

THE **STANDARD BEARER**

*A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine*

...Wherever the “liturgical renewal” now sweeping the Reformed and Presbyterian churches may originate, it does not originate in the counsels of Him who changes not and who has given His church His full and final revelation concerning proper worship in Holy Scripture.

See “Worshiping God as He Wills” — page 341

*Vol. 68, No. 15
May 1, 1992*

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In This Issue ...

In large part, this issue of the *Standard Bearer* is the conclusion of the preceding special issue on Reformed church order. Longer articles that we could not run in their entirety in the April 15 issue are completed in this issue. In fairness to the authors, as well as for the most profit to himself, the reader should read again the first installment of these articles in the April 15 issue. The articles were intended to be read at one sitting.

Two articles on the subject of church order appear in this issue in their entirety. Rev. Charles Terpstra writes on "Erasure of Baptized Members." This was one of the addresses at the conference of Classis West that occasioned the special issue on church order. The article should have run in the special issue. It was submitted in time. But we ran out of space. We apologize to Rev. Terpstra. The other article is by Rev. Chris Coleborn, minister in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia. His is an informative and intriguing comparison of the church orders of Dordt and Westminster. Our hearty thanks to Rev. Coleborn for complying with our request for this article.

The editorial is also related to the subject of the special issue, although indirectly. The fundamental claim of Reformed church order is that right government of Christ's church is revealed in Holy Scripture. It is the contention of the editorial that the worship of the church is likewise prescribed by the Word of God.

Besides these articles on or related to church order, this issue features several of our regular rubrics and writers.

Welcome, then, to the special issue on church order, part 2, plus.

— DJE

THE STANDARD BEARER

ISSN 0362-4692

Semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August.
Published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc.,
4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418. Second Class
Postage Paid at Grandville, Michigan.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the Standard Bearer,
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Meditation

Rev. Jason Kortering

Fear Not — He is Risen

"And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen as he said. Come see the place where the Lord lay."

Matthew 28:4-6.

Fear!

It can be devastating. Look at the keepers of the grave. They shook and became as dead men.

It can also be healing. Look at the women who had their natural fear, but left the sepulchre with great joy.

Are you afraid?

We all are, as we approach God's holy place in the garden of the resurrection.

The question is, what kind of fear do we have? Does fear drive you away from the tomb to fabricate lies, or does your fear cause you to draw near with believing heart and to leave rejoicing?

As we examine this Scripture, may the Holy Spirit give us victory over fear and give us blessed inner peace.

We read in verse 4, "for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men." Who are those keepers?

The events which preceded are recorded for us in the gospels. From this source we can conclude that these keepers were Roman soldiers assigned to protect the tomb of Jesus. Some of

these soldiers may have played a key role in events associated with the crucifixion of Jesus. When Judas rushed to the Jewish Sanhedrin that Thursday evening to inform them that it was now or never, he later returned with a band of soldiers, more than likely from the Roman temple guard. Already then those soldiers fell back and became as dead men; but that did not stop them from binding Jesus and taking Him to Caiaphas. While Jesus is being interrogated by him, they are warming themselves before the fire in the court. You can just see them jostling for position before the fire, laughing, telling their ribald jokes, most of them directed at that man they took that night.

Later, they have opportunity to heap their contempt upon Him personally. They heard the Jews scream, "Let Him be crucified!" They were well aware of the political maneuvering going on between Pilate and Caiaphas. When Pilate sentenced Jesus to death, it was their turn to mock him. They placed a crown of thorns on His head, dressed Him in a purple robe, put in His hand a rod made of reed, and forthwith bowed down, crying, "Hail, king of the Jews." These soldiers escorted Him to Calvary. They heard the weeping women. They saw His zeal to press on. Jesus refused their vinegar wine. With a shake of the head, I suppose, they proceeded to drive nails in his hands and feet.

Even though they heard Him pray and speak from the cross, they remained unmoved. Their interest was His clothing, for which they gambled in open disdain amidst His obvious suffering. One of their num-

ber softened after the darkness and cried, "Surely, this was the Son of God"; but for the rest they were puzzled but pressed on. Another took his sword and pierced His side and saw the evidence of death pour forth.

Here they sit, in the darkness, all night long. They are guarding the tomb in which the body of Jesus has been placed. Somewhat smugly they slip into sleep, for who would dare to disturb the tomb, sealed by none other than Caesar of Rome. But toward morning we see that they are trembling and once again became as dead men. Amidst an earthquake, the angel of the Lord came down with dazzling beauty and rolled away the stone from the sepulchre. Once they revived, they ran from the scene. And some of them ran straight to Caiaphas to tell him what took place. With money staring them in the face, they accepted bribes and began to circulate the story that the disciples came and stole the body of Jesus.

*Well may those soldiers
be afraid of God's messenger,
for he is the harbinger
of God's just judgment.*

These soldiers represent all the wicked who even dare to draw near to the sepulchre. They were not alone in their day, for with them stand Pilate, who represents the government of the world, and Caiaphas, who represents the apostate church of his day. The one thing they all had in common was that they rejected Jesus. They

Rev. Kortering is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Grandville, Michigan.

were willing to crucify Him. All through history this opposition has continued. The ungodly world has their gods of money, pleasure, entertainment, and sports. They want nothing to do with Jesus. Within the apostate church, nothing has changed. Today ungodly scholarship rejects the bodily resurrection of Jesus. They pay lip service to His ministry, but reject the blood atonement as necessary for reconciliation with God.

Well may those soldiers be afraid of God's messenger, for he is the harbinger of God's just judgment. Shake they must, for God is a God of vengeance upon such enemies. God makes them impotent, but they rise up in rebellion to tell lies. The day is coming in which this Jesus will come again. Then they will face Him in judgment, and they shall sink into the lake of fire where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. In hell they will not continue in their lies; and they will be forced to admit that God is just in their eternal damnation.

The fear of the keepers is terrible.

Now, look at the women.

What a contrast. They came to the sepulchre laden with spices and ointments. True, this appears so foolish; yet their heart is in the right place. They witnessed the same history, but it cut them to the quick. They cried at night. They couldn't sleep. Ringing in their ears were to be sure the cries of the enemies, but, much more, the words of Jesus. As He spoke from the cross, they listened. They saw Him as the promised Messiah, but they did not understand the kingdom and the place of the cross. Though Jesus had explained it all, their eyes were not yet opened and their hearts did not yet believe.

Here they came, early, while it was yet dark. It almost seems as if the angel came down in their presence, but that cannot be established. At least the angel is there when they arrive. The stone is rolled away. The grave is opened. They have obvious fear. Their fear is the awareness of standing in the presence of God's messenger. They are fully aware of

their sinfulness. How can they stand in the presence of the Holy God and live? Their fear is out of deep respect for God, both as to His holiness and His righteousness. Well might God strike them dead, for they are unworthy sinners.

Now you see that this is a different kind of fear.

This is a fear that prepares one for the gospel of the resurrection.

To such the angel speaks gracious words.

Do you come to the tomb with such fear?

Then listen: "Fear not ye, for I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen as he said. Come see the place where the Lord lay."

He is risen!

Jesus, to be sure, died. The historical evidence demonstrates this beyond dispute. Also, He died upon the cross, the emblem of reproach and shame. He was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. This included, unknown to the women, the Jewish form of preparation for burial. According to Matthew 27:57ff., Joseph and Nicodemus wrapped the body of Jesus in a linen cloth, the folds of which had been interspersed with spices. There must be no dispute: what was in that tomb was the dead body of the Lord Jesus.

The Lord Jesus raised His own body. The seal of Rome could not stop Him. The guards were not intimidating. The stone before the door did not deter Him. He arose! He is risen as He said. He told them before hand that this would take place. Striking, is it not, that the enemy remembered this more than the disciples. The angels simply confirmed the fact.

If more proof is needed, the angel suggested that they behold the place where the Lord lay. Can't you just see them gaze in wonder. There were the grave clothes, retaining the shape of the body of Jesus, not unwrapped as was the case with Lazarus. They could see that the body was missing. No one could possibly explain such evidence, except as the angel did: He is risen.

Jesus went through the grave. His body was of a different material. It was of a material which was not adapted to the earthly, but the heavenly. It was the same body, but changed. No longer did He need food, rest, earthly protection, and such like. His resurrected body was of the composition that eye cannot see and ear cannot hear. He had to assume "appearances" in order that the disciples could even know that He had arisen from the dead, bodily.

Fear not!

The bodily resurrection of Christ drives out all fear.

Why should we not be afraid of God? Can we stand in the presence of angels and live? Will not God call us to account through His messengers?

The empty tomb beckons us heavenward.

No, a thousand times no. For the bodily resurrection of Jesus is the visible proof that God accepted His perfect sacrifice for sin. The same God who tore the veil of the temple from top to bottom as an expression of the fulfillment of the law, now also raised His Son from the dead to display His satisfaction with His shed blood. In the resurrection we have proof that our sins are paid and we are righteous in Jesus Christ. This forms the basis for the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God. Who can be afraid of God when He forgives?

More, the resurrection also opens the way to victory over sin and its consequence upon our human bodies. Yes, through sin, we suffer much. Diseases and weaknesses mark our pilgrimage. Many fears follow experiences such as heart attacks, delicate surgeries, and all sorts of pain and suffering. He is risen! That makes a difference, so that death itself is not something of great dread. The empty tomb beckons us heavenward. Our bodies rest in hope.

Fear not, He is risen! □

Worshiping God as He Wills

How the people of God are to worship the one, true God in their public services on the Lord's Day is prescribed by God in His Word. The form and manner of worship are not left up to the worshiping church herself. It is an error to suppose that, although God decides *whom* we are to worship, we ourselves have the right to decide *how* we will worship.

The error is grievous.

That God determines the manner of public worship is the teaching of the second commandment of the law: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them ..." (Ex. 20:4,5). Not only does this commandment forbid men's making any likeness of the Deity, but it also stipulates that the covenant people may not decide for themselves the way in which they will worship God. The second commandment binds the church to observe God's will in the matter of the manner in which she conducts her public services of worship.

This is the explanation of the second commandment given by the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 35. The requirement of God is "that we in no wise represent God by images, nor worship Him in any other way than He has commanded in His word." The stipulation that the church must worship God only in the manner which He has prescribed is contained in the prohibition against images inasmuch as images in the church's worship are always a means by which the church intends to worship God. By her images, a church supposes that she is worshiping God. In forbidding images, God not only

says, "I will not be worshiped by means of images," but also, "I Myself will determine how I am worshiped."

