

THE **STANDARD BEARER**

***A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine***

**To turn from
the truth of the Trinity
is to depart
from the living and true
God, the God and Father
of our Lord Jesus Christ,
to serve and worship
an idol,
a god of our own
imagination.**

See "The Doctrine of the Trinity — page 229

*Vol. 69, No. 10
February 15, 1993*

CONTENTS:

February 15, 1993

Meditation — Rev. John A. Heys	
Chosen to Show Forth God's Praise	219
Editorial — Prof. David J. Engelsma	
The Kingdom Has Come (2)	221
Letters	223
All Around Us — Prof. Robert D. Decker	223
Decency and Order — Rev. Ronald L. Cammenga	
The Consistory	225
Search the Scriptures — Rev. George C. Lubbers	
Praying in Every Place	227
Taking Heed to the Doctrine — Rev. Thomas C. Miersma	
The Doctrine of the Trinity (1)	229
Church and State — Mr. James Lanting	
Discipline of a Church Member After Resignation	231
Guest Article — Rev. Cornelius Hanko	
As For Me and My House	233
Book Reviews	235
Report of Classis East — Mr. Jon J. Huiskens	238
News From Our Churches — Mr. Benjamin Wigger	239

In This Issue ...

We're happy to have again as a writer for the *Standard Bearer* Rev. Tom Miersma. For this issue he has submitted the first of what will be four or five articles on the Trinity. This short series, in "Taking Heed to the Doctrine," will be followed by another, written by Rev. Terpstra, on a different aspect of Reformed doctrine. The articles in their alternating series (as they proceed together through the "loci" of dogmatics) will still be interspersed by those of Rev. Woudenberg, who is currently providing an interesting historical introduction to what will be an examination of the doctrinal implications of conditional theology. Look for good things in this rubric.

Our schedule for writers of meditations is also quite different now from what we had planned at the beginning of the volume year. Rev. Kortering informed us earlier that, contrary to his expectations, he would not find time to write a monthly meditation. More recently, Rev. Slopeema asked for temporary relief from his responsibility for the other half of the year's meditations. That accounts for the variety which is already apparent in this rubric: Revs. Bruinsma, Hanko, and Heys. We hope to see also, in the near future, a couple of meditations from Rev. Haak.

A thought-provoking contribution in this issue comes from the desk of Rev. C. Hanko. Many memories he has of (what we know to have been) a warm pastoral ministry. Calling to mind, in this interesting article, some of those memories of days, long past, when life was slower-paced and simpler, he poses repeatedly the rhetorical question: "Have we lost something?" More conveniences we have, by far, and more things. But are we nevertheless losers for it all? What do you think? Read "As For Me and My House."

D.D.

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,
P.O. Box 603, Grandville, MI 49418-0603.

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Editor: Prof. David J. Engelsma
Secretary: Prof. Robert D. Decker
Managing Editor: Mr. Don Doezema

DEPARTMENT EDITORS

Rev. Ronald Cammenga, Prof. Robert Decker, Rev. Arie
den Hartog, Rev. Barry Gritters, Mr. Fred Hanko, Prof. Herman
Hanko, Rev. John Heys, Rev. Steven Key, Rev. Kenneth
Koolle, Rev. Jason Kortering, Rev. Dale Kuiper, Mr. James
Lanting, Rev. George Lubbers, Mrs. Marybeth Lubbers, Rev.
James Slopeema, Rev. Charles Terpstra, Rev. Gise VanBaren,
Rev. Ronald VanOverloop, Mr. Benjamin Wigger, Rev. Bernard
Woudenberg.

EDITORIAL OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
4949 Ivanrest
Grandville, MI 49418
BUSINESS OFFICE
The Standard Bearer
Don Doezema
P.O. Box 603
Grandville, MI
49418-0603

PH: (616) 538-1778

(616) 531-1490

FAX: (616) 531-3033

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger
6597 40th Ave.
Hudsonville, MI 49426
NEW ZEALAND OFFICE
The Standard Bearer
c/o Protestant Reformed
Church
B. VanHerik
66 Fraser St.
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

EDITORIAL POLICY

Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions for The Reader Asks department are welcome. Contributions will be limited to approximately 300 words and must be neatly written or typewritten, and must be signed. Copy deadlines are the first and fifteenth of the month. All communications relative to the contents should be sent to the editorial office.

REPRINT POLICY

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting of articles in our magazine by other publications, provided: a) that such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; b) that proper acknowledgment is made; c) that a copy of the periodical in which such reprint appears is sent to our editorial office.

SUBSCRIPTION POLICY

Subscription price: \$12.00 per year in the U.S., \$15.00 elsewhere. Unless a definite request for discontinuance is received, it is assumed that the subscriber wishes the subscription to continue, and he will be billed for renewal. If you have a change of address, please notify the Business Office as early as possible in order to avoid the inconvenience of interrupted delivery. Include your Zip or Postal Code.

ADVERTISING POLICY

The Standard Bearer does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$3.00 fee. These should be sent to the Business Office and should be accompanied by the \$3.00 fee. Deadline for announcements is at least one month prior to publication date.

BOUND VOLUMES

The Business Office will accept standing orders for bound copies of the current volume. Such orders are filled as soon as possible after completion of a volume year.

16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm and 105mm microfiche, and article copies are available through University Microfilms International.

Chosen to Show Forth God's Praise

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

I Peter 2:9

From what do you want to be saved?

It makes a world of difference whether we want to be saved merely from the punishment of sin, or if we want to be saved from the sin that calls for punishment.

In the first verses of the passage of Scripture wherein the text quoted above is found we have a beautiful description of a true child of God. This child of God is called a newborn babe, who desires the sincere milk of the Word of God. And that desire is evident in "laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings."

When we are such newborn babes, we taste and see that God is gracious. We taste that grace because in it and by it our God makes us "lively stones" in a "spiritual house" of which the chief corner stone is Christ. He is indeed the stone that unbelievers disallowed, and there-

fore nailed Him to a cross. But He is "the head of the corner," upon whom we rest as the House of God.

In the text above we find the wonderful truth that we, by God's grace, are made to be different from those who deny Christ to be the Chief Corner Stone of God's church. We are presented as a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a peculiar people that is chosen to show forth God's praises. We are eternally chosen to be those who show forth His praise. Surely we do well to consider that rich and encouraging truth. We are not merely saved from the punishment of sin. If we are saved by God's grace, we rejoice in that blessed truth that is presented here in I Peter 2:9, namely, that God eternally chose us in Christ to be a holy nation that praises God with heart, mind, soul, and strength.

To praise God is to extol Him for being God, and God alone. To praise Him is to speak or sing to Him the truth that He alone is God. There is joy in our souls for the salvation which He has decreed and realized through His Son, the salvation which He has promised to realize fully when He sends His Son back to this earth.

Often, and rightly so, we sing, "Praise God from Whom all blessings flow, Praise Him all creatures here below, Praise Him above, ye heav'nly host, Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." When we do that, with our hearts as well as with our lips, we have in us the evidence that we are those chosen to show forth His praise perfectly and joyfully in the new Jerusalem, when Christ returns.

That we are His chosen generation, His royal priesthood, His holy nation and peculiar people becomes plain when we show forth His praises. When we do that with our hearts we have the God-given evidence that we have been chosen by Him to be that royal priesthood which is holy, and that we are in a blessed way a people different from those whom Satan has gotten to walk in his devilish way.

Sad to say, it is so true that we have only a "small beginning" of obedience, as our Heidelberg Catechism correctly states it in Lord's Day XLIV, Question and Answer 114. There are so many times when we do not show forth God's praise. Everytime we sin, every time we break any of the ten commandments which our God gave us at Mt. Sinai, we are not praising God, but denying that He is God, and that He has the right to demand of us works that manifest pure love of Him as God and God alone, and that we praise Him as such.

The only evidence and proof of our being citizens in that "holy nation," as mentioned in the verse quoted above, is that we with spiritual pain in our hearts, reveal ourselves to be chosen by God, made to be a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a spiritually peculiar people.

Notice that awesome truth!

We are a peculiar people. The idea is that we differ completely from Satan and those in his kingdom. The blessed truth here in I Peter 2:9 is that we are peculiar when compared with Satan and his host. We are what Satan's citizens consider to be peculiar. But how comforting it is that we

Rev. Heys is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

are different from what Satan caused us to be, when he persuaded Adam and Eve that they would not die if they sinned, but would become gods, knowing what is good and what is evil. Satan got them to believe that what is good for them is to sin against God. He taught Adam and Eve that they were a peculiar people, in the sense that they were being kept from becoming more wonderful than they were.

*It is indeed a blessed
and comforting truth
that our God got us back,
after Satan snatched us
away from the love
we had for Him.*

In the Dutch Bible the word translated in the King James Version as "peculiar" means "acquired" or "obtained." And the Greek word, written by Peter, is one that means "obtaining." Thus, truly and wonderfully, Peter here speaks of us being obtained by God. What a blessed truth! Satan had obtained Adam and Eve, and the whole human race in them, to be his possession. They would sin against God, even as he had done with a host of the angels which God had created. It is indeed a blessed and comforting truth that our God got us back, after Satan snatched us away from the love we had for Him. And having by God's grace been brought back to a more wonderful life than that wherein Adam and Eve were created, we are peculiar in the eyes of sinful mankind; but we were in God's grace obtained as those who love God more richly than did Adam and Eve before they fell into sin.

Let us then take hold of this blessed truth, that our God has made us His blessed possession, having obtained us through that gracious work of sending His own Son in our flesh, not only to blot out our guilt, but also to make us a holy people.

What is also important for us to consider is that which our God performed, in order to enable us to show forth His praises. In the last part of this verse we read that God called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. The reason for this is plain. In order to see anything, we need to have light shine on it. Our God does not cause a marvelous light to shine on that salvation until He causes us to be born again. In many parts of the world, people have never read one word of Holy Scripture, or heard the truth of that Word proclaimed. We need both: the Word of God from Genesis 1:1 through Revelation 22:21, and the work of God's grace whereby He causes us to be born again, that is, born with a spiritual life that can understand and believe what He has provided for us in Scripture.

We must be called out of the spiritual death and darkness that has been in the world ever since Adam and Eve turned their backs upon God. Satan got them to hate God. Adam and Eve became spiritually dead; and when they heard God coming into that Garden of Eden, they tried to hide from Him. How spiritually dead they were, to think that they could hide from Him! Having died spiritually, as God told them they would if they committed the sin of doing what He had forbade them, Adam and Eve did not fall on their knees in sorrow, confessing their sin, expressing their sorrow for performing an act of hatred against God. Had they been able to do that, and had they done so, it would have been evident that they had not become spiritually dead, that they still were in principle those who could praise God. But what they did after following Satan's godless advice revealed their spiritual death. Not one word of praise to God did they express. As they fled away from God, rather than unto Him with sorrow over their sin, they gave no evidence of being a holy nation, God's royal priesthood, a chosen generation, a people spiritually different from Satan and the fallen angels.

Let us hold on to that truth. We are a chosen generation — one chosen

by God in Christ — a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people acquired by God. Let us, by God's grace, flee from that false doctrine that our salvation depends on our work of accepting Christ, and of letting Him save us. That doctrine denies the beautiful and comforting truth which our God through Peter wrote for our comfort.

