both new and old which are not biblical should be destroyed, so that we should cling only to the Holy Scriptures." Perhaps it is true that the more moderate Anabaptists, such as the Swiss Brethren or the Mennonites, did not go so far as to burn books, nevertheless they certainly were sympathetic to Rothmann's view. This is why there can be found no systematic theology developed among the Anabaptists—except perhaps the feeble attempt by Balthasar Hubmaier of the Swiss Brethren. The Anabaptists were of the conviction that inner, experiential knowledge could not be pressed into a theological system. If such knowledge was made "objective" then it could easily become an idol. It was because of this error that the vast majority of the Anabaptist leaders received little formal training, if any at all. They took pride in the common proverb, "the unlearned make no heresies."

We may be apt to say when reading the Anabaptists in this regard that this whole concept has some appeal. After all, does it really make a difference whether we know systematic theology as long as we have the Bible? It surely does! This does not mean we must all be dogmatists and profound theological thinkers, but it does mean that we must learn and know the wonderful truths or doctrines which the church has gleaned from the Scriptures. This invariably affects the way we handle the Word of God. And this shows itself also in the writings of the Anabaptists.

The Anabaptists claimed to "cling only to the Holy Scriptures." They would claim too that doctrine and walk are inseparable, as long as by doctrine is meant the simple teach-

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ings of the Bible. In fact, Menno Simons, in a pamphlet entitled "Foundation," wrote, "We certainly hope no one of a rational mind will be so foolish a man as to deny that the whole of Scriptures, both Old and New Testament... are the true scepter and rule by which the Lord's kingdom, house, church, and congregation must be ruled and governed. Everything contrary to Scripture, therefore, whether it be in doctrines, beliefs, sacraments, worship, or life, should be measured by this infallible rule and demolished by this just and divine scepter, and destroyed without respect of persons." Such was the bold claim of many, perhaps even most, of the Anabaptists. But because they refused to search the deep things of God their treatment of the Scripture became shallow and lopsided. The Anabaptists placed all the stress on passages which deal with Christian walk and discipleship since they felt this was the sole duty of man. Other Scriptures which dealt with such matters as God's counsel, predestination, total depravity, providence, and so on received rather cursory treatment with no real attempt to understand them. So much emphasis was placed on those passages which dealt with sanctification and exhortation that as a result the whole counsel of God unto salvation was ignored. Besides this, the lack of training on the part of their leaders in proper exegesis and biblical interpretation often resulted in what was at best an improper interpretation of a passage and at worst an allegorical interpretation of Scripture.

Against this error John Calvin repeatedly warned the Anabaptists. In his commentary on II Corinthians 3:6 Calvin writes, "They have given rise to the most disastrous error that Scripture is not only useless but actually harmful unless it is allegorized. This error has been the source of many evils. Not only did it open the way for corruption of the natural meaning of Scripture but also set up boldness in allegorizing as the chief exegetical virtue." This misuse of the Scriptures was true of them because of their

rejection of an objective, systematic knowledge of the Bible and its truths.

What is more, though the Anabaptists claimed that the Scriptures were their infallible guide, this was not true of them. They placed much more emphasis on subjective knowledge. They called this the inner Word of God or the inner Light. And it was this "Word of God" that truly served as the guide in the life of a child of God. This error is clearly propounded in the writings of Thomas Muntzer and those who followed him (known as the Prophets of Zwickau) in Wittenberg. Ulrich Stadler in his writing, "The Living and Written Word," unabashedly

*Books on theology were,
in the mind of the Anabaptist,
not merely useless
but actually sinful...*

claims, "Therefore whoever wishes to use the Scripture with true reverence and not attribute to it more than it deserves or belongs to it, the same must radically separate the Scriptures and the spoken word from the inner word of the heart The outer word is that which Christ commanded his apostles to preach A genuine preacher must receive the true Word of God in the abyss of his soul through much tribulation. This is the Word of God in the abyss of the soul. But the preached word is only the witness or the sign of the true Word. This eternal Word is not written on paper or tablet. Nor is it spoken or preached."