Lord's Day 35 of the Heidelberg Catechism is the confessional commitment of the Protestant Reformed Churches to the "regulative principle" of worship. The manner of worship in the public services of the PRC is regulated by the Word of God. Only those elements of worship are permitted that are prescribed by Scripture. Nothing may be introduced as

The second commandment binds the church to observe God's will in the matter of the manner in which she conducts her public services of worship.

part of the worship that is not prescribed by Scripture. Even though some activity may seem to us to be appropriate to worship and beneficial to the congregation, it may not be included. Even though the activity does not conflict with the Word of God, it must be excluded. For, in the language of our creed, it is some "other way than He has commanded in His Word."

The Presbyterian confession teaches the same. Questions 50 and 51 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism read as follows:

What is required in the second commandment? The second commandment requireth the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and en-

tire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath appointed in His Word.

What is forbidden in the second commandment? The second commandment forbiddeth the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in His Word.

The "regulative principle" of worship is the Reformed tradition. As with so much of the Reformed tradition, it was John Calvin who returned the church to the biblical principle that the will of God determines acceptable worship. "Calvin and Zwingli excluded from public worship all that was not specifically authorized in the Scriptures. This was a drastic reform" (J. T. McNeill, *Unitive Protestantism*, John Knox Press, 1964; cf. *Liturgies of the Western Church*, selected and introduced by Bard Thompson, Fortress Press, 1961, pp. 193-195).

Again and again in his writings, Calvin inveighed against the Roman Catholic notion that she may invent her own worship of God. Calvin insisted that the second commandment requires the church to worship God in the manner laid down in His Word. What the Reformer wrote in his commentary on Ezekiel 20:27,28 is typical.

But this passage, like many others, teaches, that not only is God's worship corrupted when His honor is transferred to idols, but also when men heap up their own fictions, and contaminate God's commands by the mixture. We must remember, then, that there are two kinds of idolatries; the one being grosser when idols are worshipped openly, and Moloch, or any Baal, is substituted for the living

God: that is a palpable superstition, because God is in some sense cast down from His throne. But the other kind of idolatry, although more hidden, is abominable before God, namely, when, under the disguise of a name, men boldly mingle whatever comes into their minds, and invent various modes of worship We see that this excuse is frivolous, when men assert that they have nothing else in their mind than the worship of God. Not only does God wish worship to be offered to Himself alone, but that it should be without any dependence on human will: He wishes the law to be the single rule of true worship; and thus He rejects all fictitious rites.

In his explanation of Lord's Day 35 of the Heidelberg Catechism, on

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as their creedal position.*

the second commandment, Abraham Kuyper maintained the "regulative principle" of worship as the Reformed position.

Completely rightly, therefore, have our fathers established the precept, that not man but God Himself alone can determine how we shall serve Him. And, thus, (is established), that every form of worship which God had not commanded is excluded as self-willed service and arbitrary invention, and is forbidden.

Kuyper adds that in the second commandment "all arbitrariness and self-will in the service of the Lord is forbidden" (*E Voto Dordraceno*, my translation of the Dutch).

The PRC have acknowledged the "regulative principle" as their creedal position. In a decision that denied that the symbol of the cross in or on a church building constitutes violation of the second commandment, the synod of 1990 expressly stated that "the second commandment regulates the worship of the church," that "the

elements of the church's worship are prescribed in Scripture," and that this truth is the "regulative principle" (cf. the "Acts of Synod," 1990, Art. 43). This principle is carefully observed in all the congregations. In the submission to her Lord that befits the church, the denomination obeys the will of God concerning the manner of His worship.

The elements of public worship are those, and only those, prescribed by Scripture. They are the activities indicated in Lord's Day 38 of the Heidelberg Catechism: the preaching of God's Word; the administration of the two sacraments ordained by Christ; public prayer; and offerings for the poor. To public prayer belongs congregational singing of the Psalms. Congregational singing is a form of prayer. One reason why the PRC sing only the Psalms in public worship is their conviction that the Psalms are the inspired songbook of the church. The Holy Spirit has given the Psalms to the church to be the praise, thanksgiving, and supplication that she sings to God.

Like the elements of public worship, the characteristics of public worship regulated by the Word of God are biblical. Such services are marked by spirituality; simplicity; solemnity; orderliness; and active congregational participation. They contrast sharply with worship that stresses ritual and external ceremony; with worship that is complicated, elaborate, and cluttered; with worship that is light, cheery, and frivolous; with worship that is chaotic and disorderly; and with worship that makes the congregation a mere audience of the performance of others.

Active congregational involvement in the worship is one important reason why the PRC repudiate "special music," choirs, and soloists in the services of worship. In his book, *Corporate Worship in the Reformed Tradition* (The Westminster Press, 1968), James Hastings Nichols notes that choirs were introduced into the Anglican Church for the express purpose of replacing congregational singing. He goes on to say:

Not all the congregations that have adopted it have intended, like its inventors, to suppress congregational participation, but the logic of the arrangement has made itself felt. Even in churches with no tendency to sacerdotalism, the use of robed choirs in chancels tends to approximate the worship service to a concert of sacred music, and works against congregational worship. Perhaps the most unfortunate legacy of the Anglo-Catholic movement to the Reformed churches generally has been this epidemic of chancels and theatrical choirs (pp. 161, 162).

To the characteristics of genuine, Reformed worship given above I would add yet another, namely, stability. God's will concerning the manner of His public worship does not change. It is, like all His will, immutable. Many criticize, and some become dissatisfied with, Reformed worship because it is "old-fashioned." They weep over the old way of worship and plead for "liturgical renewal" as Israel wept over the old manna and lusted for new food. Their plea really is that God might change His will concerning the right worship of Himself. Since God declines this request, synods and worship-committees impose their wills upon His. Wherever the "liturgical renewal" now sweeping the Reformed and Presbyterian churches may originate, it does not originate in the counsels of Him who changes not and who has given His church His full and final revelation concerning proper worship in Holy Scripture.

The members of the PRC must not be embarrassed by their traditionally Reformed form of worship. It is our glory. We must maintain it, if necessary by struggle. We must explain it and hand it down to the coming generation. We have no choice. Our form of worship is the will of God.

Basic to both the elements and the characteristics of biblically prescribed worship is the grand fact that the people of God are called together, especially on the sabbath day, for the praise of the Triune God in Jesus Christ. The purpose of their assembly

is not their own exciting spiritual experiences. In this service of worship, believers and their children seek and find fellowship with God in the Holy Spirit. They are not in church to "turn around and greet your neighbor with a smile."

The benefit to the saints themselves from this is edification in the faith, not religious entertainment. Calvin condemned Rome's worship because it did not edify the saints:

Similarly in these days, in the popedom, the organs are piping on one side, and there is chanting in four parts on the other side, and there is such a lot of foolery, that the simple people are ravished by it, but never a whit edified (*John Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1973, p. 527).

"A lot of foolery" by which the people are "never a whit edified" — does this not perfectly describe much of Protestant worship in our day?

Churches have no right to change the form of worship to suit themselves or to please their people. To do so is transgression of the second commandment. It is image worship. Unspiritual and ignorant church

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members are delighted with the new inventions — drama and dancing instead of expository preaching; professional musical productions by trained performers in the place of congregational singing; "contemporary services" replacing the traditional

services. People flock to such services in throngs. God gags.

We view the strange liturgical spectacles in Reformed churches today as we would Israel's cavorting about the golden calf at Mt. Sinai. The churches are certainly engaging in impressive celebrations unto the Lord. The people are obviously enjoying themselves immensely in their religious activities — singing; dancing; laughing; playing. The scantily-clad, lissome dancers come wonderfully close to the nakedness of Israel in their worship of Jehovah at Sinai.

There is only one problem with this exciting, entertaining, and, perhaps, sincere worship of God.

"For I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me" (Ex. 20:5).

The problem of the second commandment. □

—DJE

Letters

● As Another Sees Us

This letter is in response to an editorial in the *Standard Bearer* entitled, "As Others See Us" (March 15, 1992). I am one of the "others," as I am neither a member nor an adherent of the Protestant Reformed Churches. I am like many (as the editorial states) of the "others" outside the PRC who receive the *Standard Bearer*.

I had the privilege recently to visit my first PRC in Lynden, WA.

I live in southwestern Oregon which is a spiritual wasteland as regards the Reformed faith. I have visited many of the "Reformed" congregations within a couple hundred miles of my home only to find doctrinal disunity and Arminianism.

I traveled over 500 miles to visit

the Lynden PRC because through a thorough study of the Reformed faith I have come to adore many of the PRC distinctives: exclusive use of the King James Version; particular grace; the unbreakable bond of marriage; and exclusive Psalmody, just to name a few.

During my short stay in Lynden I was truly blessed in Christian fellowship and in the worship of God. By my being amongst these brethren I could clearly see that God has preserved this denomination as a bearer of His truth, evidenced by their doctrine and the carrying out of that doctrine in the life.

For many years Reformed brethren have many times spoken to me negatively of the PRC. My comment is this: visit many of the prominent

Reformed denominations and you will find disunity in doctrine with different translations from pew to pew. Visit the PRC and you will find unity in doctrine according to the "Regulative Principle of worship" (Ps. 133). Drink from the wells of many prominent Reformed denominations' literature and you will find Arminianism being fed to the brethren and to the covenant children. Drink from the well of literature (abundant) of the PRC and you will find pure uncompromising truth, and covenant children being taught confessional truths.

May God bless the PRC as she faithfully defends the historic Reformed faith.

Craig Miklosik
Coos Bay, OR

The Questions of Article 41 (2)

Rev. Russell Dykstra

[This is the second installment of an article on the questions of Article 41 of the church order of Dordrecht. The first article (in the April 15th issue) set forth the underlying principles of the questions and briefly discussed the first three questions.]

The fourth question of Article 41 deserves a separate and more detailed discussion than the first three, being a different type of question. The others are asking for information from the consistory; this question asks:

4. Do you need the judgment and help of the classis for the proper government of your church?

Concerning this last question, differences of opinion exist on exactly what matters a consistory may bring for the "help and judgment of the classis." The difference centers in the issue of whether or not a consistory must first decide a matter and have its decision recorded in its minutes before approaching classis for help.