We are a chosen generation, because God chose us eternally, and decided that He would make us a royal priesthood, and a holy nation, so that we could and would praise Him. Our praise of God reveals what He began in us, and will complete when His Son returns, when He will place us with body and soul in the new Jerusalem that is coming.

It is very important that we hold on tightly to the truth that the basic reason that we are able to show forth the praises of God is His eternal will and His work through His Son. We can perform the works that praise God because of the works which He eternally determined to do, and which in time He did through His Son and through His Spirit.

So, beautifully and correctly, we "Sing a new song to Jehovah For the wonders He has wrought; His right hand and arm most holy Triumph to His cause have brought. In His love and tender mercy He hath made salvation known, In the sight of ev'ry nation He His righteousness hath shown" (stanza one of *Psalter* # 261, based on Psalm 92:1). There we read that comforting truth: "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto Thy name, O most High."

We are chosen to show forth God's praise. Do it then with your heart, and in your walk of life; and you will have the blessed proof which He gives to His people, that you are His chosen generation, royal priesthood, holy nation, and a people which He in His grace has eternally chosen, and obtained in Christ.

Praise Him from whom all blessings flow. Show forth the praise of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. □

The Kingdom Has Come (2)

The Reformed faith announces that the kingdom of Christ has come. Jesus Christ has established His kingdom in the world. He did this by His death, resurrection, and outpouring of the Spirit.

In the course of history, King Jesus has established His kingdom in all lands among all peoples and nations.

When the Reformed congregation sings Psalm 72, she celebrates a kingdom that has come.

Christ shall have dominion over
land and sea,
Earth's remotest regions shall His
empire be;
They that wilds inhabit shall their
worship bring,
Kings shall render tribute, na-
tions serve our King.

She does not sing about a future dominion of Christ but about a present dominion. The "shall" in the song of the New Testament church refers neither to the earthly future nor to the eternal future. But it is the "shall" of the hope of Israel under the old covenant for the Messianic kingdom. This hope has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

The Reformed church, therefore, understands her song to mean that Christ *does already* have dominion over land and sea; that earth's remotest regions *are now* His empire; and that nations *are presently* serving her King. The Messianic kingdom is here and now.

Against premillennialism, which puts the kingdom exclusively in the future, the Reformed faith testifies simply that the kingdom has come.

Against postmillennialism, which looks for a bigger and better coming of the kingdom in the earthly future, Reformed amillennialism confesses that the kingdom has already come in the only form that it can or will take in history. In its glorious, fulfilled, New Testament form, the kingdom has been present on earth since the first coming of Christ.

Christ rules in the hearts of His elect people by His Word and Spirit. Subdued by sovereign grace, they believe on Him as Savior, confess Him as Lord, fight against sin and Satan, and frame their lives by His law. This is the reign of Christ.

Since the elect are not merely found in all nations but *are* the nations themselves, in the faith and obedience of the elect the nations serve the Lord. The reality of every nation is determined, not by its political organization or by the majority of its population, but by God's election. Just as the real Israel was the elect in that nation, although only a remnant, so also the real China is the elect Chinese, the real Netherlands is the chosen Dutchmen, and the real Africa is the predestinated Africans. The apostles carried out the "great commission" of Christ in Matthew 28:19, to make disciples of all nations (as it is in the original Greek), by converting the elect in all nations to Christ. By the present day, almost all nations have been discipled.

The corporate and institutional form of the kingdom is the church. Of the church, Christ is head and king. The church confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord. The church is governed by the spiritual policy which our Lord

has taught us in His Word. The members of the church are the citizens of the kingdom. In the church are enjoyed the peace and prosperity of the Messianic kingdom.

The true church is the kingdom of Christ. The faithful congregation in every place, necessarily united with other faithful congregations, is the kingdom of Christ. In her midst is Christ the King by the gospel, and where He is, there is the kingdom.

Basic to the Reformed understanding that the kingdom has come is a recognition of the kingdom as spiritual. The kingdom is the reign of Christ that dominates nations and peoples spiritually in the faith and holiness of the elect. It is the power of Christ exercised by preachers of the gospel and by ruling elders. It is the citizenry whose citizenship is in heaven. It is the peace of the pardon of sins and the prosperity of fellowship with God and eternal life.

All who see Christ as a carnal king and are determined that His kingdom be a carnal kingdom, like the Jews of John 6, will be completely blind to the present reality of the kingdom. At best, they will view it as a weak, small, inglorious form of the kingdom which must be expected to develop into a far stronger, larger, and more glorious form in future history.

Seeing the kingdom as spiritual, the Reformed faith understands that the kingdom has come. It has come as gloriously as ever it will, or can, in history. This was the faith of the Reformers. In explanation of the kingdom and kingdom of Christ as set forth in Psalm 2, Luther wrote, "The

church in all centuries has been seriously harassed by the world; yet it stands, grows, rejoices, praises God, proclaims His benefits, while Satan and the world are enraged and indignant." Luther denied that Christ has come to "found a new state." Rather, He is "a teacher to instruct men concerning a certain unheard but eternal decree of God." The Reformer warned against the error of regarding Christ's kingdom as a carnal kingdom:

This is the difference which distinguishes our King from all other kings, and it must be most carefully observed. For it is the devil's constant concern and tireless undertaking to confuse this kingdom with the kingdoms of the world and to make a worldly king out of Christ, who is a teacher of consciences. And the pope, a special tool of Satan, has rejected Christ entirely insofar as He is a teacher, and has seized the sword. In fact, the keys which Christ has given to the church he has turned to a political end. The fanatics or sectarians are deceived by these same thoughts and take over affairs of the state. For they abolish previous governments and introduce new customs and new usages.

Luther continued:

This King is a teacher. Consequently He will not destroy the governments, He will not change civil laws, He will not seize kingdoms. These will remain in the same condition in which they were before in the world.... This King will not change or abolish this course or order of the world. For His kingdom is not of this world. But to all kingdoms, to all commonwealths, He will bring the new Word and new teaching about Himself that all who believe in Him and are baptized will have forgiveness of sins and life eternal. This is the kingdom of this King, this is His dominion, this is His imperium.

Looking back over the prophecy of Psalm 2 concerning the coming reign of God's Messiah, Luther concluded:

This psalm describes the heavenly

religion and true worship together with the true church and Christ, its Head. It shows that although the church lies hidden and concealed in the world and Satan and the godless seem to rule, yes, even in our own flesh, nevertheless through faith in this King the church conquers at last and triumphs against Satan and the whole world, according to this thought: "Blessed are all who take refuge in Him" ("The Interpretation of the Second Psalm" in *Luther's Works*, Concordia, 1955, Vol. 12).

The kingdom for Luther is the present reign of grace in the believer and the church. It is spiritual, not carnal.

Calvin agreed. In his commentary on Psalm 72, an outstanding prophecy of the kingdom of Messiah, Calvin explained the prosperity of the kingdom to be spiritual:

It is no uncommon thing for the glory of the spiritual kingdom of Christ to be portrayed under images of outward splendor. David, in conformity with this usual style of Scripture, has here foretold that the kingdom of Christ would be distinguished for its wealth; but this is to be understood as referring to its spiritual character.

The entire Psalm, Calvin thought, is a prayer in which we ask that God "would be pleased to maintain and defend the Church under the government of his Son."

The Reformed confessions authoritatively teach that the kingdom, being spiritual, has come. They forbid Reformed believers to conceive the kingdom as carnal and, therefore, to dream of a coming of the kingdom in future history that is either altogether new or different from the form that it has taken up till now.

The Heidelberg Catechism explains "Thy kingdom come" in the Lord's Prayer to refer, first, to the reign of Christ in the elect believer ("rule us so by thy word and Spirit, that we may submit ourselves more and more to thee") and, second, to the rule of Christ over His church ("preserve and increase thy church"). The

goal toward which the progress of the kingdom in the believer and in the church tends is not a carnal, Jewish empire or the Christianizing of the nations in history, but the eternal kingdom of God: "till the full perfection of thy kingdom take place, wherein thou shalt be all in all."

The Westminster Confession of Faith identifies the kingdom of Christ with the church (25.2), as does the Belgic Confession in Article 27, where it calls Christ the "eternal King" of the church.

*... the kingdom is
a present reality
into which
New Testament believers
have been translated.*

The Reformed creeds base themselves here squarely on the Scriptures. Colossians 1:13 plainly teaches that the kingdom is a present reality into which New Testament believers have been translated. I Peter 2:9 describes the elect church as the "holy nation" and kingdom of Christ. John 3:3,5 portrays the kingdom as spiritual, in that one can see it only when he has been regenerated, and present, in that one enters it through the new birth. Romans 14:17 denies that the kingdom is carnal, consisting of earthly things such as "meat and drink," and affirms that it is spiritual, consisting of "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

The kingdom has come, and it has come victoriously. Against all the opposition of Satan, the wicked world, and the power of sin, every elect is translated into the kingdom by sovereign grace. By the same grace of the King, he makes progress in obedience of life, is restored when he falls, and perseveres unto final glory.

Likewise, the kingdom is victorious in its institutional form as the church. Christ gathers, defends, and preserves His church. She grows in grace and knowledge. She grows

numerically. Always there is a church that confesses the Lordship of Christ in truth.

She is the triumphant kingdom of Christ also when she is persecuted. Indeed, never is the invincible power of the kingdom more gloriously displayed than in these times. When the church was banned as an illicit religion and her members thrown to the lions by the Roman Caesars; when the Roman Church and compliant states shed the blood of Reformed believers in France and the Netherlands like water; when in the future under Antichrist the two witnesses lie dead in

the streets and all those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life suffer torture and death because they will not worship the beast, then, then above all, the saints do valiantly and the church conquers.

Does anyone professing Christianity dare to mock the faithful church in the world as defeated and defeatist because she does not Christianize the world? Is this not to mock the work of the Spirit of Christ? Quite a different appraisal of the church is given in Psalm 48.

Although the kingdom of Christ has already come and is always com-

ing, it has not yet come perfectly. This awaits the coming of the King Himself, as Revelation 21 teaches. Then new Jerusalem comes down from God out of heaven (v. 2).

The one hope of the Reformed believer, therefore, is the coming of Christ. Then will be the resurrection of the body. Then will be the perfect coming of the kingdom.

The Reformed believer does not pray, "Come, millennial kingdom."

But he prays, "Come, Lord Jesus!" □

— DJE

Letters

Joy and Profit from the SB in Spain

It is with joy and profit I have read your articles on "The Death of Confessional Calvinism in Scottish Presbyterianism," (Aug. 1, 1992-Dec. 15, 1992). After that I read again my copy of Dr. Macleod's book, *Behold Your God*, together with *Common Grace and the Gospel*, by the late Prof. Cornelius Van Til. I have to confess I

have read many things against Rev. H. Hoeksema, but nothing by him. I wonder if I could get a copy of his *Reformed Dogmatics* and how much would it cost. Could you guide me, please?

Since I can remember I had troubles with the doctrine of Common Grace when I tried to find support for it in the Bible. But the burden of the Reformed tradition is very heavy upon me.