Now, it is true that Stadler was far from a moderate Anabaptist. The Prophets of Zwickau were radical mystics. However, the same thread of thought weaves itself through the writings even of the moderate Anabaptists. Hans Denck of the Swiss Brethren wrote in "Recantation," "I value the Holy Scripture above all human treasures but not as high as the Word of God, which is living, powerful, and eternal, and which is free and unencumbered by all of the

elements of this world. For insofar as it is God himself it is spirit and not letter, written without pen and paper that it may never be expunged. Therefore also salvation cannot be tied to Scriptures, however important and good they may be with respect to it." Menno Simons too, when discussing the "seed of the Word of God" in his writing, "Spiritual Resurrection," makes the same separation between the objective Word of God in the Scriptures and the subjective seed of God's Word in our hearts which is, in his thinking, the more important of the two.

This view of Scripture is rooted in the existential (that truth is rooted in experience) Christianity of the Anabaptist. As we mentioned, the Anabaptists err in their entire concept of sanctification. Proceeding from the truth of total depravity the Reformed believer knows and confesses according to God's Word that the work of sanctification is an ongoing process. Though Christ has cleansed us from sin and corruption in His blood and instilled in us a new life, we yet realize that we are sinners. We have only a small beginning of the new life of Christ. And we long for the day when in heavenly perfection there will be no more sin. Unlike the Reformed believer the Anabaptist believed that after "much perseverance in many tribulations in the Lord" (Stadler), one is given the true inner Word, the eternal power of God. At that time one is completely transformed out of the darkness and abyss of sin and given the light of Christ. He now takes on the image of God and is renewed in such a way that from that point on in his life he can serve God with zeal and enthusiasm. In that zeal the Christian is able to reach heights of perfection in life. He may still make mistakes, he may even still sin unwittingly, but as far as his conscious activity is concerned he serves God with almost "angelic purity." This power of God in one's heart is the inner Word of God which takes precedence over the written Word. This is the true Word unadulterated by man. This therefore must be one's

infallible guide in life because it alone will spur one on in proper Christian conduct. And only as the Scriptures can incite this inner Word of God are they of any importance in the life of a child of God.

This, as we well know, is the

error of subjectivism, that is, reliance on one's feelings and emotions to be the guide in life. Truth is relegated to the sphere of subjective opinion rather than to that objective, written standard to which everyone must conform, namely, the written Word of

God! Perhaps this is the reason there is so much diversity of thought among the Anabaptists.

It is this error that had deadly results on the Anabaptists' teaching concerning the means of grace. But this we will have to treat in a future article. □

The Reformed Controversy with Anabaptism over Church Government

Rev. Ronald Cammenga

Under the grace of God, the Reformation restored to the church not only the pure doctrine of the gospel, but also proper church government. The Reformers to a man were concerned that the church be organized along biblical lines. Part of the deformation of the church prior to the Reformation was the deformation of the church's structure and government. The Reformers reacted to the unbiblical hierarchy of Roman Catholicism and were determined to deliver the church from papal tyranny.

But the battle for proper church government was a battle waged on two fronts. Not only were the Reformers forced to contend with Roman Catholicism on the right, but they also had to deal with the Anabaptists on the left. As with Rome, so with the Anabaptists, the Reformers' controversy was not only doctrinal, but also church political.

There were especially two as-

pects of Anabaptist church polity with which the Reformers took issue: Anabaptism's concept of church office and Anabaptism's independentism. Both of these are vital and current issues for Reformed Christians today.

Anabaptism's Concept of Church Office

Whereas the Reformers were very articulate on the matter of church office — what church office is, the number and nature of the offices in the New Testament church — the Anabaptists were not. There was no clearcut, well-developed teaching concerning church office. Views and practices among the Anabaptists themselves differed widely. In this area, as in many others, the Anabaptist movement was not homogeneous.

Part of the explanation for this diversity is that Anabaptism was primarily a negative and reactionary movement. The independentism of Anabaptism (to be considered later) also contributed to this lack of uniformity in the area of church office.