Those who hold to this position argue that failure to enforce this will encourage consistories to bring their troubles to classis too hastily. Consistories will rush to classis with their problems without much study and with little effort to solve their own problems.

A number of serious objections can be raised against this position

that a consistory must first take a concrete decision. First of all, it means, in effect, that no consistory will ever bring a problem to the classis under question 4 of Article 41; for if they once decide a matter, they no longer need the help of classis. Only if someone protests a decision will it reach classis, but then as a *protest*, not a matter of Article 41.

Secondly, this position makes it impossible for a consistory that really needs help to obtain it. If a consistory should be deadlocked on a matter, with a tie vote, it *cannot* make a decision, and therefore may not ask classis for help.

A third objection was presented effectively by Rev. G. VandenBerg, in this hypothetical case (*Standard Bearer*, Vol. 36, p. 164):

There is a Consistory that is confronted with a rather serious problem that in many respects affects the entire congregation. All are waiting to hear what the Consistory decides. Some are inclined toward one side of the problem and others are leaning the other way. There are signs of division in the congregation. The problem is very serious and the Consistory is not at all unanimous in regard to a solution although the majority in the Consistory could pass a resolution with respect to the matter. The whole Consistory, however, is agreed that the judgment of the Classis, as an outside and neutral party, would be desirable but this it cannot get unless it makes a decision first. And this the Consistory is a bit hesitant to do because of the situation in the congregation and the fact that within the Consistory itself there is no unanimity of opinion. Now

suppose that the Consistory makes a decision in a matter of this nature and that ultimately this decision proves to be a wrong one. Would it not result in endless and complicated difficulties in the congregation which would very likely become impossible to untangle after some time? Much of the consequent trouble could have been avoided if another course in the treatment of the matter had been possible. Would it not have been much better in such a circumstance if the Consistory could temporarily refrain from taking a definite stand in the matter and first go and seek the help and judgment of the Classis? To be sure, eventually the Consistory would have to decide the matter and resolve the difficulty in the congregation but it could then do so with the counsel and guidance of the broader gathering of the churches. In this way error as well as much trouble might have been prevented and this is much to be preferred to the creation in a congregation of trouble that later has to be straightened out after irreparable damage has been done.

Fourthly, some decisions which a consistory faces have implications extending much farther than just to the congregation it oversees. It may be a doctrinal issue or a matter of policy never before faced in the churches, but one that will affect all the churches in the denomination. If the consistory realizes this, would it not be wise to consult with her sister churches before taking a decision?

Finally, in conflict with that position is the practice of the Reformed churches of the past. Rev. VandenBerg notes that in the history of the PRC "it has occurred on numerous

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occasions that the delegates of a consistory were sent home with their problem unresolved because classis refused to treat the matter since the consistory had not as yet taken a definite stand." This is not in harmony with the practice of Reformed synods in The Netherlands. *The Ecclesiastical Manual* by P. Biesterveld and H.H. Kuyper include many pages of answers that Synods gave to questions raised by lower ecclesiastical bodies. It is obvious that the consistories simply did not know what to do in many instances, but the Synods answered the questions nonetheless.

Of course, no one wishes to see classis become a "question box" into which consistories drop all their troubles and questions. To insure that a consistory comes with a proper matter for classis' help, two criteria must be met. First, classis should only deal with questions on a concrete case that the consistory is facing. The consistory must really need "help." Secondly, classis must see evidence that the consistory has made a serious attempt to solve the problem on her own.*

One additional issue on this 4th question is the manner in which the help and judgment is to be given. Should the president give the help? Should a motion be proposed and adopted? Or should a committee be appointed to give advice to classis? One thing to keep in mind is that if classis passes a motion, its decision is binding, according to Article 31, which

would release the consistory from taking any decision, if they agreed, and would force them to protest if they disagreed. Thus it would be preferable that no motion be passed on most of these questions. In the experience of many delegates of Classis West, matters raised under this question of Article 41 were often answered by a general discussion by the delegates, after which the president inquired of the delegates (of the particular consistory) whether the discussion was enough help. (In most instances, it was.) In some cases a committee might be needed to study the problem and meet with the consistory to help them settle the matter.

In conclusion, we are convinced that the questions of Article 41 are good for the classis and the churches, for mutual supervision. On the other hand, we are also convinced that the manner of asking and answering the questions departs much from the spirit and purpose of the church order. A few suggestions are offered to help make this practice more valuable.

1) Change the place in the agenda from next-to-last to the beginning, as the Reformed Churches originally decided. While there is something to be said for ending the meeting with a show of unity, this position contributes much to the danger of its being only a "show." The important matters have been concluded. Many delegates are packing up, some are checking plane schedules, and thinking of the journey home. This is not conducive to a meaningful answering of these important questions.

Placing them early in the meeting means that there is less of a rush to "get finished." It also sets the right tone for the meeting — that of great care for the spiritual welfare of the sister churches.

2) Let the presidents take heed to the words "among other things" — i.e., "the president shall, *among other things*, put the following questions to the delegates of each church."

It was the intent of the fathers and, we believe, the practice of the

churches, not to limit themselves to these four questions. Other questions may, and perhaps ought, to be added as follow-up.

3) The president could change the questions to be slightly more specific. For example, instead of "Are the consistory meetings held in your church?" could be asked, "How often are the regular meetings of the consistory held?"

4) Definitely divide question 3 on the poor and the Christian schools.

5) Presidents could preface their questions with a brief summary of the scope of each question and/or with pointed examples of the intent of the question. □

Confidence in Foreordination
Sovereign Ruler of the skies,
Ever gracious, ever wise,
All my times are in Thy hand,
All events at Thy command.

His decree, who form'd the earth,
Fix'd my first and second birth;
Parents, native place, and time,
All appointed were by Him.

He that form'd me in the womb,
He shall guide me to the tomb;
All my times shall ever be
Order'd by His wise decree.

Times of sickness, times of health,
Times of penury and wealth;
Times of trial and of grief,
Times of triumph and relief.

Times the Tempter's power to prove,
Times to taste a Savior's love;
All must come, and last, and end,
All shall please my heavenly Friend.

Plagues and death around me fly;
Till He bids, I cannot die:
Not a single shaft can hit
Till the God of love sees fit.

O Thou Gracious, Wise, and Just!
In Thy hands my life I trust:
Have I something dearer still?
I resign it to Thy will.

Standard Bearer,
December 15, 1932

[* In the discussion at the conference, an interesting difference of practice was observed between the two classes in the PRC in the use of this question (#4). The ministers and elders could cite specific cases which had been brought up in Classis West and treated to the satisfaction of the consistory, where the consistory had taken no decision. But concerning Classis East, the only instances which could be cited were those where a consistory's request for "help" had been denied because the consistory had not taken a decision prior to approaching Classis. Why this difference?]

Erasure of Baptized Members

Rev. Charles Terpstra

Introduction to the Nature of the Problem

The question with which we deal in this presentation is that which concerns the proper exercise of discipline on the part of the church toward those baptized members who have not yet made public profession of faith but who walk in open, unconfessed, and impenitent sin. The Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as other Reformed churches, have the practice of working with such members by means of admonitions and warnings before finally erasing them as members of the church, which is to take their names off the membership rolls and thus exclude them from the church. But sometimes the propriety of this practice of erasure is questioned, and the contention is made that such erring members ought instead to be excommunicated from the church just as confessing members are if they continue in sin. This is the issue before us.

Let it be clear that the question is not whether such baptized persons ought to be disciplined by the church. Reformed and Presbyterian churches have always held to the position that such persons are indeed members of the church and as such come under the government and discipline of the elders of the church. And they certainly are agreed that when baptized members walk in sin, this sin has to be

dealt with following the general rules of discipline outlined by our Lord in Matthew 18:15-18 and referred to by our church order in Articles 71-78.

Further, this question of the discipline of baptized members does not concern the young children of the church. We are also agreed on the fact that when the young children of the church sin, they do not come under the formal discipline of the church but under the parental discipline of the home (Prov. 23:13, 14; Eph. 6:1-4). Our concern in this matter is with adult baptized members who have reached the years of discretion or the age of accountability. That such may be disciplined by the church is clear from Deuteronomy 21:18-21.

But the question concerns the precise *method* and *extent* of discipline which may be applied to adult baptized members who walk in sin. Is it proper for such erring baptized members to be removed from the church by this simple erasure, or must they be put out of the church by means of the "extreme remedy" of excommunication, with its attending admonitions and announcements and reading of the Form of Excommunication?

Closely related to this issue is the question of the precise nature of the membership of baptized persons in the church. On the one hand, there are those who argue that baptized members, not having confessed their faith and having been admitted to the Lord's Supper, cannot be the objects of the formal discipline of the elders. They are "minors," or "incomplete" members, and therefore may not receive major and complete discipline. They cannot be barred from the table of the Lord, and for that reason can-

not be excommunicated (cf. H. Hanks, "Notes on the Church Order, pp. 108-109; I. VanDellen and M. Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary*, 1941 ed., p. 295; W. Heyns, *Handbook for Elders and Deacons*, pp. 252-3; J.L. Schaver, *The Polity of the Churches*, p. 201; K. DeGier, *Explanation of the Church Order of Dordt*, pp. 106-107).

On the other hand, there are those who argue that baptized members ought to be dealt with in the same way as confessing members as regards sin, since they are equally responsible for walking according to the demands of the covenant and for upholding the honor of Christ and His church. Hence, they may be and ought to be excommunicated (cf. W.W.J. VanOene, *With Common Consent*, p. 315).

It must be stated that the answer to this question is not specifically answered by the church order of Dordt as adopted and revised by the PRC. Articles 71-78 set forth the purpose, objects, and manner of Christian discipline, but nothing is said concerning the discipline of baptized members. The assumption is made that those persons who are the objects of the formal discipline of the church are confessing members who have been admitted to the Lord's Supper. Nor to my knowledge have we ever made any official church decisions or set any specific policy on this matter. It is a practice we have inherited from the Dutch Reformed churches of the past.