May God bless your ministry as you work for His Glory.

(Rev.) Alfonso Ropero
Tomelloso, Spain

Response:

We are sending you a copy of H. Hoeksema's *Reformed Dogmatics*, as well as some other materials, as our contribution to your work on behalf of the Reformed faith in Spain.

— Ed.

All Around Us

Prof. Robert Decker

■ ICHABOD!

Such is the strange name which the wife of Phinehas, the son of Eli, gave to her newborn son. Times were bad in Israel. It was the time of transition from the period of the judges to that of the kings. Eli, who judged Israel for forty years and who was succeeded by Samuel, was weak at best. His two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were completely profane.

Prof. Decker is professor of Practical Theology in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

The worship of the tabernacle was corrupted. On account of all this the Lord announced a terrible word of judgment upon Eli and his family (I Samuel 2:27-36). Shortly after this, Israel was soundly defeated by the Philistines. In the battle Hophni and Phinehas were killed. What was much worse, the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant (I Samuel 4). Upon hearing that the Ark had been taken, Eli fell backward from his chair and broke his neck and died. When the wife of Phinehas heard of the deaths of Eli and her husband, and was told that the Ark was taken by the Philistines, she went into labor and

gave birth to a son. With her dying breath she named him Ichabod, saying, "... the glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken" (I Sam. 4:21-22).

I thought of this sad bit of Bible history as I read about the current condition of the church in Geneva, Switzerland. The name Ichabod could aptly be placed on the city limits signs of Geneva.

Geneva is where John Calvin labored and preached for many years. It was one of the leading centers of the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. For many years after Calvin's death it continued in that role. Many

Reformed pastors, also those in the lowlands, received their training in Geneva. Calvin's influence is unmistakable in the Belgic Confession.

What is the current condition of the church in Geneva? It's losing members rapidly, according to a recent survey. In Geneva and Zurich the Reformed churches are losing 2,500 members every year. Half of those leaving are young people between twenty and thirty-five years old. In Basel, the church is only half the size it was thirty years ago. In Switzerland, citizenship and church membership used to be nearly the same. Today, we are told, only 2.75 million of the 6.8 million Swiss are enrolled as church members.

The survey also showed that, even among church members, many have beliefs rooted in nature religions or occult practices. Almost three out of four members say they rarely attend church. One of every four says he is considering leaving. And 62% say they do not think their religion (that of the Reformed church) is the only true faith.

Ichabod! Indeed, the glory has departed from Geneva! What is so sad and tragic about all this is that the name Ichabod could aptly be placed over the doors of many Reformed and Presbyterian churches throughout the world, churches that not very long ago still confessed the Reformed faith as staunchly as the church of Calvin's Geneva once did.

REC News Exchange

■ GKN Admits Children to the Lord's Supper

The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN) decided that local congregations may admit children to the Lord's Supper. In 1977 the RCN said churches should not hinder a person from coming to the Lord's Supper, if four conditions are met. In practice, about a third of the RCN congregations now have children participating. The synod's decision in November was a decision to change the church order to conform to current practice in the congregations.

The church order now says that, as a rule, the Lord's Supper is given to those who have publicly professed their faith, but churches may make exceptions when the conditions of 1977 are followed. This change in the church order will need approval from the following synod.

Whether the following synod approves or disapproves it is not likely that the congregations will alter their current practice.

How is it possible for a young child to examine himself, eat and drink worthily, and properly discern the Lord's body?

REC News Exchange

■ Resistance to "TOGETHER ON THE WAY"

Over ten years ago a unification process, known as *Together on the Way* (*Samen op Weg*), was initiated among three Dutch denominations. These three churches are the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (which seceded from the State church in 1834 and merged with Dr. A. Kuyper's "grieving" in 1892), the Netherlands Reformed Church (the state church), and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Netherlands. The Netherlands Reformed Church (NRC) is the largest of the three denominations.

The Reformed Alliance (*Gereformeerde Bond*) is offering strong objections to the union process of the three churches. The Alliance is a large group of ministers, consistories, and congregations within the NRC. In fact it represents approximately one-third of all members in the NRC. The Alliance is a more strictly orthodox wing of the NRC.

In November of last year some 1600 members of the Alliance gathered to hear objections to the new church order which the three uniting churches had adopted at a combined synod meeting in October. Some of their objections have to do with the confessions. They objected that two documents were included in the church order which are contradictory, namely the *Canons of Dordt* and

the *Concord of Leuenberg*. They also objected that the confessions were now said to be "in community with the confessions of the forefathers." Alliance members view this phrase as a downgrading of the status of the confessions.

The Alliance further noted that the church order allows baptized members to partake of the Lord's Supper and to hold church office. These church regulations, as well as the omission of any mention of marriage, will bring problems, according to the Alliance.

For all of their strong and weighty objections to these matters, as well as to other departures over the years in the NRC, the Alliance members are strongly attached to the NRC. They describe it as planted by God in their land. In an account of these events, Prof. Klass Runia commented that the Alliance cannot leave their denomination. They sit between two equally hot fires, he said. J. van der Graaf, the Secretary of the Alliance, commented on their predicament, "We cannot go, and we cannot go along." Runia says this means the Alliance cannot leave the NRC, but they cannot accept the union either.

There are many good preachers within the Alliance. Undersigned knows one of them personally, the Reverend Dr. C. Tucker, who was a guest lecturer at our seminary a few years ago. The members of the Alliance can be characterized as sincere, devout, Reformed Christians. For years now they have been valiantly trying to stem the tide of liberalism in the NRC. But has the Alliance changed the course of the NRC? Not one bit!

Our question to the brothers and sisters of the Alliance is, why do you not leave the NRC? We could put it another way, how can you in good conscience remain in the NRC? It certainly cannot be said of the NRC that she is Reformed according to the Confessions. The Belgic Confession says, "that everyone is bound to join himself to the true church" (Article 28). The Belgic Confession insists that the marks of the true church are these: "if the pure doctrine of the gospel is

preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin: in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the

only Head of the Church" (Article 29). The Article continues, "Hereby the true church may certainly be known, from which no man has a right to separate himself." The Alliance by its very existence admits that the above cannot be said of the NRC. How can they remain?

Let this be a lesson to all of us in these days. How does one determine in which church he or she belongs? Look for the three marks. Nothing less, nothing more! □

REC News Exchange

Decency and Order

Rev. Ronald Cammenga

The Consistory

In all churches there shall be a consistory composed of the ministers of the Word and the elders, who at least in larger congregations, shall, as a rule, meet once a week. The minister of the Word (or the ministers, if there be more than one, in turn) shall preside and regulate the proceedings. Whenever the number of elders is small, the deacons may be added to the consistory by local regulations; this shall invariably be the rule where the number is less than three.

Church Order, Article 37.

Introduction

This article begins the *Church Order's* treatment of the consistory, what in the Presbyterian tradition is referred to as the session. Article 29 specified four kinds of ecclesiastical assemblies: "Four kinds of ecclesiastical assemblies shall be maintained: the consistory, the classis, (the particular synod), and the general synod." Articles 37-40 deal, now, with the local consistory.

The discussion of the ecclesiastical assemblies begins with a discussion of the consistory. This is as it

should be. For in the Reformed (biblical) view, the consistory is the essential assembly.

Each congregation must have a consistory. Without a consistory there can be no congregation. The Synod of Wezel, 1568, called for every church to have a "Company of Prophets" that consisted of the ministers, elders, and deacons. The first regular Synod of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, Embden, 1571, ruled that each church must have "...gatherings or consistories of ministers of the Word, elders, and deacons...."

Composition of the Consistory

Ordinarily the consistory consists of the minister(s) and the elders of the local congregation. Several passages of Scripture refer to the elders, including the ministers, as a body: Matthew 16:19; Acts 20:28; I Timothy 4:14; 5:17; I Peter 5:1-3. Our "Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons" states: "And thus the ministers of the Word, together with the elders, form a body or assembly, being as a council of the Church, representing the whole Church."

Provision is made for the inclusion of the deacons into the consistory: "Whenever the number of elders is small, the deacons may be added to the consistory by local regulations; this shall invariably be the rule where the number is less than

three." The Synod of Dordt, 1574, decided:

To clarify the 6th Article of the Synod of Embden, the minister of the Word, elders and deacons shall constitute the consistory. Furthermore, the ministers and elders shall meet and the deacons shall also meet by themselves to handle their own affairs concerning the poor. However, in places where there are few elders, the deacons may be admitted according to the desire of the consistory. The deacons shall be obligated to appear when they are summoned to the consistory.

The question was put to the Synod of Middelburg, 1581:

Whether the churches which have few elders are permitted to admit deacons in the consistory? Answer: It is permitted as often as the consistory needs their advice and help. Besides, they shall ordinarily be allowed there if they fulfill both the office of eldership and of diaconate.

It was the Synod of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, 1905, that decided that the deacons must be included with the consistory if the number of elders was less than three. This was carried over by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in its revision of the *Church Order* in 1914. That the deacons are to be included in

Rev. Cammenga is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Loveland, Colorado.

the consistory if the number of elders is less than three means that they must be included if the number of elders is two. A consistory, in order to be a consistory, must have at least two elders; there must be a plurality of elders. The Synod of 's Gravenhage, 1624, declared that one elder and one deacon do not constitute a legitimate consistory.

Status of Deacons Included in Consistory

Often the question is asked, "What status do the deacons have who have been included in the consistory?" The answer to this question is that they have decisive, not merely advisory, vote in all matters coming before the consistory. They are actually included in the consistory. Clearly, this is the meaning of Article 37.

Sometimes the question is asked whether the deacons, in this case, have a vote in matters of discipline. The answer to this question is, "Yes." VanDellen and Monsma state:

...when the Deacons are part of the Consistory they should be considered to be full-fledged Consistory members. They have a voice and vote in all matters which pertain to the government of the Church, even as the Elders under these circumstances have a voice and vote in all matters regarding the Church's work of mercy. To deny the Deacons a right to vote in cases of discipline, for instance, would be contrary to the *Church Order* and the duties which have been imposed on them by local arrangement. (*The Church Order Commentary*, p. 166.)

The Synod of the Christian Reformed Church, 1936, made the following decision on this matter:

In view of the fact that the basic problem in regard to the status of Deacons in the Consistory hinges on the interpretation of the phrase, "added to the consistory" in Art. 37 of the *Church Order*, Synod declares that:

a. The phrase, "added to the Consistory," can mean only that the Dea-

cons become members of the Consistory, and as such they are warranted in performing presbyterial functions including the right to vote in matters of Church government.

b. This concession by our *Church Order*, namely, that Deacons may function as Elders, is made to avoid the unReformed practice of oligarchic rule which would be the only alternative.

c. It ought, however, to be added that such Deacons, in matters of Church government, should naturally give due consideration to the judgment of the Elders. ADOPTED. (ACTS of Synod, 1936, Art. 96.)