The Anabaptists did not generally share the conviction of the Re-

formers that Christ has instituted three special offices in the New Testament church, the offices of minister, elder, and deacon. Neither was there among the Anabaptists a clear distinction in the work of each of these special offices. Often the Anabaptists dispensed with the special offices almost entirely, particularly in those places where community of goods was practiced. In other fellowships the office of "prophet" was recognized. Those who occupied this office were the subjects of direct revelations, capable of teaching the people as "messengers" from God. Besides prophets, the Anabaptists recognized prophetesses, thus violating the biblical principle that the woman is to be silent in the church (I Cor. 14:34, 35; I Tim. 2:11, 12).

These peculiarities of the Anabaptist movement are seen today. Certainly among modern Baptists the Anabaptist influence remains. Often there is no honoring of the special offices in the local congregation. The congregation is served by a pastor and a board of deacons, a board that is in many instances self-perpetuating. In many Baptist circles the

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charismatic movement has been welcomed with open arms. Along with this has come the reintroduction of the office of prophet.

But even in Reformed churches today concessions are made to the Anabaptist conception of church office. In many churches there is not a good understanding of the nature of church office. There is fuzziness on the distinct work that belongs to the three special offices. All sorts of additional offices are introduced into the church. The charismatic movement has made serious inroads into many a Reformed church. And increasingly the biblical prohibition of women in office is disregarded.

Anabaptism's Conception of the Office of the Ministry

It was especially, however, because of its conception of the office of the ministry that Anabaptism drew the fire of the Reformers.

For one thing, many of the Anabaptist ministers were itinerant preachers, wandering from place to place, without serving in a particular congregation or being subject to the rule of a local consistory. It was especially over against this common Anabaptist practice that Article 7 of our Reformed *Church Order* stipulates that "No one shall be called to the ministry of the Word, without his being stationed in a particular place...."

It was also common for the Anabaptist preachers to be self-appointed, simply taking the office of the ministry to themselves. It was accepted among the Anabaptists that the call of the Spirit superseded and rendered unnecessary the lawful call by the church. Calvin was vehement in his condemnation of those who simply assumed the office on the basis of "the prompting of the Spirit." In his commentary on I Corinthians 12:28, he writes:

We must infer from this that people with absolutely no qualifications, who force themselves upon the Church, are fanatics, driven by an evil spirit. There are many, for instance, who boast that they are moved to action by the Spirit, and pride

themselves in a secret call of God, when all the time they are unlearned and totally ignorant.

In order to guard against this infectious spirit of Anabaptism, the Reformers insisted on the lawful call and examination by the churches. The third article of our *Church Order* lays down the necessity of the lawful call. Article 4 spells out the procedure by which a minister is called to office and the examination required of those entering upon the ministry for the first time.

The Munster Anabaptists prided themselves in the fact that at least they were not guilty of book-learning.

It was also characteristic of the Anabaptists that they disdained theological training as a necessary part of preparation for the office of the ministry of the gospel. For the Anabaptist "possession" of the Holy Spirit more than compensated for a regular course of theological study. In Munster, where the Anabaptist fervor reached its highest pitch, all of the books were taken out of the library and publicly burned. The Munster Anabaptists prided themselves in the fact that at least they were not guilty of book-learning.

For the Reformers, on the other hand, the ideal of a trained, educated ministry was a priority. Both Luther and Calvin were instrumental in establishing and promoting institutions of higher learning, particularly institutions for higher theological learning. Repeatedly and strongly they condemned the Anabaptist anti-intellectualism. Calvin writes that this is

...an error unworthy of being noticed, were it not that some fanatics in former times, to flatter themselves in their ignorance, boasted that, after the example of David, all learning and liberal sciences should be despised; even as, in the present day, the Anabaptists have no other pre-

text for boasting of being spiritual persons, but that they are grossly ignorant of all science (Calvin's commentary on Psalm 71:15).