History of the Problem

The history of how the Reformed churches dealt with the discipline of baptized members reveals that this was a subject of disagreement from

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the very beginning. Already at the National Synod of Dordt held in 1578 this very question came up. In Question 47 of the "Particular Questions" we find this question and answer:

Whether children who have been baptized in the Reformed churches, having come to maturity, shall be subjected to ecclesiastical discipline, and whether they, having been admonished and remain obstinate, shall be excommunicated, although they have not yet confessed their faith and have not attended the Lord's Supper. Answer: Since baptism is a general testimony of God's covenant which belongs to the children of Christians as long as they do not reject the same by public apostasy, the public and general admonitions, ... shall be enough in the public and free congregations. But since confession of faith and the fellowship of the Lord's Supper is a special testimony in God's church, by which those who have sinned against God's covenant are again received ... no excommunication shall be used (except — CJT) against those in whom God's covenant is sealed anew by the Lord's Supper (*Ecclesiastical Manual*, P. Biesterveld and H.H. Kuyper, trans. by R. De Ridder, 1982).

The answer of the Synod is clear: there is to be no excommunication of erring baptized members.

But this was not the end of the matter. In the 16th and 17th centuries the Reformed churches were divided concerning the two positions mentioned above. G. Voetius, a Dutch delegate to the great Synod of Dordt in 1619-'19 and a scholar in church polity, held to the position of the Synod of 1578, that baptized children are incomplete members of the church, and cannot therefore be excommunicated. They are to be admonished, and if they remain impenitent, erased from church membership. On the other hand, John a' Lasco, the Polish pastor of the Netherlands congregation in London and author of a book on church discipline, held to the position that baptized members who did not confess their faith by the time they were fifteen because of an unspiritual

attitude and walk were to be admonished; and if they still did not make such confession by the time they were 18-20 years of age, they were formally excommunicated and excluded from the church (see L. Doezeema, the *Standard Bearer*, "Excommunication of Baptized Members?", Vol. 20, pp. 317-319; 405-406).

The issue next appeared in the Dutch Reformed churches at the Synod of Middelburg in 1896. At this Synod Prof. H. Bavinck and B. Rutgers presented advice on the question of what should be done to those baptized members who did not make profession of faith by the age of 18. It was their advice that: 1) such members should be admonished as to the willful neglect of their covenant obligations; 2) the Consistory continue to admonish such until confession is made or until the admonitions go unheeded up to the 30th year of age; 3) at that time or before, the Consistory is to announce that because of their refusal to heed the exhortations such persons "can no longer be recognized as members of the church" (see Heyns, *Handbook*, p. 255; and Doezeema, "Excommunication," pp. 318-405). This advice was adopted by the Synod of Groningen in 1899.

In 1920 the Synod of the Reformed Churches of The Netherlands expressed its basic agreement with the advice of Bavinck and Rutgers. It was their view that excommunication cannot be applied to baptized members who in confession and walk manifest themselves as unbelievers and ungodly, but that the consistory can declare that such have withdrawn themselves from the church (see Doezeema, "Excommunication," p. 319). But in 1939 a Committee of Synod drew up a "concept announcement" regarding unfaithful baptized members which took the stronger position. While still recognizing that such persons were incomplete members, this Committee's announcement stated that following unheeded admonitions such members were to be excommunicated and declared to have no part in the kingdom of Christ as long as they were unrepentant

(Doezeema, "Excommunication," p. 319).

This same struggle over the proper discipline of baptized members went on in our mother church, the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). We find the first reference to this question in a decision of the Synod of 1881: "Those baptized who come to years of discretion and refuse to attend catechism shall be admonished; and if they persist, they shall be excommunicated" (Schaver, *Polity*, Vol. 2, p. 173). Schaver also makes reference to the "excluding" of baptized members by official announcement dating back to the CRC Synod of 1896, which exclusion was to take place only after an announcement had been made to the congregation and following the advice of Classis (Vol. 2, p. 179). The first mention of the word "erasure" appears in the Acts of the Synod of 1910: "There can be no determined age for erasure of baptized members because circumstances vary greatly" (*Manual of CRC Government*, p. 310).

The clearest and fullest statement on this matter, however, was given by the CRC Synod of 1918 (and later amended in 1974). It made a specific decision respecting the procedure to be followed in excluding unfaithful baptized members. First, it said that those baptized members who failed to make confession of faith by the time of the years of maturity were unfaithful covenant members, and thus became objects of church discipline; and if they continue in this sin, are to be "excluded" from the church. Second, it declared that, before such members can be excluded, a threefold procedure has to be met: an announcement must be made to the congregation without mentioning their names; the advice of Classis is to be sought; and another announcement is to be made to the congregation mentioning their names and asking for prayers for them. Third, it stated that the actual exclusion of such members is to take place "by officially informing the congregation, notifying the parties involved that they, due to their persistent unfaith-

fulness as covenant members, notwithstanding all ecclesiastical admonitions, will henceforth not be regarded as belonging to the church" (CRC Manual, p. 310). And finally, this Synod determined that such members were not to return to the church except through repentance and profession of faith. This remains the CRC position to the present time.

Evaluation of the Present Practice in the PRC

What is the current practice in the PRC? To the best of my knowledge our manner of erasing baptized members is as follows. In the case of unfaithful baptized members who walk in open sin and impenitence, the Consistories apply the admonitions and warnings of God's Word with much patience and yet firmness, seeking always the repentance of the sinner. There are no time limits or age limits set by the Consistories for laboring with such members. Every opportunity and time is given for the Spirit to work in their hearts and lives. After long labor, the Consistory makes a decision to proceed with the erasure of such a member, and then seeks the advice of Classis to proceed with this step. Following the advice of Classis, the Consistory usually brings final admonitions to the sinner, pointing out to him that he will be erased from the membership of the church at a previously determined date. Finally, the Consistory actually erases the member on the date decided, and informs the congregation via bulletin announcement or public announcement.

*... the practice of erasure
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its full due and impact.*

In evaluating our present practice, there are good things to be said concerning it. In the first place, our consistories take this aspect of discipline very seriously and are very care-

ful and deliberate in their proceedings. They do not rashly commence such discipline, nor do they hastily carry it out. This is as it ought to be, since the goal of all discipline is the repentance of the sinner and his reconciliation with Christ and the church. Secondly, the erasure of baptized members in the PRC must be done with the advice of Classis. The Consistories have to be able to show the Classis that such members have indeed sinned, that they as elders have labored diligently with them, and that they are convinced that they must proceed with erasure. This too is good, since it safeguards the sinner and holds the Consistories to faithful work.

However, there are also reasons why I believe the present practice of the discipline of baptized members in the PRC is weak and ought to be changed.

In the first place, the practice of erasure does not give the work of discipline its full due and impact. I believe that it is incomplete and too passive, and that it leaves the wrong impression. Though the admonitions given are an active form of discipline, and though the decision to erase does exclude one from membership in the church, the idea is often left with us and with the sinner that this discipline was not so serious because there were no formal steps and because the elders could not carry discipline out to its full extent in excommunication.

In the second place, our present way of dealing with such sinning members does not give the congregation an active role in the work of discipline. At present the members of our churches do not find out about the discipline of unfaithful baptized members until the time that their erasure is reported in the bulletin or in a public announcement. This must not be. The role of the members in the office of believer is very important for the work of discipline, and they must be informed of and included in the work of admonishing erring baptized members.

And in the third place, my reasons for criticizing our present prac-

tice and wanting to see it changed include this, that we ought to be more in line with the practice of other Reformed churches. Our current way of erasing baptized members is not the way other Reformed churches handle this aspect of discipline, and I believe that we ought to learn from them and conform to them. This will not only promote uniformity among Reformed churches; but also serve to make us more consistent in our own practice.

Proposed Changes in Our PRC Practice

What changes would I propose? First, I would recommend that we dispense with the concept and terminology of erasure, and speak of and practice the excommunication of adult baptized members who are guilty of erring in doctrine or in life. It is my conviction that for all responsible adult members of the church, whether confessing or baptized, there is only one way of being barred from the church for reasons of sin and impenitence, and that is excommunication. That is what we ought to call it, and that is what we ought to practice.

If we would retain the term and concept of erasure, it ought to be applied only to those who fail to maintain their membership in the church for other reasons (moving away, etc.). This is what other churches refer to as "lapsed" membership.

Second, I propose that we include in the steps of discipline of such baptized members public announcements to the congregation, enjoining them to pray for and admonish the erring member(s). There ought to be at least two such announcements, the first in which the name of the erring member is not mentioned, and the second (preferably following the advice of Classis) in which his name is mentioned. Such announcements take into account the vital role and responsibility of the office of believer in the work of Christian discipline.

Finally, there is something to be said for the preparation and use of a special liturgical Form for those cases of excommunication. While our present "Form of Excommunication"

could properly and adequately be used, there are enough differences to warrant another Form. W. Heyns suggested this years ago in these words:

Such a Form, elucidating and emphasizing the inestimable value of the privilege of being a participant in the Covenant of Grace and a member of the Church of Christ, as signed

and sealed unto us personally by Baptism, and also the awful seriousness of being deprived of these privileges by the Church in the name of Christ, would give much-needed instruction, would add to the solemnity of the occasion, and would cause this solemn act, like others, to be executed in the language of the Church (*Handbook*, p. 254).

Whether or not such a Form

would be drawn up, and howsoever we would go about making these changes in our discipline of baptized members, we ought to see the importance of taking a serious look at our present practice and perhaps instituting a change along the lines suggested above. Such a more carefully defined policy would better serve the churches and would better tend to the glory of Christ. □

The Value of the Church Order Today (2)

Rev. Ronald Cammenga

Ensuring the Continued Value of the Church Order

Every Reformed Christian, Reformed congregation, Reformed consistory, and Reformed denomination must do all in its power to ensure the CONTINUED value of the church order. The continued value of the church order depends upon several things.

First, the continued value of the church order depends on its being used and honored. The church order must not be ignored, deliberately set aside, never consulted. This has happened in Reformed churches in the past. It is happening in Reformed churches today which do formally subscribe to the church order. The most valuable instrument is useless, if it is not used.

To a large extent, of course, the continued use of and esteem for the church order depends on our remain-

ing convinced of the truthfulness of the principles embodied in the church order. This is the reason in the past and today why the church order falls into disuse in the church: repudiation of the biblical principles of church government upon which the church order is based.

*The continued value
of the church order
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of the church order
in the churches.*

In the second place, the continued value of the church order depends on our keeping alive the knowledge of the church order in the churches. We must KNOW the church order if it is going to be of value in the life of the church. Seminary students must be given thorough instruction in the church order in the theological school. Officebearers must make it

their business to study and become familiar with the church order. The members of the church ought to be acquainted with the church order through their own study of the church order and of the several commentaries available on the church order. A study of the articles of the church order is highly recommended as the after-recess portion of the Adult Bible Study or Men's Society in your congregation.