To justify this inclusion of the deacons in the consistory and their being permitted to function as elders is not difficult. First, the offices in the church are not fundamentally distinct. All the offices are really only aspects of the one office of Jesus Christ. There is a fundamental unity of the offices, therefore, that makes permissible the inclusion of deacons in the consistory. In the second place, it is possible for a man to hold two offices at the same time. This was true in the Old Testament. David, for example, was both prophet and king. Melchizedek was priest and king. In the New Testament, Philip was one of the first seven deacons and also held the (temporary) office of evangelist. Essentially, this is the situation when deacons are included in the consistory. Although they are primarily deacons, they share in the office of elder.

Consistory Meetings

Originally Article 37 specified that the consistory ought to meet once each week. This was the practice in Geneva at the time of Calvin, as well as in the early history of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands. Our present Article 37 qualifies this stipulation for weekly consistory meetings: "...at least in larger congregations..." and "...as a rule...."

The prevailing practice in the Protestant Reformed Churches is that the consistory meets once or twice per month. In the "Questions for

Church Visitation" it is asked: "Does the consistory meet regularly in accord with the needs of the congregation, at least once a month?"

The matter of the exact number of meetings is left to local regulation. There must be at least one regularly scheduled meeting each month. Special meetings ought to be called if these are needed for the consistory to finish its work.

Must the consistory meetings be announced to the congregation? The regular monthly consistory meeting must be announced to the congregation, so that all who have a matter to take up with the consistory may have the opportunity to do so. But any special or continued consistory meetings need not be publicly announced.

Article 37 requires that the minister of the congregation function as the president of the consistory and preside at its meetings. If a congregation is served by more than one minister, they shall preside at the consistory meetings by turn. In case the minister is absent or ill, the vice-president (an elder) presides. In case a congregation is vacant, the vice-president, or, if he is nearby, the moderator presides.

Are the consistory meetings open to the members of the congregation, or are they closed, i.e., limited to the members of the consistory only? The consistory meetings are definitely closed meetings, as has always been the position and practice in the Reformed churches. Sensitive matters are often dealt with involving persons. Particularly the work of the consistory in Christian discipline is to be kept in the confines of the consistory.

This implies that consistory members are also to keep consistory matters confidential. The members of the consistory must exercise careful discretion not to discuss consistory business outside of the consistory room. The Synod of Antwerp, 1564, stipulated that those who violated the confidentiality of the consistory were first to be admonished by the consistory and, if repeated, suspended from office.

Legal consistory meetings must have at least one over half of the members present (quorum). If less than half of the members convene, the meeting is to be re-scheduled. It stands to reason that there are to be no secret meetings of the consistory, so that some of the members are not informed of the meeting. All the members are to be informed of the time and place of each meeting. The question was put to the Synod of Middelburg, 1581: "How shall the consistory meetings which are held outside the proper times or extraordinarily be regarded when all members of the consistory are not summoned to them? Answer: They shall not be valid, but the whole consistory shall be allowed to change what was done so improperly. And if all who belong are summoned to an extraordinary meeting, at a proper time, though they do not come, what is decided in such extraordinary meetings shall be valid."

Congregational Meetings

The "Decisions pertaining to this article," which are appended to Article 37 make reference to the congregational meetings. The congregational meetings are to be regarded as an extension of the consistory meeting and not as a distinct ecclesiastical assembly. This is plain from the fact that the congregational meeting is not

listed in Article 29 as one of the ecclesiastical assemblies. The president and secretary of the consistory function as the president and secretary of the congregational meeting. The minutes of the congregational meeting are to be entered into the minute book of the consistory and approved ("confirmed") by the consistory. If any member desires to have a matter treated at the congregational meeting he must make request to the consistory, and it is the prerogative of the consistory to determine whether and how the request shall be granted.

Do the decisions of the congregational meeting have binding authority also over the consistory? They do. If the consistory feels that a decision taken at a congregational meeting was in error, it must bring the matter before the congregation. If disagreement persists between the consistory and the congregation, the consistory may not merely set the decision of the congregation aside, but must bring the matter for adjudication to the classis.

Who may participate in the congregational meetings? Only confessing male members of the congregation. This is the Reformed tradition. The reason for this is that authority is exercised by the right to vote at the congregational meeting. Women are not permitted to exercise authority in

the church. In the "Decisions pertaining to Article 38" specific mention is made of "the vote of the male membership."

Many churches have for some time given the right to vote in the congregational meetings to women. In many Presbyterian churches all professing members of the church are given the right to participate in the meetings of the congregation. This has for some time been the policy of the Christian Reformed Church. The Synod of 1957 decided that "women may participate in congregational meetings with the right to vote subject to the rules that govern the participation of men." The Synod of 1972 reaffirmed this decision: "Synod reaffirms that it is the right of women members, as full members of Christ and his church and sharers in the office of believers, to participate in and vote at congregational meetings on a level of equality with men." This is a violation of the biblical prohibition against women exercising authority, and of the biblical command that they keep silent with respect to the government of the church. Historically it has generally been the case that permitting women the right of participation at congregational meetings has been only one step towards opening up the offices to women. □

Search the Scriptures

Rev. George Lubbers

Lesson IV

Praying in Every Place

I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.

I Timothy 2:8

Men are to pray in every place as Christ's ministers at the altar.

Introduction

In the first place, we note, that Paul is writing the authoritative words in this text in the capacity of having

Rev. Lubbers is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

been appointed by Jesus Christ to stand in the office of preacher, apostle, and teacher of Gentiles (I Tim. 2:7; II Tim. 1:11; cp. Gal. 2:6-10).

Note also that verse 8 stands at the head of this unit. It is basic. It really is the rock-bottom pillar of the truth addressed to the erring women in the church. We hope to take careful notice of this in Lesson V.

Thirdly, we see that Paul informs Timothy and us why he writes these important and basic matters from Macedonia — i.e., why he does not wait till his next visit with Timothy in Ephesus. The reason, briefly stated, is his desire to prevent Satan and all his hosts from working havoc in the church as the house of God, in the very place where God dwells in His house of prayer. Is not this the "place" where God seeks those who worship Him in Spirit and in truth (John 4:21-24)?

Lastly, permit me to point out that when Paul writes as he does in I Corinthians 14:33, 34, he establishes the revealed truth that there is no confusion in any of God's outgoing works at all. Whether you read of the works of God as they are predetermined before the foundation of the world, or as the unfolding of these divine "thoughts" in all of creation and providence, you will find that God reveals Himself nowhere as a God of confusion. Always we see the wisdom of God as the Builder and Maker of His church. Ever the "law" says, do not blame God for sinful confusion. The "law" is the rule of all our believing thinking. Here the voice of God says loudly and clearly, "Who art thou, O man, that answers against God?"

Let us in seriatim form notice the Word of God in I Timothy 2:8. We focus our attention first on the words, "I will therefore."

We hardly need to speak at length on this point. The very fact that Paul is appointed to be Christ's preacher (herald), Apostle, and teacher of the Gentiles indicates beyond contradiction that Paul does not write here as a self-appointed charlatan, but as a true ambassador who

cries: "Thus saith the Lord: I will." In my church it is and shall be my determined and wise will that "men" shall raise up holy hands to me in congregational prayers, combined with the preaching of the Gospel. Hence, it behooves us to take our shoes from off our feet in humble submission to God and to His officially sent emissaries.

The very verb "I will" in the Greek text tells that this is what God wills as based upon divine, wise, and eternal deliberation. These plans and purposes are succinctly stated in Psalm 40:4-6; Hebrews 10:1-10; and Isaiah 55:6-11. God works all those things according to the counsel of His sovereign decree. Now, in full agreement with this counseling will of God, as well as the execution of the same in bringing all the elect to glory, Paul writes: "I will."

Paul writes, entirely in agreement with the will of God, and also entirely as an obedient herald, apostle, and teacher of Gentiles, "I will that men lift up prayers." According to what standard? The injunction is that "men" and not "women" should preach and pray in the churches called into being according to "the law" (I Cor. 14:29-35). This standard, "thus saith the law," is tantamount to saying: "according to the eternally determined will of God." If we question this, let us all be put in our place with the rebuke uttered in Romans 9:17-23!

Let us not overlook the revealed fact that, in His sovereign and all-wise plan, God qualifies only those whom He calls to perform their assigned ministry. Read Acts 6:1-8. There God qualifies His chosen deacons. We see this particularly in the appointment of Stephen, a man full of the Holy Ghost, upon whom the Apostles also "laid their hands." Read Acts 7, which records Stephen's masterful and brilliant defense of the Gospel of Christ. Men who are appointed in "every place" to pray are the men qualified by the Holy Spirit. Such qualification is not for all. We hold that it is quite clear that God according to the Law does not give

such gifts unto women, be they ever so pious and knowledgeable in the Scriptures. Once (it was some sixty years ago) an elderly sister spoke to me very disrespectfully concerning her husband. I reminded her that she should reverence her husband. She rejoined with a rather haughty, "What if he does not know anything?" I answered with a question: "Then do you know so much better than he does what the Scripture requires of the wife in Ephesians 5:21-33?"

Prayers must be made by the lifting up of holy hands. This indicates that men who pray must not only have received intellectual charisma of God, but also must partake of the holiness of Christ; for they stand praying and preaching before a holy God in the midst of His sanctified people. They are indeed members of Christ's church, living members. They do not have bloody hands, murder in their hearts. The church's ministers, elders, and deacons wear the golden signet on which is written *holiness to the Lord* (Ex. 29:36)!

The terms "without wrath and (doubtings) wranglings" is very clearly the practical walk and deep spiritual attitude required by the Lord. The term in the Greek which is translated "doubting" in the KJV, is more aptly translated "disputings" in the American Version as well as in the Dutch translation. The term in question in the Old Testament really refers to "thoughts" of God in a good sense, as the holy thoughts and saving purpose of God (see Ps. 33:11; 92:3; Isa. 55:8; Jer. 23:11). However, the term is also used in the Old Testament with reference to the evil thoughts which proceed from wicked hearts against God and His people (Gen. 6:5; Ps. 94:11; Isa. 65:2-5; 66:18).

In the New Testament the term refers exclusively to the evil "thoughts" of the hearts of men. The classic text is Matthew 15:10-20, especially verses 17-20. Here Jesus lifts the veil on the spiritual-ethical reality of the fountain of sin in evil men who reject the law of God as spoken of in Matthew 15:8. Isaiah had given the mystery of sin in chapter 29:3. (Read

this passage carefully.) Jesus lays bare the heart of those who are hypocrites. It is from the unbelieving hearts that the evil thoughts proceed. (Read verses 19, 20. Further, as to "evil thoughts," read Matt. 7:21; Luke 2:35; 5:22; 9:47; I Cor. 3:20.)

Now we must attempt to see the relevancy of this matter of good and evil thoughts, i.e., the thoughts of God and those of unbelieving men as referred to in I Timothy 2:8. The good thoughts consist of God's wisdom in His "law" that only qualified "men" lift up holy hands. This is, of course, rejected by unbelieving men and women. Here we see the wrath of man which does not work out the righteousness of God. And in the house of prayer there must be no hot, wrangling debate. Why? Because this is indicative that they who vehemently oppose this do not worship God in Spirit and in truth (John 4:19-24). God is not a God of confusion but of peace!

Question to consider.