Historically the Reformed churches have insisted on a trained clergy. That training, with very few exceptions, includes graduation from college and the rigors of a three or four-year seminary course. The position of the Reformed is that, although it is the Holy Spirit who gives the gifts for the ministry, those gifts require development and testing. This insistence on a trained ministry follows the biblical example. In the Old Testament there were schools for the prophets. In the New Testament, Jesus prepared His disciples for some three and a half years before sending them out as His apostles. Paul received his preparation in the deserts of Arabia, and wherever he went on his missionary journeys he devoted attention to the training of young men, like Timothy, for the work of the ministry.

It is un-Reformed that there is disdain in the churches today for the lawful call, that men simply assume the teaching office in the church. It is shameful that seminary instruction is not the demanding, rigorous training that it once was. Matters are so bad today that men graduate from Reformed seminaries without even a clear understanding of the Reformed faith, let alone the ability ably to defend and teach it. This anti-intellectualism is not Reformed but decidedly Anabaptistic.

Anabaptism's Independentism

The confusion that characterized Anabaptism on the local level, also permeated the movement more broadly. This became evident in the Anabaptist reaction to papal hierarchy by going in the direction of independentism.

The Anabaptists disdained the Reformed practice of denominational affiliation, including broader assemblies like classis and synod which exercised ecclesiastical authority within the federation of churches. The Anabaptist congregations would have none of this. For them each local

church was to be completely independent, without any essential and vital connection to any other congregation. Although there might be some association with other congregations, it was always incidental association. Any assembly of representatives from various congregations was an assembly without any real authority.

This independentism of the Anabaptists came to expression in "The Baptist (Philadelphia) Confession of 1688." This confession is really only an adaptation of "The Westminster Confession of Faith," with modifications particularly to suit the Baptist views on church polity and the sacrament of baptism. In chapter XXVI, which is entitled "Of the Church," paragraph 15, it is stated:

It is according to the mind of Christ that many churches, holding communion together, do by their messengers meet to consider and give their advice in or about that matter in difference, to be reported to all the churches concerned; howbeit these messengers assembled are not intrusted with any church power properly so called, or with any jurisdiction over the churches themselves, to exercise any censures either over any churches or persons, to impose their determination on the churches or officers.

It is alarming to note that this Anabaptist independentism survives to the present. Neither is its survival only among the modern-day Baptists,

whom J.L. Schaver calls "more congregational than the Congregationalists," (*The Polity of the Churches*, vol. I, p. 47). But this spirit of independentism thrives even in Reformed circles. Increasingly there is the rejection of the binding authority of classical and synodical decisions. Individuals and consistories refuse to consider the decisions of the broader assemblies "settled and binding," as they are bound to do by Article 31 of the *Church Order*. There is not only agitation against synodical decisions, but Reformed officebearers who have signed the "Formula of Subscription" publicly condemn the actions of the synods in their writing and preaching. Some churches refuse to abide by those synodical decisions that they have not themselves ratified. Other churches refuse to submit to synodical decisions, although remaining in the federation. This is radically un-Reformed.

Those individuals, officebearers, and churches who are honest enough to leave corrupt denominations, often establish independent congregations, or groups of congregations that are only very loosely associated. The *Church Order* is not adopted and no authority is given to broader assemblies. This is not the way of genuine church reformation. Genuine church reformation in the past has always been characterized by a return not only to pure doctrine, but also to

proper Reformed church polity, a return always to the *Church Order of Dordt*. The existence of a Reformed congregation without the *Church Order of Dordt* is inconsistent, and it ought also to be inconceivable.

The irony of independentism is that whereas it seeks escape from the demon of hierarchy, it always falls prey to the clutches of this devil. Church history shows that independentism is a dead-end street. It is church federation, the expression of the unity of the church of Christ by denominational affiliation, that delivers from hierarchy. Often independentism leads to ministerial hierarchy. The minister runs the show, calls the shots, makes all the important decisions. In how many independent churches is that not the case today. Or independentism leads to a hierarchy of the eldership or "board of deacons." Beyond this board the members have no recourse. Before this board the minister must annually appear for a vote of confidence. Papal tyranny is replaced by a tyranny equally as cruel.