In our own churches a new generation of officebearers has arisen in recent years. The torch is being passed from one generation to the next. Especially the younger ministers and elders must exert themselves to become thoroughly familiar with the church order.

Revision and Updating of the Church Order

The continued value of the church order would be ensured, I believe, by a revision and updating of the church order. Is it not time that our Protestant Reformed Churches undertake a revision of the church order? Is it not time for us to do what

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Article 86 of the church order requires us to do: "These articles, relating to the lawful order of the church, have been so drafted and adopted by common consent, that they (if the profit of the churches demand otherwise) may and OUGHT to be altered, augmented or diminished"?

I believe that we ought seriously to consider such a revision. Now I am not advocating the kind of radical revision that would excise all Reformed and biblical principles from the church order. But I am advocating a revision that would update the church order and improve it.

There are several reasons why we ought to give this matter of revision consideration. For one thing, there is a radical difference between the situation in The Netherlands at the time of Dordt and our situation in the United States today. A study of the articles of our church order will reveal a very close relationship between church and state at that time, so close that in certain instances undue influence is granted to the government in the affairs of the church. For another thing, there are numerous additions to and decisions pertaining to articles that we have appended, evidence in itself that the church order is due for revision. Not only have we appended decisions, but in some instances these decisions are contradictory to the very articles to which they are appended. Besides, there are some articles or parts of articles that we simply ignore as inapplicable, and have decided to understand other articles in ways which they were not originally intended to be understood.

Let me point out some articles that are in need of revision.

Some articles are in need of correction. Article 2 needs to be corrected which speaks of four special offices in the New Testament church and makes of professor of theology a distinct office. Article 3 allows for professors of theology who are not ordained ministers, a thing not in keeping with the policy and practice in our churches. Article 6 needs correction and clarification regarding

ministers serving in institutions of mercy.

Some articles need to be dropped. Articles 47-49 which speak of provincial or particular synods, in distinction from the national synod, ought to be dropped. Article 52 reads, "Inasmuch as different languages are spoken in the churches, the necessary translations shall be made in the ecclesiastical assemblies, and in the publication of recommendations, instructions and decisions." This article is obsolete; it ought to be dropped.

Several articles need to be changed and updated. Article 23, which requires all the families of the church to be visited both before and after the administration of the Lord's Supper, ought to be amended so that it is in line with our practice of annual family visitation. Article 26, which speaks of the cooperation of the deacons with others (government agencies) devoting themselves to the care of the poor, ought to be changed. Articles 37 and 40 which require weekly consistory and deacons' meetings ought to be revised to require monthly meetings, which is our practice. Article 45 makes it the duty of the church in which classis or synod meets to furnish the next classis or synod with the minutes. This article should be dropped, or it should be amended to refer to the duty of the stated clerks. Article 50 calls for meetings of synod every other year; this should be updated to harmonize with our practice of an annual synodical meeting. Article 65, dealing with funeral sermons and funeral services, is in need of revision. Article 70 requires consistories to see to official church weddings. This article is scarcely abided by in our churches. The revision of this article by the Canadian Reformed Churches is excellent:

The consistory shall ensure that the members of the congregation marry only in the Lord, and that the ministers—as authorized by the consistory—solemnize only such marriages as are in accordance with the Word of God. The solemnization of a mar-

riage may take place either in a private ceremony or in a public worship service. The adopted Form for the Solemnization of Marriage shall be used.

A revision might also take into consideration adding certain articles. An article could be added delineating the task of missionaries. A separate article could be added dealing with "church counselors," spelling out clearly their duties. Perhaps an article could be added dealing with the procedure for erasure of baptized members.

In addition, some articles could be combined. Organization of the articles could be improved, for more logical placement of some articles. Some of the existing articles could be brought more in line with the original church order of Dordt. And the language of several of the articles could be improved upon, so as to make the meaning of the article clear.

All of this is not to be understood to mean that in its present form the church order is unserviceable. It certainly is not. This is a matter of improvement with a view to greater service.

As Reformed churches, we have received of the Lord a great heritage, not only in doctrine but also in church polity. That heritage is embodied in our Reformed church order. May we be faithful to it, and may God bless its use in the churches so that we are "nourished and preserved in concord and in unity." □

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A Comparison of the Church Order of Continental Dordt and Westminster Scotland

Rev. Chris Coleborn

For a better understanding of our Reformed heritage, we will briefly attempt to compare the practices or church orders of the historic Continental Reformed churches as found in the Order of Dordrecht (Dordt), and the historic Reformed church (Westminster), as found in the Practice of the Church of Scotland.

The Great Points of Agreement

Both orders (the Scots tend to use the term "practice") spring from common root concepts and principles. Firstly, both see that the life of the community of the saints must be ordered and arranged according to Christ's prescription, and not to man's. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the church. He from all eternity has embraced in covenant His people, and by His work has redeemed them to Himself. He rules over the church that He loves and gave Himself to ransom. Our life under the order of the church is thus tied to Almighty God and His sovereignty over us.

Secondly, both have historically viewed the establishment of the life and government of the church as principally by Christ's apostles, and thus

with Christ's authority. The ordering of the affairs of the church on earth as she lives as a holy society is thus built on God's revelation to us. Both orders, then, see the apostolic rules and regulations as normative and authoritative for us until Christ comes again. It is part of our confession that we believe in a holy and apostolic church! Both orders recognize that it is Scripture alone which is the basis of our practice.

The basic concepts behind Dordt and Westminster come down to us via Calvin.

In the third place, both Dordt and Westminster owe a great common debt to John Calvin. The basic concepts behind Dordt and Westminster come down to us via Calvin. He greatly influenced the formulators of the orders of the Reformed Churches of the Continent and Scotland. Men such as a' Lasco, Knox, Andrew Melville, Olevianus, Acronius, Walaeus, Trigland, and Voetius were all indebted to Calvin and the light of the Word of God he had, not only on the truth of God generally, but also on the matter of the arrangement of the affairs of the visible body of the church in the world.

Apparent Differences

There are some areas where there

are apparent differences between the two orders. However, closer examination shows a marked degree of unity of principle, if not the same outworking of the principle. There are several instances to illustrate this.

The Discipline of Pastors and Members

The Order of Dordt is understood to make the consistory or session the radical court of the church. It is said that one "acid test" of this is that the consistory can discipline its pastor. On the other hand, it is understood that the Westminster Practice does not allow a session to discipline its pastor. Only presbytery can do that. Again, it is said that, under Dordt, classis cannot discipline members within its bounds, for classis is a voluntary union. On the other hand, under Westminster, presbytery can discipline members within its bounds. At first glance, it seems that this is a difference of principle in the two orders.

As we examine the matter more closely, however, we find that the difference is perhaps more that of administration and emphasis than of principle! For example, the Westminster/Scottish practice plainly declares: "The kirk session, being properly the only radical church judicature, not consisting of delegate, but of perpetual and fixed members, cannot be at any time dissolved, but by them-

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selves are adjourned from time to time..." ("Collection and Observations Methodized," etc., Title VIII, No. 35, page 242). Both thus principally agree that the session/consistory is the radical court of the church.

But what of the matter of the discipline of ministers and members? Is there not a big difference of principle there? In answer we ask, how can it be, when Article 53 teaches that classis can suspend ministers from office? The Order of Dordt (Articles 76 and 79), teaches that, though a local Consistory exercises discipline of its members and minister, it cannot excommunicate without the advice of Classis, and in the case of the discipline of a minister, elder, or deacon, the Consistory is restrained from suspending or deposing from office until they have the approval of the nearest adjoining consistory. No consistory may act alone. But note, a Westminster man sees officers from two consistories principally forming a classis! Thus, do we not find in both cases that the consistory (Dordt) and the session (Westminster) are restrained from unilateral action? Do

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and emphasis
than of principle!*

we not here see the principle of the need of supervision and advice in the serious matter of the discipline of an officebearer in the context of a broader assembly of officebearers than the local court?

Further to this, under the Westminster order, in contrast to Dordt, a session cannot proceed of itself to the actual discipline of a minister. It can yet both admonish its pastor as a brother elder and instigate disciplinary processes against him in the event of a misdemeanor. The session is only restrained in the trial of him. The trial must be held before

the presbytery. Surely, the principle is very close in both cases, and the differences are that of the practical outworking of the principle. In addition to this point, if a classis or synod find a congregation erring willfully outside the Three Forms of Unity and the Order, they can be declared outside the denomination—that is, "out of communion" with the rest of the denomination. Is not this a form of "excommunication"? Can it not be argued that this is in fact a form of discipline? The order of Dordt speaks of classis/synod being able to settle and bind matters (Art. 31). This speaks of an authority and power of the major courts apart from the consistory. Thus classis and synod are not merely advisory bodies to independent congregations, but act similarly to presbytery and synod, with actual delegated authority.

Higher/Lower or Broader/Narrow Courts

A difference is often seen behind the language used to describe the various church courts. Westminster Presbyterians often refer to their courts as "higher" or "lower." Some who follow the Order of Dordt use the language of "broader" and "narrower," although the Order itself uses the terms "minor" and "major" (Arts. 30, 31). No essential difference of principle should be seen in this different language. The Westminster/Scottish practice understands "higher" only in the sense that such a court has greater authority because of the larger number of congregations represented at it. The greater the number of congregations represented, the greater or "higher" its authority. Is not this precisely the thinking behind the use of the words "broader" and "narrower"? The Second Book of Discipline of the Church of Scotland brings this point out. It speaks of "the Eldership" as governing the church at a local, regional, and national level. The National Assembly was called "the General Eldership of the Whole Church within the realm" (Ch. VII). There is no hierarchy here.

Moderators/Presidents Between Meetings of Major Courts

It is suggested that a principled difference between Dordt and Westminster's practice is seen in the Dordt order teaching that the office of president (moderator) ceases when the assembly arises. Under the Westminster scheme, the moderator remains in office with delegated authority between presbyteries/synods. However, Articles 44 and 49 make it clear that classis/synod can also appoint officers with ongoing authority of the broader court between meetings of that assembly. Again, is this a matter of difference of principle, or a difference of administration?