Do you know that certain men

and women in our day, who champion the total equality of women and men both in church and in human society in general, attempt with might and main to usher in a new "theology"? A rather persistent attempt is made to find Scripture passages which teach that the blood of Christ has removed once and for all the "law" spoken of in I Corinthians 14:33, 34. The erring proponents of "feminine theology" make their feeble appeal to Galatians 3:28.

Now I most earnestly request that we, who strive to make ourselves *workmen* worthy of the name, show ourselves interpreters of the Sacred Scriptures. We must be men who allow the Scriptures to explain the Scriptures. Woe to us if we in any way should be unlearned and unstable men who wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction (II Pet. 3:16). Let us tremble before the Word of God.

Since space forbids a lengthy exegetical dissertation, I will attempt to combine clarity with brevity. I will therefore write the arguments against the contention in propositional form.

We have in mind the contention that to be in Christ there must be neither male nor female. The distinction between husband and wife, of which Genesis 3:16, 17 speaks, no longer obtains.

We have in mind that it is the contention of the feminist teaching that the great problem in the world's grief and sorrows is not a matter of man's having fallen into sin, as taught in Genesis 3, nor that of man's disobedience as stipulated in Romans 5:12-21 and I Timothy 2:13-15, but a matter rather of "our culture, its economic system, social practices, legal systems, socializing processes, family dynamics, language theory and educational curricula." These create and perpetuate both subordination and the oppression of woman. (See *Calvin Theological Journal*, Vol. 27, Number 1, April 1992, pp. 68-92.)

We shall take careful notice whether this all squares with clear and infallible teaching of the Sacred Scriptures, D.V., in our explanation of I Timothy 2:9-15. □

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. Thomas Miersma

The Doctrine of the Trinity (1)

Introduction

The doctrine of the Trinity stands at the core of our Christian faith as one of the key distinctives which separate us from cults, sects, and heathen religions. The truth that God is one in being or essence, yet three in person, pervades the whole of our doctrine so

completely that no doctrine is unaffected by it.

That which is true generally of the Christian church is especially true of our Reformed faith. The Reformed doctrine of the covenant and the covenant life of God cannot be understood except in the light of the truth that God is triune. This doctrine is, moreover, both personal and practical, as it goes to the very heart of our worship and service of God.

It is not without reason, therefore, that the doctrine of the Trinity

has always been the object of the fiercest attacks of our adversary the devil, both in the past and in the present. The Christian church of the past was called to maintain and defend this doctrine, and we are called likewise to stand for this truth in the world. The Athanasian Creed, one of our ecumenical creeds, is correct when it speaks of the catholic or universal Christian faith and says:

Whosoever will be saved: before all things it is necessary that he hold the

Rev. Miersma is pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

Catholic Faith: which Faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled: without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the Catholic Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the persons: nor dividing the Essence (*Psalter*, new edition, p. 82).

The seriousness of this confession must not be overlooked. To tamper with or defile the doctrine of the Trinity leads to eternal destruction. To turn from the truth of the Trinity is to depart from the living and true God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to serve and worship an idol, a god of our own imagination.

As the terms Trinity and Triune themselves emphasize, we make a distinct confession, that God is three, and yet He is one. He is a tri-unity. Both aspects of this doctrine are important. The essential unity and oneness of God must be faithfully maintained as well as the truth of the three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Both aspects of the truth of the Trinity have been attacked and are under attack in various forms.

The Oneness and Unity of God

The doctrine of the Trinity proceeds from the basic confession of Scripture that God is one. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD" (Deut. 6:5). God's oneness is a divine attribute which expresses the essential unity of His nature and virtues. There is but one God, one divine essence or being, who is perfectly one in all His divine glory, virtues, and perfections. This oneness is rooted in the truth of God's simplicity, that God is not composed of parts. His attributes are indivisible. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are not three gods or three parts of God, so as to divide the divine nature and glory. The Word of God says, "I am the LORD and there is none else, there is no God beside me..." (Isa. 45:5). He is Jehovah, "The I AM THAT I AM" (Ex. 3:14).

This truth of the unity of God may not be corrupted by our doctrine

of the threefoldness of God's internal triune existence. Both aspects of the doctrine, as we said, are under attack, especially as they are bound up with the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian faith confesses but one God over against paganism with its doctrine of many gods, spirits, and divine powers. Our God is a self-conscious, thinking, willing spiritual being who has one mind and one will, not minds nor wills. The Father, The Son, The Holy Spirit are not various sparks of divine energy emanating from a mindless unconscious divine essence. Over against the mindless oneness of the Hindu Brahma, the creative force which manifests itself in various godlike incarnations and manifestations, we maintain that there is one self-conscious living God.

Jesus is the Son of God, true God and true man, possessing the whole of the divine nature of the one only true God, yet as Son in distinction from the Father and the Spirit. Jesus is not a god, a divine-like creature, a divine emanation. Nor is He the highest angelic being, possessing parts of the divine glory, as the New Age cults would have Him or as the Jehovah's Witnesses implicitly teach. Neither is it true that Jehovah is a god, Jesus a god, and you a god, or one who is spiritually evolving into a god.

This warmed-over polytheism destroys the unity of God. In its various forms it is a doctrine that today seeks to creep into the Christian church from the cults and the New Age movements. It often seeks to twist the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and to clothe its false philosophy in Christian terms. The most notable example of this is the Mormon cult, the so-called Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints. The Mormons are not Christians. They have taught since the days of Joseph Smith (1805-1844) a plurality of gods, and that each man can become a god. According to them Jehovah is a god, Jesus another god, and Lucifer or Satan yet another god and Jesus' brother. They even debate among themselves whether Adam was in fact Jehovah.

A Plurality of Persons

It is in the context of maintaining the truth of the essential unity of the one only true God and the divine essence, that the Word of God leads us to confess not a plurality of gods, but a plurality of persons within the being of God. Unto us as creatures and as His people, Jehovah God says "I" and speaks as one God. He says, as we have seen, "I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me..." (Isa. 45:5). God speaks to us as one simple spiritual being. Yet God is revealed as speaking within Himself in the plural, as a plurality. In the account of the creation of man we read, "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..." (Gen. 1:26). After the fall we read, "And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us..." (Gen. 3:22). The Word of God points us to a distinction within the being of God, a plurality of persons, which does not destroy the unity of God. This is true of the very first chapters of the Bible. What this distinction is, moreover, the Scriptures make abundantly clear, for God reveals Himself in His Word as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. God is within Himself three, and yet one God.

*To turn from the truth
of the Trinity
is to depart from
the living and true God,...*

This truth of the threefoldness of God is not founded on a few texts taken here and there in Scripture, but belongs to the teaching of the whole Word of God. It is seen in the creation when God creates the world; speaks *His Word* and calls into existence all things; and the *Spirit* of God moves upon the face of the deep (Gen. 1:1-3). It is confessed in the Psalms, "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth" (Psa. 33:6). (emphasis mine—TCM) God created the heavens and the earth, they were created by the Word, and the Spirit or

breath of God wrought in the beginning and gave life to the creature. The Creator is God, the Word, the Spirit.

Likewise it is Jehovah who is our Savior and the God of our salvation. He is so as our Father. "Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: Thou, O LORD, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting" (Isa. 63:16). Yet he is also revealed as the Son of God, our Savior and king. "I will declare the decree: The LORD hath said unto me,

Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee" (Psa. 2:7). Moreover He is the Son, not only as man of the line of David to be born in Bethlehem, but as the one "...whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2). He is the eternal Son.

In like manner the Word of God speaks of God's Spirit, the divine wind or breath of God, as the One who not only quickens the creation but saves us, raises us from death to life, and gives us breath (Ez. 37:5, 9), whom

God will pour out upon His people (Joel 2:28).

That which is revealed in the Old Testament is yet more plainly declared in the New Testament, so that we are baptized "...in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28:19). There is but one Almighty God, Creator, Savior, and Lord into whose Name we are brought, and He is a triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Of this the whole of the Scriptures testify. □

Church and State

Mr. James Lanting

Discipline of a Church Member After Resignation

[Church membership] may be severed freely by a member's positive act at any time. But until it is so terminated, the church has authority to prescribe and follow disciplinary ordinances without fear of interference by the state. Within the context of church discipline, churches enjoy an absolute privilege from scrutiny by the secular authority.

Hadnot v. Shaw
(Oklahoma Supreme Court, 1992)

Post-Withdrawal Discipline

At times a church consistory is involved in the unpleasant but necessary task of admonishing and disciplining a communicant member. But more often than not, it seems, the erring member who refuses to repent evades imminent censure or other

discipline by "asking for his papers." The consistory then faces the question of whether to ignore the resignation and continue the disciplinary procedure, or to acknowledge the withdrawal from membership and thereby terminate all discipline.

In his book, *The Polity of the Churches*, church order scholar J.L. Schaver argues that a consistory should continue discipline notwithstanding a member's resignation:

It is said that, when members resign, discipline must cease because it concerns only the members of the church. The error in this reasoning lies in the assumption that the Church should accept such resignations. The Church ought not to be regarded simply as a society wherein people become members by their own volition. In Reformed and Presbyterian churches it is not believed that people become members by a voluntary act but by an act of God.... That relationship should not be severed except by an

act of the Church. In a Reformed or Presbyterian Church it should not be a person's privilege to resign when he pleases. A soldier who has committed a crime cannot leave the army in order to escape its discipline—not even if he became united to the army by way of voluntary enlistment.

Although this view is sometimes entertained by zealous elders and ministers eager to maintain a high view of church discipline, it appears to be erroneous for at least two reasons. First, continuation of post-withdrawal discipline is contrary to the weight of church order authorities. Secondly, two recent state supreme court decisions have held that a church that continues discipline of a member after a request for withdrawal of membership exposes itself to suits for civil tort liability.

Church Polity

J.L. Schaver notwithstanding, most Reformed church polity authori-

Mr. Lanting, a member of South Holland Protestant Reformed Church, is a practicing attorney.

ties insist that a consistory cannot coerce or compel a person to remain a member in Christ's church against his volition. For example, in their book *The Church Order Commentary*, VanDellen and Monsma quote with approval a 1918 synodical decision of the Christian Reformed Church:

Synod, considering that withdrawal from discipline, to which one has freely subjected himself, and the breaking off of the fellowship with the Church to which one belongs, for reasons which cannot stand the test of God's Word, is a sin which should not be esteemed lightly...; but considering also that one's affiliation with the Church ... should remain to be, according to Church governmental principles, an act of each one's own personal choice, (therefore Synod) judges that no one can continue to be an object of church discipline if he persists in resigning his membership.

A later synod stated that it should be announced that the person who withdraws under such circumstances has committed a very grievous sin. Furthermore, expressions like "accepting the resignation" should not be used in the announcement, "because full responsibility for his sinful act must remain with the person who withdraws himself from the Church."

This then is seemingly the more reasoned and appropriate response: no person may continue to be an object of church discipline if he insists on withdrawing his membership. This is because Christ never forces or coerces membership in His kingdom, but rather requires a willing and compliant heart. And once membership is withdrawn, it follows that the church has no authority or jurisdiction over the former member.