The Reformed controversy with Anabaptism goes on. The Devil's attack on the church takes not only the form of doctrinal deviation, but also assault on the government and offices of the church. God grant Reformed churches the world over the grace to stand firm in both areas. □

The Reformed World and Life View

Rev. Kenneth Koole

World-fight or world-flight?
Which is the Christian life?

There was a time when all who went by the name of Calvinists would have said "world-fight." That they were biblically accurate is not so difficult to demonstrate.

Today, however, more and more

of protestantism, given the choice, would respond, "Neither." World-flight is as foreign to them as world-fight. The threat of "worldliness" is a clear and present danger on which far too many Protestant pulpits have become silent.

What has occurred is rather in-

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sidious. World-flight, that legitimate and necessary aspect of the Christian life, is itself labeled as world-flight. When the church calls her members to engage in the battle of faith, and world-flight, the opponents of this antithetical spiritual action shout it down by calling it world-flight. And thus many blacklist world-flight, inject uncertainty and confusion into the minds of the unwary, and justify their own worldly lifestyle and their unwillingness to forsake it. This is nothing less than a betrayal of Christ's cause and a desertion of the Lord's company.

Those who insist on identifying the two, "fight" with "flight," in order to justify their not having to engage in either, are to be numbered in the end with Demas, concerning whom Paul wrote, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." Observing what many in Protestantism permit themselves to do one wonders what it is that falls under this category of "worldliness," if anything at all.

That there is a "world" we are called to fight (i.e., vigorously oppose, warn against, and have no part with) is apparent from many passages. One by itself will do. James

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declares "know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (4:4). How much sharper can you get? There is a world out there that we are to deal with as an enemy.

World-flight is not to be identified with world-flight. And the Reformed faith has never done so. At the same time, it would be folly to insist that world-flight knows nothing

of world-flight at all. Far too many, as we have suggested, seize upon the phrase "world-flight" in order to be excused from engaging even in world-flight. Would to God that there were a little more flight, and a lot less "Lot-like" dallying in the Sodom of this world. Where would Lot have been if he had not been compelled to flee the fleshly delights of the well-watered, culturally advanced, sex-obsessed valley of the doomed cities? Without a doubt standing next to his well-preserved, worldly-minded wife. Let us never forget that she stands as a monument to the folly of refusing to flee this world in any decisive way at all.

When the apostle Paul says to the Christians in that most civilized and modern of cities, Corinth, with all its places of entertainment, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord..." he certainly was speaking of a kind of flight, a hasty separating of self from the lifestyle of a world and its interests.

This is necessary for faith's "fight," the Christian warfare. One can hardly fight an enemy if one has failed to flee its ranks, but rather continues to be entertained by it and imitating its pursuits and interests.

Nonetheless, the phrase "world-flight" has in the development of church history come to describe a certain radical mentality towards life in this world. The monastic movement arose out of this mentality. It defined "separation" in terms of "isolation," removing oneself physical, bodily from the flow of society — in many instances walling oneself off from social contact with others in nearly every form. Evil was seen in material things themselves, and hence everything of normal life was prohibited or severely limited.

The Anabaptist movement exhibited a surprisingly similar perspective. They practiced an inclusive "communalism," that is, they sought to remove themselves from contact with the "ungodly" and the world by forming their own cities in which only converts to their cause were wel-

comed and could participate in day-to-day life. The world of the unholy and unbelieving was walled off and shut out. They intended to live in their own self-sufficient community of re-baptized saints. To the extent that they could, they would ignore the affairs of the worldly society in which they lived.

The Reformed faith has never advocated this kind of world-flight. For one thing this is hardly compatible with Christ's command to shine as lights in the world. You can not bear witness to a society from which you have physically isolated yourselves.

But we, in the name of the Reformed faith, do advocate what is called the life of the "antithesis." Practically speaking this means that there is much in this life and world to which we must say "No!" It arises out of the recognition that there is a "world" out there that is a danger to our spiritual mind and well-being. It is dangerous exactly because it is produced by men who fear not God, despise His holiness, take pleasure in sin and vanity, and want others to join them in this pleasure. The very purpose of much of what they produce is to affect others such that others display a like mind.