Historical Agreement but Contemporary Divergence Catechism Preaching

There are instances of agreement in the past between the two practices, but in time the churches have drifted apart in their once common order. For example, the systematic preaching of God's Word on the basis of the respective Catechisms was once common to both churches. However, this practice has been forgotten by most Presbyterians today. Book II, "Collection and Observations," etc. No. 13, page 256, states: "Ministers are to preach catechetical doctrine, besides their ordinary work of catechising, in such manner as they find most conducive to the edification of their flocks...." The Order of Dordt (Art. 68) makes a similar requirement. There are still Presbyterian Churches, though, such as the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, where catechetical preaching is still to be found.

Modification of Concepts and Terms

There are also instances where the original agreement has altered because of changes made to the practice/order by a denomination. For example, some, following Dordt, have altered the word and description, "church," to, "churches" (Preface to PRC Order in re Article 86).

The Civil Magistrate

Once, the two practices/ orders were more or less identical, at least in principle, in allowing a qualified involvement of the civil magistrate in the functioning of the church's affair. Both reject the heresy of Erastianism. Yet originally both the Westminster/ Scottish and the Continental, as seen in the Belgic Confession Article XXXVI, and the Westminster Confession, Ch. XXIII, allowed a role for the Christian magistrate in relation to the life of the church. For example, they allowed the civil magistrate to call assemblies of the church to meet, so as to be advised by them, etc. The Synod of Dordt and the Westminster Assembly were, in fact, such extraordinary gatherings. It is hard to ascertain how consistently this matter is held to by the churches under Dordt today. Such churches as the Evangelical Presbyterian Church still subscribe to this principle.

Recognized Differences of Principle

Term or Permanent Offices

There appear to be several principled differences between the two practices. Probably the most significant example is the matter of term eldership and deaconship (Dordt, Art. 27). The Westminster/ Scottish view is perpetual office. Nevertheless, there is appreciation for aspects of the Dordt view by the Westminster practice. In some instances, where there are sufficient elders, Westminster allows a rotation of elders in a congregation ("Collections and Observations Methodized," etc. Title VII, No. 10, page 211). So, although there appears to be a principled difference on this matter, we should bear in mind that it is one of long standing between the Reformed Churches of the Continent and Britain. Nevertheless, it never became an issue of division between them and, ironically in this case, the practice could be very close even though the principle is different!

Responsibility for the Preaching

Under the Order or Dordt, the consistory must approve, and be re-

sponsible for, whoever occupies the pulpit. Under the Scottish, the minister is seen as responsible and answerable to the Presbytery. Of course, the local session may admonish their minister if they feel that he has erred in preaching, or, if more serious, commence proceedings against him before the Presbytery.

Holy Days

Another example of where there is a clear difference of principle is in the matter of observance of "holy days." Article 67 of the Order of Dordt requires the keeping of them. The Westminster/ Scottish practice, while allowing for occasional days for thanksgiving or fasting, yet outlaws all "holy days" ("The Directory for Public Worship, Touching Days," etc.). What is the attitude of the historic Reformed Church of Scotland to such matters of difference? They saw them as very serious, and dissented over them, yet they did not break communion with such churches who kept them. This can be seen when the Church of Scotland wrote to the Swiss Churches warmly approving the Second Helvetic Confession, but with this qualification: "(They) take exception to those 'festivals of our Lord's nativity, circumcision, passion, resurrection, ascension and sending the Holy Ghost upon His disciples. These festivals... obtain no place among us, for we dare not religiously celebrate any other feast-day among us than what the divine oracles have prescribed'" ("The First Book of Discipline," Ed. J.K. Cameron, St. Andrew Press, Edinburgh, page 88, fn. 10).

Song in Worship

Article 76 of Dordt allows songs other than the Scriptures to be sung in the public worship of God. The Westminster/ Scottish allows only the 150 Psalms to be sung in the public worship of God ("Directory for Public Worship: The Singing of the Psalms").

Conclusion

There are other differences between the two orders, such as the

Westminster providing for an Ecumenical Synod. However, as far as the present writer understands, these differences are apparently not differences of basic principle, but simply one practice choosing to address a matter, and the other not choosing to do so.

Let us remember that, whilst there are certainly some things in which the two orders/ practices differ, they yet have much in common. Basically, so it seems to the writer, with only several exceptions, the two agree. Are not the differences, which are all too often thought to be substantial, really only differences of administration rather than essential principles?

Historically, the two orders/ practices did not arise in isolation from one another. When the two practices were being defined, there was a walk together and an interaction between the churches of Britain and the Continent. They understood one another, although disagreeing on some points. The churches historically have had a closeness, and have mutually respected one another. They were not antagonists but fellow pilgrims of the same essential like precious faith, who sought, even with some differences, to edify one another and to strengthen one another's hand where they could.

In the basic concepts of the two church orders, the Reformed churches of Scotland and the Continent essentially held to, and were motivated by, the same grand principles of God's glory and of the Scripture as our only rule. They saw Christ as the sole Head of the church; that He has an exclusive right to appoint all her laws and ordinances of worship and service; that all administrations in His house are to be performed in His name and by His authority; and that we His servants, in the proper line of our office, do not act by the authority of or by the delegation from any earthly prince or legislature but by Christ speaking to us in His Word alone! (See Dr. T. M'Crie's "STATEMENT," page 81.) □

*Taking Heed to the
Doctrine*
Rev. Bernard Woudenberg

Hope and Disappointment

*Wherefore putting away lying,
speak every man truth with his neighbor:
for we are members one of another.*

Ephesians 4:25

If there was a dream that ever smoldered in the heart of Herman Hoeksema, it was certainly that of being able to engage in profitable and constructive dialogue with those who were theologically his equal. That he was denied that opportunity in 1924 was one of his most painful disappointments. A few years before, he had assisted the seminary professors in clearing their school of modernism, a task at which they had themselves failed. Surely it could have been expected that, if they had honest differences with him over Common Grace, they would have come to him personally to discuss and work out the problems. Instead, however, he suddenly found himself barraged with a series of protests clearly orchestrated, but coming from strange and unexpected sources, and rushed on to synod with little opportunity for study or deliberation. Moreover, once synod convened, he was all but denied a voice in his own defense. And then, when the whole matter was brought up in classis again, his former friends did battle with him, not face to face, but through a bizarre exchange of papers from a distance. It left for him one of the deepest hurts of the whole sad matter, not so much that they differed with him, but that they did what they did without talk-

ing to him personally or allowing any opportunity for free and open discussion. It was no wonder that, when the *Standard Bearer* was started, the organization formed was called the Reformed Free Publishing Association. Its intent was to provide a theological journal open to every responsible person who wished to discuss Reformed doctrine freely and without censure. But for the most part Rev. Hoeksema was left to work alone.

Thus we can well imagine the sense of surprise and satisfaction which came to him when in 1939 Dr. Klaas Schilder, one of the most prominent theologians in The Netherlands, having been invited to speak at Calvin College and Seminary, thought also to walk down the street to Hoeksema's home. It was altogether in character, for to this day Dr. Schilder is remembered, in all of his greatness, to have remained the most common of men. His concern was not in the least with status or reputation; but only, like that of Hoeksema, with a simple pursuit of truth.

Immediately a deep bond of kinship sprang up between these two unaffected but profound men. Without hesitation they began to work together in setting up a conference on Common Grace such as Hoeksema had always before been denied. The Christian Reformed men came; they could hardly deny the doctor. Dr. Schilder spoke; Rev. Hoeksema spoke; but the rest for the most part drew back and were silent.

Still, a working relationship had begun. Both realized, undoubtedly, their theological differences; but they also believed that with mutual trust and honest effort, they would be able to work constructively together to the

benefit of all. But it was not to be. Dr. Schilder, of course, had to return home; and all too soon the Second World War intervened. All through the war Rev. Hoeksema tried to maintain contact; but little other than greetings and expressions of concern could get through.

Eventually, however, the war was over, and as quickly as possible plans were in the making for another visit of Dr. Schilder to the United States, this time at the invitation of the Protestant Reformed. Now, it seemed, these two friends would be able to sit down and work through the theological problems of the day. But providence again would not have it so. Shortly before Dr. Schilder was to arrive, Rev. Hoeksema was struck down by a massive stroke. The visit did take place, and was deeply appreciated by the churches. But this time it was Rev. Hoeksema who could receive little more than the greetings and expressions of concern.

A physically strong man, Rev. Hoeksema's recovery was not long. It was for hardly more than a year that Rev. Vos served as editor for the *Standard Bearer* in his stead, during which time he sought to lay out the distinctives of the Protestant Reformed covenant view. And at the same time the synod of the Liberated Church, meeting at Amersfoort, voted to seek correspondence with us. It was the next indication of promise. Now perhaps at last theological dialogue could begin, if not through personal meeting, at least by carefully formulated papers and official communications. Eagerly opening notifications were awaited from the Liberated's committee. But wait as we might, months passed, and finally

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years, and nothing was heard. The longed for discussion never came.

It was not as though those years did not have their positive notes. They did. During this time immigrants began to arrive from The Netherlands; and many from the Liberated churches sought contact with the Protestant Reformed. It was mostly in Canada; and soon those of our men who could speak Dutch were busily traveling back and forth to the Toronto area to work with them. It was an exciting and satisfying experience. These people were theologically keen, and committed. Readily and openly they engaged in discussion about all aspects of Reformed doctrine, including, of course, the covenant; and their response to our teaching and preaching was warm. There appeared to be little prejudice against what was said, and some even expressed preference for it over that which they had been accustomed to hear in The Netherlands. And it seemed to bring our own denomination together in common cause, as well as drawing us closer to our friends over the sea.

But, there were ominous sounds as well. When at last Rev. Hoeksema was able to take up as editor of the *Standard Bearer* once again, it wasn't with the welcome of all, which might have been expected. In fact, almost immediately there was heard the sound of complaint.

The first matter that arose had to do with his catechetical method. Always he had believed that children should not be taught doctrine until they had mastered Bible history. Thus he had developed for our churches a three tier level of instruction. The first required the simple teaching of Bible history. The second showed how out of that history the doctrines of Christianity had arisen. And only then did he begin a systematic instruction in the doctrines of the church. The method came out of his organic concept of the covenant. Rev. Hoeksema was not a scholastic, regardless of what his detractors might claim. He did not believe a systematically organized system of dogma to be the end and the all of Christianity.

Systematic theology he considered to be important, but not as an end in itself; it is merely the means by which the church may best understand and remember the truths God has made known through his revelation and works. It is this living knowledge of God that is ultimately important.