Civil Liability

But there is also another compelling reason to discontinue discipline after resignation. In our regretably litigious society, numerous churches have recently been sued by former members who were subjected to post-withdrawal discipline. In 1989,

the Oklahoma supreme court upheld a jury verdict against the Collinsville (Oklahoma) Church of Christ for invasion of privacy and intentional infliction of mental distress allegedly occasioned by post-withdrawal discipline.

The Collinsville Church of Christ apparently held a doctrinal belief that a member cannot voluntarily withdraw from the church. They consequently ignored a woman's letter of resignation and proceeded to announce to local Church of Christ congregations her alleged sin of fornication. A jury later awarded her \$390,000 in damages.

The Oklahoma supreme court upheld the verdict, declaring:

After she wrote a letter to the Elders unequivocally withdrawing her membership, the Elders continued their disciplinary actions against her. During Sunday services the Elders read to the congregation those Scriptures which the Parishioner violated. This exposure of her private life, done without her consent, was unprotected by the First Amendment." (*Ginn v. Collinsville Church of Christ*.)

Pre-withdrawal Discipline is Privileged

But, in a more recent decision, the same state supreme court ruled in a scholarly opinion that, in contrast to *Ginn*, before a member resigns, a church's discipline procedures enjoy "absolute privilege from scrutiny from secular [courts]." (See *Hadnot v. Shaw* headline quote above.)

The *Hadnot* court carved a sharp distinction between pre-withdrawal discipline and post-withdrawal discipline. The first amendment (freedom of religion) will protect and shield a church from suits filed by disgruntled ex-members concerning disciplinary decisions occurring prior to a parishioner's withdrawal of membership. The Court also mentioned that this immunity extends even to post-withdrawal implementation of a disciplinary decision taken before the member's resignation.

But the court went on to say that "when the church-member relation-

ship is severed" by either voluntary withdrawal or excommunication, the church's disciplinary activities are no longer constitutionally protected. Accordingly, any post-withdrawal disciplinary decision may subject a church to suits for invasion of privacy, slander, libel, intentional infliction of mental distress, and other such torts.

Conclusion

This is not to say, of course, that a consistory should neglect its duty to persuade resigning persons to refrain from this additional grievous sin and rescind their pending resignation. But it now seems clear that if a disciplined member insists on withdrawal of membership, both leading church authorities and the civil courts agree that disciplinary decisions must be immediately halted and the resignation acknowledged. Churches which persist in disciplinary action against a member who has "asked for his papers" are arguably acting contrary to church order and also assume the risk of lawsuits by irate and litigious ex-members. □

What heart can
comprehend Thy name,
Or, searching,
find Thee out?
Who art within,
a quickening flame,
A presence
round about.

Standard Bearer,
August 15, 1933

As For Me and My House

Off from the main street of Sioux Center, Iowa stood a small house. In fact, it was a very small house, actually consisting only of a small living room and a still smaller bedroom, with a lean-to for a kitchen.

I knocked, and then stooped as I stepped through the kitchen door. On the opposite side of the room, with a table between them, sat an elderly couple. As was customary, he was spending the evening reading the Bible, one chapter after another. Across from him sat his wife, busily engaged in her knitting, while she attentively listened to the Scriptures.

There was a pause when I entered, a smile of welcome. The Bible was closed and laid aside, and a chair was offered so that we could converse together for a little while.

It seemed a shame to disturb this quiet, pleasant atmosphere by my intrusion, but the welcome smile I received from both of these elderly saints made me feel entirely welcome.

This man was a carpet-weaver by trade. Behind his house was a shed where he worked his loom, producing carpets of various kinds: cheap carpets made from strips of rag from worn-out clothing, but also carpets made from expensive woolen yarn, produced in all kinds of intricate designs.

One could profitably spend a

little time watching this experienced weaver as he sent the shuttle back and forth, and with a foot treadle intertwined the woof with the warp. I did so once. As I watched, it seemed to me, in my ignorance, that he did not quite know what he was doing, as he tossed material of various colors between the intertwining threads. In fact, it seemed all wrong. A strip of one color here, a dash of another color there, one strip following the other in what appeared to be a mass of confusion.

As he noticed my concerned look, a slight smile lit up his face. While I was inclined to shake my head in wonder he continued to add row upon row, color upon color, in mass disorder.

... until at the right moment he unrolled the carpet to show a perfect design.

I was reminded of the many times in my life when it seemed that nothing was as it should be. Everything seemed all wrong. Even as I slept I dreaded the thought of another day in which the wrong could never be righted. I was inclined to complain with the old patriarch Jacob, "All these things are against me" (Gen. 42:36).

...until—but, no, I never did get to see the pattern that my Lord was making. By His grace however I learned to say with the apostle Paul, "If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:31, 32).

But that was at an earlier occasion. Now, as we sat and talked, the conversation turned spontaneously

to the spiritual and to the hope that we cherish in our hearts.

Let me add that, after a while, this man looked at his wife. She smiled and kept on knitting. A little while later he looked at her again, and she smiled in return. Finally he said, "Aren't you going to make us a cup of coffee?" "Oh," she said, as if she had not understood before, "is that what you want?"

I was struck with the atmosphere of perfect contentment and understanding. They had so little, and yet they had so much.

We have our dens, our comfortable chairs, our newspapers, our books, our TV sets, and so much more to occupy our attention on a quiet evening. But have we lost something?

Do you say, "But the evening you described belongs to old folk"? Maybe so; we may have to be old before we fully appreciate the one thing worthwhile. And maybe we won't find it then.

But, still, haven't we lost something?

* * * * *

Another incident I recall happened down south in the "Bible Belt."

My son and I drove up to the steel mills, where a person worked whom we wanted to meet.

When we approached the gate and asked for this person, the guard who was stationed there told us where we could find him. He added this striking remark, "You will not talk to him for five minutes, or you will know that he is a Christian." What a testimony of this man! We wondered, would it be true? Could it be true, that

in a few minutes this man would reveal his true nature? Let me assure you that this was true. Could others say that about you or me?

One evening, soon after, we were invited to the home of another man, who also worked in steel, walking on narrow beams five or six stories above the ground. As we approached his home we saw written over the front door the words, "Jesus lives here." Immediately I was set to wondering whether that would become evident during our visit with that family that evening. It was with a certain amount of curiosity that I went in upon their invitation.

Have we maybe lost something?

At the meal this man led in devotions, and in his prayer he made the request that our conversation throughout the evening might not fall into the secular, but would remain spiritual. This was another surprise. Again I wondered whether that would or could happen.

I must say that this was indeed the case. Even when we discussed secular matters, and that was the purpose of our visit, the conversation did remain strictly spiritual.

It could well be said, "The Lord was in our midst."

Have we maybe lost something? You may object and say, "But we are not accustomed to carrying our hearts on our coat sleeve." That may be ever so true, but, still, why is it so hard to strike up a conversation among us about the spiritual and the heavenly?

Why? Is there something lacking in our lives?

* * * * *

In my thoughts I now go to a farm community in the far west.

It is a winter evening. My wife and I are visiting with a large family in their big kitchen, gathered with the family around the table.

It was customary in this community for the visitors to enjoy the company of the whole family, young and old. And, on the other hand, for the entire family to enjoy the visitors. Later in the evening the children would go off to bed. The older people would go to the living room to visit there awhile. In the meantime the young folks would be making the lunch in the kitchen.

This was a farm community. There was likely no place for the young folks to go — at least not every evening. The family therefore could enjoy being together, and the visitors could enjoy spending some time with the whole family. That was a real pleasure. The time sped by. All too soon it was time to go home.

Today, all this has changed. The automobile has made inroads into our lives. There are so many places to go, and we all are so busy. Especially where the mother in the home also goes out to work, there is very little time that the whole family is together.

Well may we ask ourselves, if it is not too late, What is happening to our family life?

What is happening to our own spiritual life? To the spiritual life of our family? To our church?

* * * * *

Forgive me that I reminisce a bit. But my thoughts go back to the old hard-coal stove that stood in the corner of the living room casting a warm glow from its mica windows through the room.

It's a wintry Sunday afternoon. The family is gathered in the twilight singing the songs of Zion that have thrilled the hearts of the saints throughout the ages.

What a wonderful gift the Lord has given us, the gift of song. There is no experience of the soul that is not expressed in the Psalms, cries of anguish, complaints of sin, grieving confessions, but also joys of salvation, glorying in the riches of God's grace, bursting forth in praise to our God, expressing the hopes, the longings,

for the blessedness awaiting us beyond the grave.

We can sing in our inner being, without uttering a word. That is true especially when we sing "songs in the night." We can sing while we are working, or while we travel, either alone or in the company of others.

But it is something special when God's covenant family is gathered together in solemn meditation, expressing itself in song. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! ... For there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life forevermore" (Psa. 133:1, 3).

Does your family have time to sing as family?

Or have we lost something?

* * * * *

When we made confession of our faith before God and His church we vowed: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Are we living up to that?

"Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord." And Jesus adds to that, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). □

If you find yourself
loving any pleasure
better than your prayers,
any book
better than the Bible,
any house
better than the house of God,
any table better than
the Lord's table,
any person
better than Christ,
any indulgence
better than
the hope of heaven —
take alarm!

Thomas Guthrie

Israel's Hope and Expectation, by Rudolph VanReest. Neerlandia, Alberta, Canada: Inheritance Publishers, 1991. 331 pages, \$17.90 (US); \$19.90 (CAN), paperback. Originally published as *De Grote Verwachting* by Oosterbaan and LeCointre, Goes, the Netherlands (third edition 1977). Translated by Theodore Plantinga. [Reviewed by Lois Kregel.]

Many of the readers of the *Standard Bearer* will, no doubt, remember the genial Dutch journalist, K.C. VanSpronsen, who writes under the pseudonym, Rudolph VanReest. He traveled extensively in this country in the mid-forties, spending some time in Grand Rapids also. He sent back his impressions of the United States and the American people to the Netherlands, to be published in a series of articles in *De Reformatie*. Later he wrote a book about his experiences, *Van Kust Tot Kust*. His best-known book, *Schilder's Struggle for the Unity of the Church* (Inheritance Publishers, 1990), was published some time after his death in 1979. VanReest as novelist, however, is little known here, although, according to the book's cover, he has been rather prolific in this form of writing.

This English translation is smooth and easy to read. The translator has added biblical references that were not part of the Dutch edition. His purpose was that the book might "be used in Christian schools — not first as a work of literature, but also as a source of knowledge regarding the Biblical era in which the Savior was born." Because the story follows closely the biblical narrative and frequently refers to the Old Testament laws and the psalms, there are many such helpful references.

The story takes place in Judea, mostly around Bethlehem and Jerusalem, from perhaps fifteen to twenty years before Christ was born to the return of Joseph and Mary from Egypt.

Whether or not VanReest actually traveled to the Holy Land is not stated, but he has succeeded in making the setting realistic.

Woven into the story are well-known characters from secular history. There is the murderous, lecherous Herod, his wife, Miriamne, and her brother, Aristobulus, his sister, Salome, and his son, Antipater, as well as Mark Antony and Cleopatra, and the emperor Augustus. There are biblical characters, too: the pious Anna, Simeon, Joseph and Mary, Zacharias and Elisabeth. And already on the first page we meet the supercilious Pharisees with their broad phylacteries, fearing even to touch those less holy than they.