Because the reality is that also in the regenerated child of God there is a point of contact for sin's pleasure, namely, the "flesh," precautions must be taken to prevent the world from stirring up like passions self. If this were not so, why would the apostle John with such vigor warn against the world that appeals to "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life"? This realization necessitates the antithetical perspective.

We understand well that the antithesis does not forbid us to use and enjoy the world of God-created things. The believer is free in Christ to use the things which God has made, be it wine, pork, or sex in marriage, and even things civilization produces, i.e., clothes and transportation (confer I Timothy 4:4).

Yet, even here the Reformed faith, in accordance with God's Word,

issues warnings. What we must never do is adopt the world's mentality towards and evaluation of the things found in this life.

The Reformed faith warns against "concupiscence," that is, a strong attachment to the lawful things of this life. Calvin did not hesitate to speak of the proper mindset in terms of "contemptio mundi" (a world held in contempt) [*Institutes*, III:9:1]. By this Calvin meant our attitude was to be one of detachment, a readiness to part ways with whatever we use and enjoy in this life should God so require. This is not easy by any stretch of the imagination, but this is what characterizes the believer when his faith is functioning properly.

This is not the extreme of the Anabaptist radicals, but at the same time it is a far cry from the "prosperity gospel" that has warped so much of Protestantism today.

Neither does the antithesis mean that we have no use for the learning, discoveries, inventions, and compositions of mankind. We use today's transportation, benefit from modern medicine, enjoy Beethoven's music, read Tolstoy's books, recite Homer's poetry, learn Euclid's geometry, appreciate Rembrandt's paintings, and study the latest in physics, chemistry, and biology. The antithesis does not mean that we despise all of these things, consider learning what men have accomplished in these areas to be a silly waste of time (considering ignorance bliss), and discourage developing gifts and abilities that one has in these various areas. The apostle Paul was acquainted with the poets of his age, quoting them more than once; the church father Augustine used his vast knowledge of the philosophies of his age in order to free many who were snared by their vanities; and Calvin himself had an excellent liberal-arts education. He used this to good advantage when addressing the high and learned of his age.

In a word, the antithesis does not mean that we become isolationists, living in our own colonies of saints, ignoring society "out there." But the antithesis does mean that we

subject everything to scrutiny, and critique it from a distinctively ethical perspective. And it means that our evaluation of what confronts us is going to be different from the evaluation of the unbeliever, radically different. At least it should be, if faith makes a difference.

This, by the way, is also the reason for establishing good Christian day-schools. A spiritual evaluation of society's culture is something children must be taught. An unbelieving person cannot possibly teach them this proper discrimination. Only a teacher schooled in the Reformed perspective can.

It is one thing to be familiar with the glory that was Greece, and the grandeur that was Rome; it is another to glory in the Greeks (and all they produced, as they glorified the human mind and body), and to seek to emulate all found in and done by Rome. Concerning everything of society confronting us, we must ask, does it glorify sin? does it seek to awaken sensuality? is it a revolt against the laws of creation's order and form? If so, we condemn it.

*...the theory
of Common Grace ...
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It is here that the PRC have raised a banner against the theory of Common Grace as articulated by the 1924 Synod of the CRC. We assert that this theory is nothing less than a death blow against the decisive character of the antithesis.

For this rejection we have been accused of promoting a world-flight mentality and attempting to smuggle the Anabaptist perspective into the Reformed camp. All we say at this point is that such is false.

The PRC from the very beginning raised a warning against the theory of Common Grace because

they saw that it provided the desired justification for Christians to run with the worldlings and find pleasure with them in unholy things.

What is striking is that the 1924 Synod formulated and adopted a "Testimony" that indicates that they themselves saw the danger of the theory they were imposing on the church, and yet would not reconsider what they were adopting. (We quote from this "Testimony" as it is found in Rev. H. Hoeksema's book, *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*, pp.91-93.)