As it was, however, there were those who were tiring of this, and had come to the conclusion that doctrine was the first thing children should be taught. And so, suddenly, Rev. Hoeksema found it being announced even in his own congregation, as it was being done in others, that the catechetical system he had introduced was to be replaced. And all this was done without consideration in the churches, and without consultation with Rev. Hoeksema. Never one to be silent, he wrote an editorial objecting to this, which met with bitter criticism — strangely, even from some who formerly had been most critical of his doctrinal emphasis. And this was only the beginning. Soon there came another rather bitter objection to his teaching as to the importance of properly instituted preaching. And so it went. It was almost as though through his illness it had been discovered that he could be weak, and now they dared speak out against him.

But all of this was minor compared to the continuing defense of a conditional theology. On the surface it appeared to be little more than a debate over words: could there be a proper use of the word "condition" in Reformed theology or not? It almost seemed to be supposed that, if any proper use of that word could be found, then the whole Liberated view of the covenant would be justified, and the acceptance of it approved. But underneath, as Rev. Hoeksema was so often later to explain, they were playing with a principle of Reformed theology much more deeply important than Common Grace had ever been. Still, for the time being, he simply watched and refrained. But that was more than Rev. Ophoff could do. He began to write articles refuting this defense of conditional theology; and the battle was begun.

Nevertheless, outwardly matters seemed to remain on a rather stable level. The problems were there; but it looked as though they could be contained — that is, until one Sunday, in the summer of 1949, when Rev. Ophoff went to preach in the new mission station at Chatham, Ontario, just over the border in Canada. There he was shown a letter from Prof. Holwerda, one of the prominent leaders in the Liberated Church in The Netherlands, which was being circulated among the people there. The committee on correspondence of the Liberated churches, which for over a year had failed to make any of the promised approaches to us, had met secretly with two of our men who had gone over individually on personal visits to The Netherlands; and it was as though on their claims our churches were being evaluated. The letter was one of advice to the immigrants, and read as follows:

I received your letter yesterday, and a direct reply per airmail is in order. Day before yesterday we held a meeting with Rev. Kok and Rev. DeJong, the purpose being mutual discourse. We had a wholly open-hearted exchange of thoughts. They said this: Indeed, we have much to be grateful for to Rev. Hoeksema. But his conception regarding election etc. is not church doctrine. No one is bound by it. Some are emitting a totally different sound. Their opinion was that most (of the Prot. Ref.) do not think as Rev. Hoeksema and Rev. Ophoff. And sympathy for the Liberated was great also in the matter of their doctrine of the covenant. They do accentuate differently in America, considering their history, but for the conception of the Liberated there is ample room. And from other quarters I heard that Liberated in the Christian Reformed churches run into difficulty, if they hold their position.

They, that is, Rev. Kok and Rev. DeJong, also reported what is being done in their churches for handling the spiritual care of the Liberated. I must honestly say that thereby much of my fear has been removed. I still consider the method of the Amersfoort decision regarding cor-

respondence with the Protestant Reformed Churches unfortunate. But now I see the thing thus: First, the Prot. Ref. Church is the true church, be it that the lay (of conception) regarding election, etc. is somewhat different, considering their wholly different history. However, I am not entirely agreed. Second the Protestant Reformed Church proves to be the true church also herein that she truly seeks the immigrants from Holland and consciously allows all room for their conception. In this situation I believe that joining the Prot. Ref. Church is (our) calling. And let them then as Liberated preserve their contact with Holland by all means, and also spread our literature. Our Liberated would be doing a fruitful work, if they then labored in the Prot. Ref. Churches to remove misunderstanding and to deepen insight. Rev. Kok said, We can still learn much from each other. The communica-

tion that Rev. Hoeksema, who first was skeptical of the immigrants, paid them a visit, and returned enthusiastic, struck me as remarkable; and another must have said, "These are strong men, who know what it is all about. You could make them all ministers, just like that." If Rev. Hoeksema's conception was binding, I would say, Never join. Now I believe, however, that accession is calling; and then so that the Liberated also help to disseminate the dogmatical wealth of Holland in the Prot. Ref. Churches.

Rev. Ophoff was shocked and taken aback. He hated secrecy as much as Rev. Hoeksema ever had; and here was an indication of secret intrigue which he could not ignore. On the one hand, it was being claimed that a sizable portion of the ministers in the Protestant Reformed churches had

forsaken the historical position on election upon which our churches had been founded, and were giving serious consideration to the Liberated view of the covenant (one advocating a kind of Common Grace within the covenant sphere). On the other hand, Prof. Holwerda, rather than contacting our churches openly and discussing our differences, was secretly instructing the immigrants to infiltrate our churches and take them over for their view. And finally he was telling those people that, if Rev. Hoeksema's view of election stood, our churches should not be joined.

To such Rev. Ophoff could see but one answer; and that was to take the letter home and publish it in the next issue of the *Standard Bearer* for all to see.

This he did; and it was the beginning of the end. □

Malachi

Lesson 8

A God-Fearing Remnant in the Midst of a Hardened People

Malachi 3:13-18

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Carl Haak

God will ever see to it that there is a people on earth who serve Him even in the midst of the most hardened and callous spiritual apathy. As a jewel cast on a pile of coal, so in this

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section of Malachi we are shown a God-fearing remnant in the midst of the most blatant and blasphemous religious indifference. The words of Romans 11:5 are underscored by our lesson: "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (see Rom. 11:3-6).

We are first given the full-blown and shameful truth of the spiritual

coldness and deadness among many in Malachi's day (vss. 13-15).

The unbelieving state of mind of many in Judah was expressed in their blasphemous talk against God. We have seen their back talk before (ch. 1:7, 8; ch. 2:14, 17), but never to the horrible extent as confronted by Malachi now. Their words were "stout" (literally, "strong") against God.

The following elements are to be found in them:

1. They leveled two charges, or insults, against the justice of God. One, that they had served God and gained nothing by it (vs. 14). Two, those who disobeyed God were not only unpunished but blessed (vs. 15). Their thinking was as follows: "Since we who serve Jehovah are not outwardly rewarded, and the proud heathen flourish in prosperity, we must conclude that God builds up the workers of iniquity and ignores those who render Him service. It was the highest insult they could have spoken and was to bring God's severe judgment on them.

2. They presented to God an empty, outward service instead of true humility (vs. 14). They claim to have kept God's "ordinance" (literally, "charge"), and to have walked "mournfully" (literally, "walked in black"). But it was all false pretense. They were swollen with false confidence, for they were pretending to be low before God, when in reality they were "stout"! Though they claimed to be modest and submissive, in reality they were swelled with presumption as they daringly and furiously spoke evil of God. Calvin offers the following perceptive comments on their true state: "They thought they worshipped God perfectly; and this was their false principle; for hypocrites ever lay claim to complete holiness, and cannot bear to confess their own evils; even when their conscience goads them, they deceive themselves with vain flatteries, and always endeavour to draw over them some veil that their disgrace may not appear before men."

3. When reproved by the prophet, they were defiant (vs. 13). Their hardness had reached a point where they could not be checked. To the charge that they have spoken against God they respond that they are falsely accused. They are conscious of no wrong.

Yet, we must not conclude that the words of Malachi produced no fruit to God's glory. A remnant, a faithful element, were brought under

conviction as they listened to the prophet, and they turned to God and one another in repentance (vss. 16, 17).

Let us note the following elements in them:

1. They feared the Lord. This is their prominent characteristic, as it is mentioned twice in verse 16. The fear of God is loving reverence for God. The essential elements of the fear of God are: a) Correct conception of the character of God. b) A pervasive sense of the presence of God. c) A constant awareness of our obligation to God.

2. They thought upon God's name (vs. 16). This must be understood in the sense of hallowed meditation on the character of God as revealed in His names (see Ps. 20).

3. They spoke among themselves (vs. 16). This means that an evidence of true repentance is seen in our relations one to another. Those who fear the Lord and are brought to humble repentance must also unite themselves to one another "so that with one consent they may return to the way they had departed, yea, that they may return to God whom they had forsaken" (Calvin).

4. A book of remembrance was written (vs. 16). This was a sign of the truth that they had been turned to God and had then vowed to devote themselves to Him. It would also serve as a reminder in the days to come and thus an encouragement to the faithful.

How marvelous is the promise of God spoken to a repentant, God-fearing, re-committed remnant (vs. 17). The Lord had blessed the labor of Malachi and made it profitable to some, even though we are not told their number.

The promise spoken to the remnant is rich (vs. 17). God owns them as His own (see Is. 43:1-7). The word "jewel" is literally "my possession, or treasure" (see Exodus 19:5). He promises to spare them from the judgments which must fall on the impenitent, and to do this in the compassion and fervor that a father would show to his son. He speaks of a future day

when He shall make up His final possession by drawing out of all ages and nations, including these repentant members of Judah, and making them into one treasure of the Lord (see Eph. 1:10).

Our lesson concludes with the announcement that there shall also come the time when the difference shall be clearly shown between the righteous and the wicked (vs. 18). In that day (see ch. 4:1) every man will appear in his true colors, and the righteous judgments of God will be perfectly seen (see Rom. 2:5-16). Malachi then returns, in verse 18, to the charges the hardened members of Judah had brought against the Lord; and he answers them by saying, "God will at length rise to judgment, and then all shall know that the deeds of men do not go unnoticed by Him and that wickedness shall not go unpunished."

May our study be used of God to work in us the same blessed fruit mentioned in verses 16 and 17. What can compare with the promise, "And they shall be mine..."?

Memory Work:

Malachi 3:16, 17

Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.

And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.

Romans 11:5, 6

Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.

Questions for Study:

1. We begin by looking at the hardened state of many in Judah as it forms the background (blackground?) to the wonderful fruit of the repen-

tance of the remnant. We will want to understand the carnal mentality behind their back talk to God, how it develops, and how it is a temptation to us as well.

a. Compare the responses to the prophet's indictments which are recorded in this prophecy, jotting down a note on each. (1:6, 12, 13; 2:14, 17; 3:7, 8, 13-15)

1) What are the common ingredients? What is the attitude that comes across?

2) Is there a progression in these responses that we can discern?

3) How is this response to God's reproofs evident today? (In our life today?)