The plot centers in Jacob, who is twelve years old as the story opens, and full of questions as he helps his father pick olives for the temple oil. It is his father's wish that he become a priest, but Jacob is not at all eager to fulfill that wish. He is troubled by the inconsistencies of the Jewish religion and its leaders. The legalism of the Pharisees and their disdain for the common people, the hypocrisy of the rabbis — these are some of the things that Jacob can not harmonize with the instruction in the Scriptures which he has received from his devout parents. The temple service and the bloody sacrifices repel him. He wants to be a shepherd.

In time, Jacob meets Rachel, a neighbor of Zacharias and Elisabeth, and falls in love with her. They marry, but do not receive children. Jacob makes a deal with the Lord, promising that he will serve as priest, if God will give them children. It appears that God hears them, but when their daughter is born, Rachel dies. In his bitterness, Jacob moves to a little house on a hillside near Bethlehem and becomes a shepherd. When she is old enough, his little daughter, also named Rachel, joins him there. And so he is among the shepherds that

hear the announcement of the birth of Christ, hear the song of the angels, and go to the manger to worship. It is in Jacob's house that Joseph, Mary, and the Christ-child are living when the Magi come.

The plot is plausible. The strength of the story lies in the skill with which VanReest has pictured life in Judea — political, social, and religious — in the fullness of time. Especially striking is his expansion of the story of Zacharias serving in the temple, a privilege that was his only once in twenty-seven weeks. He pictures Zacharias as longing to be the one upon whom the lot would fall to burn incense, as never having had that wish fulfilled before, although now he was old; and when he does not believe the message of the angel Gabriel, it is part of his punishment that he cannot serve out the remainder of this ministration, for now he has a blemish — dumbness. There are also numerous illustrations of the use of the psalms and the quoting of Scripture by the people in their daily life. And the words of Christ come to mind as Ozias, Jacob's brother-in-law, explains why he must soak and stamp a piece of new cloth before he sews it to an older one: the new cloth will shrink, and tear the old.

There are shortcomings. It is hard to imagine that Zacharias would have waited to tell Elisabeth about the son they had been promised, until the days of his service at Jerusalem were ended and they had traveled a day's journey home. It is equally baffling that on the night that Jesus was born, the shepherds are still puzzling over Zacharias' vision, and no one seems to have heard about the birth of John, even though he must have been half a year old by this time.

More disturbing is the way VanReest deals with the story of the Magi. He sees them as three Babylonian sages, who have for some time been observing that the stars

have been speaking a lively language, that there has been a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn; when that happens, a great king will be born in the West according to their beliefs. After some discussion, which includes some talk about the futility of their own gods to do much for them, they start out for Jerusalem. In spite of this perception of the Star, the author pictures the Magi as seeing it over the house where the Child was—a strange mixture of the natural with the Wonder. A conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn aiming its rays at one small house? The reader, particularly the young student reader, should have his open Bible at hand when he reads.

As a historical novel the book is often sketchy; momentous events are sometimes given casual treatment. For example, in describing the mood of the people as they waited for the Messiah, we read: "And the poor people ... also came to fear that they were under the wrath of God—especially when their Jewish homeland was severely shaken by a mighty earthquake in which tens of thousands of Jews lost their lives" (p. 111). Further, when Herod tried to commit suicide towards the end of his life, we read (p. 327), "A grandson who was on the scene prevented him." One would have expected a "who" and a "how."

Bearing in mind these caveats, enjoy the book, and be transported back in time to when God's people waited in hope for the First Coming. You may even find yourself, as did this reviewer, humming the carol, "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus."

Men, Women and Order in the Church: Three Sermons by John Calvin, tr. Seth Skolnitsky. Dallas, Texas: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1992. 63 pages. Paper. \$4.95. (Reviewed by the Editor)

The translation into English of three sermons by Calvin on I Corinthians 11:2-16 is timely. In these sermons Calvin explains and applies

the teaching of the apostle on the relationships of believing men and women, especially in the public worship of the church. As a faithful expositor of the Word of God, Calvin insists on the subjection of the woman to the man in the Lord. This subjection means that women are not to occupy the pulpit (p. 28); Christ forbids them to be preachers and pastors of the church (p. 32).

Recognizing that believing women are the image of God as well as believing males, the Reformer correctly points out that spiritual oneness in Christ by faith does not rule out difference of rank and outward policy.

Regarding our eternal salvation it is true that one must not distinguish between man and woman.... Regarding policy however, we have what St. Paul declares here; for our Lord Jesus Christ did not come to mix up nature, or to abolish what belongs to the preservation of decency and peace among us (p. 21).

Controversial is Calvin's referring the headship of the man over the woman to the headship of all males over all females, rather than to the headship of the husband over his wife. Seemingly in contradiction of this assertion in the second sermon is Calvin's treatment of this headship as a husband's headship over his wife, in the third sermon.

The passage forces Calvin to say something about head-coverings for the women in church. Correctly, he understands them to be hats or some other coverings rather than long hair itself. The practice, he takes to be a custom of that time by which the women showed their subjection in Christ: "... the man is the head of the woman ... and ... the covering is a sign of that subjection"

Contrary to the suggestion of the translator that Calvin views head-coverings as a law of God for the church in all ages and places, Calvin denies that "the piety and holiness of the children of God is ... comprised of this" (p. 12). With regard to the related prohibition against the man's

having a head-covering in church, Calvin explains, "Let us observe that St. Paul has only taken exception to something that was not appropriate and fitting according to the usage of the land" (p. 24).

That Calvin does not suppose that the custom of head-coverings for the women and of the absence of head-coverings for the men is an inviolable law, like the headship of the man which it signifies, is plain from the picture that adorns the cover of the book: Calvin preaching with a hat on his head. (He wore a cap in order to protect himself from catching cold in the drafty church building where he preached.)

Calvin's exegesis of the difficult fifth verse ("But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered ...") is erroneous. Confronting the problem that the apostle implies that the woman does pray and prophesy at church, apparently in contradiction of his forbidding this elsewhere, Calvin explains that the praying and prophesying are merely hypothetical. In fact, according to Calvin, no woman does pray or prophesy at church, nor may she. But the apostle's words certainly mean that women were praying and prophesying at church.

Apart from the timeliness of these particular sermons in our day of feminism's riding roughshod over the Bible's teaching of the headship of the man and the exclusion of the woman from office in the church, we preachers can learn important lessons from the sermons of Calvin. Calvin's preaching is intensely practical from the very outset of the sermon, and he adopts a direct, popular style calculated to drive his practical message home to the people.

The section on contentious persons in the congregation, and how the church should deal with them, is precious (pp. 58ff.). I wish that I had read it at the beginning of my ministry.

This is the kind of book that ought to be the devotional reading of Reformed Christians. ■

Gospels and Tradition: Studies on Redaction Criticism of the Synoptic Gospels, by Robert H. Stein; Baker Book House, 1991; 204 pp., \$12.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. Herman Hanko.]

The author of this book is professor of New Testament at Bethel Theological Seminary, a strongly evangelical school. He is also, by his own statement, one who believes in the divine inspiration of Scripture. But he is unabashedly a higher critic of Scripture, and he devotes his book to a higher critical analysis of Mark, which higher criticism, he claims, is necessary to understand "the divinely inspired purpose for writing" Scripture, and which the church will "always be interested in because the church will always be interested in hearing the divine word brought to her by God's ordained spokesmen—the Evangelists" (pp. 19, 47).

Most of the author's attention is concentrated on a study of Mark. To this gospel is applied the vagaries of form criticism and redaction criticism. Form criticism deals with two *sitze im leben*: 1) the history of Jesus itself; 2) the theology and tradition of the church in the period of oral tradition. Redaction criticism deals with the theology of the evangelists, here particularly Mark.

To understand the gospel, various exercises are necessary. One must determine what in the gospel narrative are "pre-Markan sources," whether written or oral. Only in this way will one be able to know Mark's editorial work and thus his theology. The pre-Markan sources are the written and oral traditions which are called "pericopes." Mark's editorial work is what writing Mark did as, engaging in what the author himself admits to be, at least in part, a "scissors and paste" process, he wove the various pericopes together by means of insertions, summaries, modifications of the pericopes, and appropriate explanations.

Once having determined what is truly "Markan," one can then proceed to an analysis of what Mark

actually wrote and thus determine what Mark's "theology" in fact was.

These exercises, always bringing with them "assured results," enable the student of Mark to determine whether the transfiguration account in Mark 8 is a misplaced account of Christ's resurrection; whether Mark 14:28 ("But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee") and 16:7 ("But ... tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee...") are references to Christ's second coming; and whether Markan theology proves that Jesus was a teacher.

Such are the studies which occupy so many evangelical teachers in today's Seminaries. ■

Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith, ed. Donald K. McKim. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press and Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1992. 414 pages. Hardcover. \$37. (Reviewed by the Editor)

"This *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith* provides a picture of major events, persons, and theological understandings of the Reformed faith. It is 'encyclopedic' not in the sense that it can exhaustively treat all aspects of the Reformed faith in a comprehensive manner.... Rather, it seeks to provide a circle of knowledge (from 'Accommodation' to 'Zwingli') indicating how events, persons, and concepts have been particularly significant in the Reformed heritage. This orientation sets the following work apart from other general dictionaries and encyclopedias of church history and theology" ("Preface," p. vii). Such is the editor's own description of this unique resource on the Reformed faith.

The work is a valuable source of information on many aspects of the Reformed faith — persons; events; doctrines; creeds; books; and more. Of particular value is the contemporary nature of the work. Included are not only articles on John Calvin and the Geneva Catechism of 1536 but

also on Karl Barth and the Barmen Declaration of 1934. The articles are thorough, but brief.

The contributors are recognized Reformed scholars. Indeed, the list of contributors reads like a "who's who" of the worldwide Reformed community.

Overall the information is accurate. Robert Letham's description of Arminianism, for example, observes that

Arminianism proposed a substantial revision of the Reformed doctrines of predestination and grace.... Election is thus conditional on God's foreknowledge of a person's response. Moreover, the fallen will remains free. Humans can believe or resist grace. Thus, saving grace is sufficient but not irresistible. Humans cooperate.

He notes correctly that the Synod of Dort condemned Arminianism because it "introduced a semi-Pelagian doctrine of grace and a conditional gospel."

The analysis of Reformed doctrines, however, is often another story. Generally, the *Encyclopedia* reflects the rejection by contemporary Reformed theology of the creedal presentation of fundamental Reformed doctrines and a recasting of these doctrines to suit the modern mind. In the article on "Scripture," editor McKim asserts that Calvin, the Reformed confessions, Abraham Kuyper, and Herman Bavinck taught infallibility only in the sense that Scripture "will not lie or deceive about what Scripture is intended to focus upon: God's salvation in Jesus Christ."

Dewey A. Wallace, Jr. suggests that one does justice to the Reformed doctrine of predestination if he merely affirms "God's gracious favor bestowed upon the undeserving," setting "aside its negative implications as unbiblical." These "negative implications" include the eternal decree of reprobation. In this connection, writing on "Bolsec, Jerome," Philip C. Holtrop makes the intriguing admission that "perhaps the majority of Reformed theologians today would

be closer to Bolsec's views on predestination than to Calvin's."