"Now synod expressed itself on three points that were at stake in the denial of Common Grace and thereby condemned the entire disregard for this doctrine, she feels constrained at the same time to warn our Churches and especially our leaders earnestly against all onesided emphasis on and misuse of the doctrine of Common Grace. It cannot be denied that there exists a real danger in this respect....

"When we consider the direction in which the spirit of the time develops round about us, it cannot be denied that our present danger lies more in the direction of worldly-mindedness than of false seclusion (emphasis mine-K.K.). Liberal theology of the present time really obliterates the distinction between the Church and the world. It is more and more emphasized by many that the great significance of the Church lies in her influence upon social life. The consciousness of a spiritual-ethical antithesis becomes increasingly vague in the minds of many, to make room for an indefinite notion of a general brotherhood....

"...With holy zeal [the Church] must constantly send forth the call to our people, especially to our youth: 'And be ye not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.' With the blessing of the Lord this will keep our churches from worldly-mindedness, that extinguishes the flame of spiritual ardor and deprives the Church of her power and beauty."

More prophetic words could not

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have been spoken. The Common Grace teaching has been used exactly as the Synod feared it might be and Hoeksema said it would be.

For the sake of the antithesis and world-fight we reject the theory of Common Grace. We reject it, not because it speaks of good things which God gives to the ungodly, but because it speaks of a power that works in the ungodly, a power God works in them out of a favor (grace) upon them, which power, it is said, diminishes their ungodliness, and enables them to do things pleasing to God. And it is this "grace" that is said to be the operational power that enables children of darkness to produce this world's culture.

And here you have the bridge between Jerusalem and Athens, the church and the world, between the narrow way of Christ's discipleship and the broad way that leads to perdition. The "sons of God" have all the excuse they need to justify their enjoyment of and indulging in almost everything and anything the world produces and engages in. Why? Because if you look hard enough you are going to find the good element that was supposedly produced by the Spirit's grace which gives the R-rated film, the erotic "art" exhibit, and the pulsating rock music (all which serve to get your sexual juices flowing and imagination working), some redemptive value. We need deny ourselves

nothing.

One is willingly foolish if he does not see that such thinking is logically consistent with the tenants of the Common Grace theory.

What should be clear to any objective student of church history? This: if you want to adopt a doctrine that keeps your church and young people from worldly-mindedness, common grace is not that doctrine. It is the antithetical world and life view, free from the baggage of Common Grace, that is going to nurture the flame of spiritual ardor. Oh that concerned brothers would see this!

"And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed..." (Rom. 12:2). □

News From Our Churches (abbreviated)

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Ministerial Calls

On Sunday, September 22, the Hudsonville, MI PRC extended a call to Rev. R. Cammenga, to serve as missionary pastor to the members of the Covenant Reformed Fellowship of Larne, Northern Ireland.

For the Venice, FL mission field, the congregation of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC formed a trio consisting of Revs. Bekkering, Bruinsma, and VanOverloop. On September 15 they extended a call to Rev. Bekkering.

The Consistory of the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI scheduled a con-

gregational meeting for Sunday, September 29 for the purpose of calling a missionary to Jamaica. The trio consists of Revs. M. DeVries, B. Gritters, and R. Moore.

And Candidate M. Dick has received the call to serve as pastor to the congregation of our Hope PRC in Isabel, SD. □

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Consistory and Congregation of the Lynden Protestant Reformed Church express their sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Wilbur Stuit and family in the death of their sister,

MRS. MARGARET COLE.

May Jehovah comfort the bereaved with the glorious hope of the resurrection of the dead in Jesus Christ. "I am

the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:25, 26).

Rev. Carl Haak, President

NOTICE!!

5th Annual Reformation Day Lecture

October 31, 1991, 8:00 PM

Theme: "Sola Fide"

(Only by Faith)

Speaker: Rev. Carl Haak

Place:

Lynden Protestant Reformed
Church

315 N. Park St.

Lynden, Washington

Mr. Wigger is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.