4) Now, look up Proverbs 6:20-23 and II Timothy 3:16, 17 and discuss this statement: If we cannot submit to the reproofs of Scripture and see how we must be warned, the Scriptures are of no profit to us.

b. The *two* criticisms of God's justice (vs. 14, 15):

1) "It is vain to serve God."

a) Examine the following passages and compare them to this: Psalm 73:13; Matthew 19:27.

b) What is the reasoning which lies behind this; that is, what is the root of the thinking which leads one to say that it is vain to serve God? In what ways can we guard against this sin?

2) "And now we call the proud happy..." (vs. 15).

a) What is meant by this? (See Psalm 73:3.) How could the

people of that day come to this conclusion?

b) Compare the following verses and state briefly what they teach on this: Ecclesiastes 9:1, 2; 8:11-13; Romans 2:6-16.

c) Does God postpone judgment? (See Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 4, Q&A 10. Also verse 18.)

c. The claim was made that they had "kept God's ordinance, and we have walked mournfully before God."

1) Was this true? Why or why not?

2) Look up Isaiah 58:1-7 and also Micah 6:6-8.

a) What are the symptoms of a pretended humility and service of God?

b) What are the elements of true lowliness before God?

2. Verses 16 and 17 are certainly very rich and precious, as they reveal the response of the God-fearing to the message of God's prophet and the tenderness of their hearts to be pricked and thus to repent and return.

a. First, what accounts for this sincere repentance? (See Romans 11:3-6; I Kings 19:10-18.)

b. What is the "fear of God"? To answer, consult your Bible Concordance and select three or four passages which express the heart of fearing God.

1) Explain how these three elements are necessary for the fear of God:

a) Right conceptions of God.

b) Pervading sense of God's power.

c) Heartfelt recognition of one's obligations to God.

2) Is the fear of God the most *basic* and *distinguishing* mark of a Christian?

3) How is the fear of God nurtured in ourselves? In our children?

c. "They spoke often to one another."

1) Look up the following passages and show how they teach that repentance before God and reconciliation with one another are inseparable: Matthew 18:21-35; II Corinthians 7:9-11 (especially vs. 11); I John 4:20, 21.

2) Why is this so?
d. What is the significance of the "book of remembrance" which was written?

3. God's comforting promise to a truly humbled and repentant people (vs. 17).

a. What is the significance of God's making us His possession (jewel)? Exodus 19:5; Psalm 135:4

b. What is meant by the promise that God will "spare them"?

c. What is the day in which God shall make up His possession (Eph. 1:10; John 10:16)?

d. Read Isaiah 43:1-6. What comfort do you derive from the promise, "I will be with thee, thou art mine"? How ought this to be held before our minds in our daily life?

4. Can you write from memory Malachi 3:16, 17 and Romans 11:5, 6?

□

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

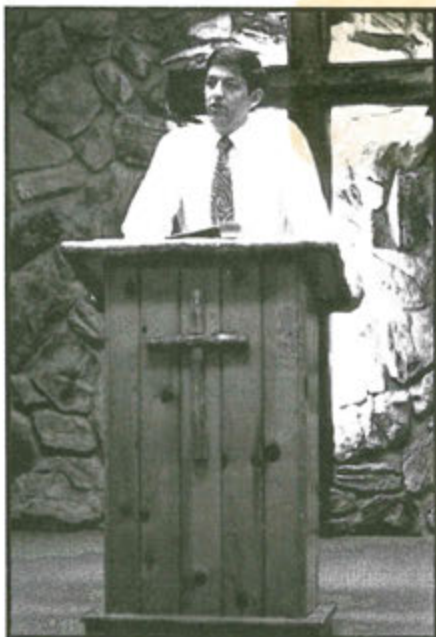
Mr. Wigger is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

Denominational Highlights

I thank Rev. R. Cammenga, pastor of the Loveland, CO PRC, for providing us with the following report on the Second Annual Young Adults' Retreat.

"The second annual Young Adults' Spring Retreat was held from

Monday, March 23, through Wednesday, March 25, at Covenant Heights Conference Center, nestled in the mountains above Estes Park, Colorado. The retreat was sponsored by the young adults of our Loveland, Colorado congregation. Some thirty young people, seniors in high school



Rev. Russell Dykstra

and older, from California, Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, South Dakota, Washington, Wisconsin, and even Canada gathered for a time of fellowship and fun.

"The weather cooperated admirably. Although there was still snow in the mountains, the days were sunshiny and pleasant. There was opportunity for hiking, tubing down the mountain slopes surrounding Bear Lake, volleyball and basketball in the Rec Building, and games and fellowship into the wee hours of the morning.

"The theme of the retreat was 'Living the Antithesis.' On Monday evening Rev. Ron Cammenga, Loveland's pastor, spoke on 'Living the Antithesis in our Personal Rela-

tionships.' A warning was sounded against making friends with the children of this world, and the many serious consequences that come to those who refuse to heed this warning were pointed out. A call was issued to all to make, to cultivate, and to maintain friendships with fellow believers, beginning with the fellow young people of our own churches and sister churches. On Tuesday evening Rev. Russ Dykstra, the featured speaker at this year's retreat, spoke on 'Living the Antithesis in our Entertainment.' Here, too, a serious warning was issued against evil forms of entertainment. The spiritual snares involved in much popular entertainment were pointed out. And practical guidelines were laid down for determining the sorts of entertainment that the Christian may enjoy. Many members of the Loveland congregation drove up to the retreat for the speeches at night, and stayed for fellowship and activities afterwards.

"Several of those who attended were polled on their opinion of the retreat. Here is a sampling of the responses.

Good time. Good fellowship. Really enjoyed the speeches.

— Ted, Illinois.

Well worth the trip. Excellent opportunity to get to know other young people of the denomination.

— David, Lacombe.

Great! Excellent volleyball matches. The lermongs were very good.

— Tricia, Michigan.

"The two years that the young adults of Loveland have held the re-

treat, they have been gratified by the response. Plans are, the Lord willing, to continue to hold these retreats every Spring. We invite more of our older young people to join us. We are sure that you will have as good a time as those who have attended these first couple of years, and that if you come once, you will want to come again.

"I need to say something about this last opinion. In Tricia's case, it is 'lermon.' This is not a misspelling, or at least not an inadvertent misspelling. This has to do with a profound discussion that several at the retreat had over the time limits to a sermon, a lecture, a speech, a sermonette, and a message. The speeches at the retreat were about 45-minutes, somewhere between a sermon and a lecture, thus a 'lermon.' "

Congregational Highlights

The Doon, IA PRC's Choral Society presented their annual Spring Concert on Sunday evening, March 29.

At a congregational meeting held in late March, the membership of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC adopted a proposal from their study committee to sell their church parsonage. No word on what their plans are to replace it.

The congregation of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI passed two proposals also concerning their parsonage. First, a new study will be built behind the parsonage and second, the basement will also be finished.

While we are at Southeast, we could also add here that at the time of this writing, plans call for Rev. Kuiper and his family to leave the Immanuel PR congregation in Lacombe, AB, Canada on April 7. Installation is scheduled for Sunday morning, April 12, with Rev. Kuiper preaching his inaugural sermon the same evening.

And now, before your mind leaves Immanuel PRC, let me mention that, because spring seems to come just a little later in the northern climate of Alberta, Canada, Immanuel moved their Prayer Day Service from the traditional second week in March to a later Wednesday in the month.



The Young Singles of the Grandville, MI PRC met on a Sunday evening at the parsonage to discuss with their pastor, Rev. J. Kortering, "Lessons From Singapore."

Ministerial Calls

Rev. Ken Hanko, presently serving in Norristown, PA, declined the call to become pastor of the Hope PRC in Isabel, SD.

Rev. J. Kortering, serving the Grandville, MI PRC, has declined the call extended from the Hudsonville, MI PRC to serve as missionary pastor to the Covenant Reformed Fellowship of Larne, Northern Ireland. At the same time he did accept the call extended by the Hope PRC of Walker, MI to serve as minister-on-loan to the Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore. □

Parting Quote:

"To forsake Christ for the world, is to leave a treasure for a trifle, eternity for a moment, reality for a shadow."

-- William Jenkyn

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council of the South Holland congregation express their deepest sympathy to their fellow officebearer, Mr. George Vroom, and his family in the loss of Mr. Vroom's mother,

MRS. ROSE VROOM.

May their hearts be comforted by the promises of God's Word, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4)

Rev. Charles Terpstra, President
Louis R. Regnerus, Vice-President

CALL TO SYNOD

Synod 1991 appointed South Holland Protestant Reformed Church of South Holland, Illinois, the calling church for Synod 1992 of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America.

South Holland's Consistory hereby notifies our churches, sister-churches, and all interested Reformed churches and believers that the 1992 Synod will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 9, 1992, at 9:00 AM in the South Holland Protestant Reformed Church, 16511 South Park Ave., South Holland, IL 60473 (Phone: 708-596-3113).

The Pre-Synodical worship service will be held in the South Holland Church on Monday evening, June 8, at 7:30 PM. Rev. Jason Kortering, president of the 1991 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the Consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact the clerk of the Consistory, Mr. George Vroom, 16525 Louis Ave., South Holland, IL 60473 (Phone: 708-596-1771).

Consistory of the South Holland
PRC,

George Vroom, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Mary-Martha Society of the Redlands Protestant Reformed Church would like to express her Christian sympathy to our fellow member, Mrs. Betty Ekema, and her husband, John Ekema, in the death of their daughter,

LINDA VANOVERLOOP.

May they find comfort in God's Word as found in Psalm 116:15: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."

Pastor denHartog, President
Laurie Jabaay, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Sr. Adult Bible Class of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church expresses its heartfelt sympathy to one of its members, Mrs. Sally Koll, in the loss of her sister,

MRS. LINDA VAN OVERLOOP

who was taken to glory on March 2, 1992.

May we and her family find peace in His promise: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and there shall be no more death neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

Rev. B. Gritters, President
Mrs. Marcia Holstege, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of the Loveland Protestant Reformed Church express heartfelt sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Fritz Schwarz in the death of her sister,

MRS. EDNA HUBER.

May the bereaved be comforted by the Word of God that "... all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Rev. Ron Cammenga, President
Mr. Bob Brands, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies' Society of the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church would like to express our sincere and heartfelt sympathy to our member, Mrs. June VanOverloop, in the sudden passing to glory of her daughter-in-law,

MRS. LINDA VANOVERLOOP.

May the words of our beloved Savior when He said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee," comfort and strengthen her in this time of loss.

Rev. G. VanBaren, President
Mrs. Gertrude Lubbers, Secretary