There is no entry for "Hoeksema, Herman." Holtrop does refer to Hoeksema (as a supralapsarian) in his article on the "Decree(s) of God" and lists his *Reformed Dogmatics* in the bibliography.

Of special interest to Protestant Reformed readers is English theologian Peter Toon's contribution on

"Hyper-Calvinism." This "exaggerated, rationalist form of the Reformed faith" has a modern representative, we are informed, in "Herman Hoeksema, whose *Reformed Dogmatics* (1966) places excessive emphasis on the sovereign grace of God." To this a Reformed man or woman has only one response: "It is impossible to place excessive stress on the sover-

eign grace of God. The strongest stress ever placed on God's sovereign grace comes short of doing justice to the unfathomable sovereignty and infinite grace by which a sinner is saved." The charge that a theologian is "guilty" of stressing excessively God's sovereign grace is, in fact, the highest commendation of that theologian's teaching.

The book is worth the price. □

Report of Classis East

Classis met in regular session on January 13-14, 1993 at the Faith Protestant Reformed Church. This session was chaired by Rev. D. Kuiper. All the churches, with the exception of Norristown, were represented by two delegates.

This was an eventful, and in several respects difficult, meeting of classis. The delegates witnessed the deposition of one minister, the leaving of another by virtue of his congregation withdrawing from the federation of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, and the addition of a third by way of a *colloquium doctum* — a conversation about doctrine. The deposition was held in closed session and nothing more can be reported here about that process, but the consistory bringing the request to depose has sent an announcement about the outcome of this matter to all the churches in Classis East and in Classis West. The leaving pastor was Rev. Kenneth Hanko who, along with the congregation in Norristown, Pennsylvania, informed the classis that they were withdrawing from the Protestant Reformed Churches. The reason for their leaving centered on their disagreement with the decisions of Classis East and Synod regarding the use of *The Psalter*. Classis decided to acknowledge their leaving, to send a letter to them urging them to reconsider, and to appoint a committee to meet with them should they desire. An announcement to the churches, to be

read on Sunday, January 17th, was also adopted. The churches gained a pastor in the person of Rev. Peter J. Breen by way of his sustaining his conversation about doctrine with the delegates of the classis and with the concurrence of the synodical deputies from Classis West.

In other business, classis did not approve an overture from First Church to change the rules of classis. First Church requested through the overture that material relative to personal discipline cases not be published in the agenda sent to the churches. Classis rejected the overture on the grounds that such material requires deliberate study by consistories and, especially, delegates, and therefore ought to be sent prior to the meeting of classis.

Classis always involves itself in much voting in the January meeting. The following delegates to synod were chosen: **MINISTERS:** *Primi:* W. Bruinsma, B. Gritters, K. Koole, D. Kuiper, J. Slopsema; *Secundi:* R. Flikkema, M. Joostens, A. Spriensma, G. VanBaren, B. Woudenberg; **ELDERS:** *Primi:* D. Engelsma, C. Doezeema, C. Kalsbeek, G. VanOverloop, K. Vink; *Secundi:* H. Boer, P. Feenstra, D. Harbach, H. Langerak, T. Looyenga. Elected as delegates *ad examina:* Rev. D. Kuiper to a three-year *primus* term, Rev. B. Gritters to a three-year *secundus* term, and Rev. B. Woudenberg to a three-year *secundus* term. Rev. A. Spriensma was elected to serve a three-year term

on the Classical Committee. Revs. Kuiper and VanBaren were elected to serve as church visitors with Revs. Slopsema and Woudenberg as alternates.

Classis approved classical appointments for Southwest and Hudsonville and adopted the following schedule: **SOUTHWEST** (evenings): January 17 — Slopsema (morning service), January 31 — Woudenberg, February 7 — Spriensma, February 21 — Bruinsma, February 28 — Gritters, March 14 — Koole, March 21 — Slopsema, March 28 — Woudenberg, April 4 — Spriensma, April 18 — Kuiper, April 25 — Koole, May 9 — Flikkema, May 16 — Kuiper; **HUDSONVILLE** (evenings): January 31 — Koole, February 7 — Slopsema, February 14 — Gritters, February 21 — Woudenberg, February 28 — Spriensma, March 7 — Bruinsma, March 21 — Kuiper, March 28 — Koole, April 4 — Slopsema, April 18 — Slopsema, April 25 — Woudenberg, May 2 — Spriensma, May 16 — Flikkema.

In financial matters, classis approved subsidy requests for 1994 in the amounts of \$6,500.00 for Kalamazoo and of \$32,500.00 for Covenant. The expenses for this session amounted to \$1,823.15.

Classis will meet next in Southwest PRC on Wednesday, May 12, 1993.

Respectfully submitted,
Jon J. Huiskens
Stated Clerk

Mission Activities

In his latest letter, dated January 7, Rev. G. VanBaren writes to his congregation concerning the ongoing work in Northern Ireland with the Covenant Reformed Fellowship. He mentions that the Fellowship "has been trying to send out a little 'bulletin' twice a month to about 150 addresses. Also, every other week we have been placing a large ad in the Ballymena paper giving information concerning what we confess."

In another paragraph of the same letter Rev. VanBaren writes: "The Fellowship is taking advantage of some of the January sales to obtain certain things for the house (the house recently bought for the Hanco family, BW). They have also decided to pay for much of the decoration, including carpeting for the 'manse.' I remain amazed at their willingness to sacrifice much financially so that they can have a minister of their own."

Congregational Activities

Late last year the congregation of the Hope PRC of Redlands, CA decided to go ahead with plans to sponsor the Reformed Witness Hour on radio station KLFE, 1240 AM. With the help of funding both from the Reformed Witness Hour Committee and from their own congregation's monthly collections for evangelism, they were able to begin broadcasting. These can be heard at 5:00 P.M. Sundays.

The Council of the Bethel PRC of Elk Grove Village, IL appointed a committee to assist the council in fulfilling a mandate given to them at a recent congregational meeting "to continue to investigate the possibility and details for purchasing property and to report to the congregation in a month."

However, the council decided

that such important work should not be done hastily, and therefore decided that it was wise to delay the report for one more month, while the search continued.

At a Congregational meeting of the First PRC of Holland, MI in mid-December, the council presented several options regarding future building to their congregation. One option was to expand their present building. However, the membership felt that their present location was not of sufficient size to make this a viable solution. Consequently they decided to begin looking for property on the outskirts of Holland with a view to relocating in the future.

A New Year's Day "Get-together" was planned by the congregation of the Bethel PRC, Elk Grove Village, IL, with all those interested meeting at the Elk Grove Bowling Alley in mid-afternoon for a few frames of fellowship.

Denominational Activities

Many of the PR churches in the west Michigan area were treated to

one or more pulpit exchanges during the first couple of weeks in January. The reason for these exchanges was that the pastors of these churches attended a week and a half interim course on "Contemporary Theology" taught at our seminary. And going back to seminary made it difficult to find time to prepare two sermons for each of those two Sundays.

Two days before Christmas Rev. and Mrs. Dykstra of the Doon, IA PRC were blessed with the birth of a baby girl, Holly Sue.

Ministerial Calls

The congregation of the Trinity PRC in Houston, TX extended a call to Rev. C. Haak to serve as their next pastor. With Rev. Haak on the trio were the Revs. Houck and Van Overloop.

On January 28th the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI was scheduled to meet to extend a call to one to serve as their pastor. The trio presented by Southwest's council consisted of the Revs. Cammenga, Dykstra, and Haak.

□

ANNOUNCEMENTS

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies' Aid Society, Ruth, of Hope Protestant Reformed Church (Walker, MI) expresses heartfelt Christian sympathy to one of our members, Donna Dykstra, and her family in the passing to glory of her mother,

MRS. DICK (SADIE) KOOIENGA, who for many years was a faithful member of our society. May the family be comforted knowing that she is one of that great multitude which no man can number, saying before the throne, "Amen: Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be unto our God for ever and ever, Amen" (Revelation 7:10).

Mr. Tom DeVries, President
Mrs. Harry Langerak, Secretary

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

February 1, 1993, marked the 25th wedding anniversary of

GARY and JUDY KAPTEIN.

We are thankful to our Covenant God, that He has blessed them with these 25 years of marriage.

"It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassion fails not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22, 23).

* Mike,
* Cindy,
* Cheri,
* Cristy,
* Cathy

Jenison, Michigan

Mr. Wigger is an elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

THE STANDARD BEARER

P.O. Box 603
Grandville, MI 49468-0603

SECOND CLASS
Postage Paid at
Grandville, Michigan

CALL TO ASPIRANTS TO THE MINISTRY

All young men desiring to begin studies for the 1993 - 1994 academic year in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches should make application at the March 18, 1993 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

A testimonial from the prospective student's consistory that he is a member in full communion, sound in faith, and upright in walk, a certificate of health from a reputable physician, and high school and college transcripts must accompany the application. Before entering the seminary, all students must have earned a bachelor's degree and met all of the course requirements for entrance to the seminary. These entrance requirements are listed in the seminary catalog available from the school.

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

All correspondence should be directed to the Theological School Committee,
4949 Ivanrest Avenue
Grandville, MI 49418.

Jon Huiskens, Secretary

* * * * *

The Protestant Reformed Seminary admits students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin.

IN MEMORY

On January 7, 1993, it pleased our heavenly Father to call our beloved wife, mother, and grandmother,

SADIE KOOIENGA,

to her heavenly home at the age of 89 years.

"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting to such as keep his covenant and to those that remember his commandments to do them" (Psalm 103:17, 18).

Husband: Dick

Children:

* Robert and Joan Miedema

* Earl and Lois Dykstra

* Roger and Lucile Kooienga

* Arnold and Donna Dykstra

* Donald and Judith Sall

* Donald and Mary Kooienga

* Stanley and Bette Dykstra

35 grandchildren

83 great grandchildren

1 great, great grandchild

Hope, Walker, Michigan

NOTICE!!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in South Holland, IL, on Wednesday, March 3, 1993, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the Clerk of South Holland's Consistory.

Rev. R. Hanko,
Stated Clerk

CLASSIS WEST OFFICEBEARERS' CONFERENCE

When:

Tuesday, March 2, 1993
beginning at 9:00 A.M.

Where:

South Holland
Protestant Reformed Church
16511 South Park Ave.
South Holland, IL 60473

Theme:

Shepherding God's Flock

Keynote Address:

A Pastor's Heart

Prof. Herman Hanko

Sectionals:

Counseling Those with

Marital Problems

Rev. Arie den Hartog

Counseling Those with

Problems of Assurance

Prof. Robert Decker

Counseling the Grieving

Rev. Charles Terpstra

The Use of the Scriptures

in Counseling

Rev. Steven Houck

Counseling Hopelessness —

the Hard Sin of Suicide

Mr. Joel Sugg

The Role of the Elders and Deacons

in Pastoral Counseling

Mr. Robert Brands

All past and present officebearers, as well as anyone who is interested, are invited to attend.

Hope to see you there!