

THE **STANDARD BEARER**

**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**



Hull, Iowa PRC Builds New Church

See Special Article — page 442

*Vol. 69, No. 19
August, 1993*

CONTENTS:

August, 1993

Meditation — <i>Rev. Cornelius Hanko</i>	
Contentment	435
Editorial — <i>Prof. David J. Engelsma</i>	
1994 Reformed Conference in Scotland	437
Letters	438
All Around Us — <i>Prof. Robert D. Decker</i>	440
Special Article — <i>Rev. Richard G. Moore</i>	
Hull's Congregation in New Church	442
A Cloud of Witnesses — <i>Prof. Herman C. Hanko</i>	
Heinrich Bullinger: Covenant Theologian	443
The Strength of Youth — <i>Rev. Barrett L. Gritters</i>	
Renewing the Battle (4), Drama, Television, and Movies	446
Guest Article — <i>Rev. Ronald L. Cammenga</i>	
The Shameful Sin of Homosexuality (2)	449
A Word Fitly Spoken — <i>Rev. Dale H. Kuiper</i>	
Travail	451
Taking Heed to the Doctrine — <i>Rev. Thomas C. Miersma</i>	
The Doctrine of the Trinity (3)	452
Book Review	454
News From Our Churches — <i>Mr. Benjamin Wigger</i>	455

In This Issue ...

An ancient philosopher once observed that "the wealthiest man is he who is contented with least." Even the world recognizes that there is a direct correlation between "contentment" and "happiness" — and that it isn't material wealth that makes for either one. But what does? If one cannot find contentment in things material, in wealth or in health, where does one look for this great treasure? What the world cannot know or appreciate is that contentment is first of all a *spiritual virtue*. It is, too, a *gift* — but at the same time something which must be *learned* and *sought*. Paul learned it. For a "lesson" in that learning process, you'll want to read Rev. C. Hanko's Meditation, entitled simply, "Contentment."

New facilities for worship and for church-related activities are surely reason for excitement in a congregation. Hull PRC is no exception. We're happy for them, and are glad to be able to share a little of their joy through the article and pictures provided to mark this important event in the history of their church.

Several articles in this issue are continuations of very interesting series. Rev. Gritters, in the fourth article in his series in The Strength of Youth, argues persuasively that most of what the movie and television industries produce today represents an "Augean stable" which would defy cleaning even by a modern-day Hercules — because the art-form on which they rely is itself illegitimate. To see why, read "Renewing the Battle."

And from Rev. Cammenga we have the second in his series of hair-raising articles on homosexuality. He demonstrates conclusively, in this one, that the "gay" life-style is, for homosexuals themselves, anything but gay, and, with respect to the rest of society, is a medical and fiscal threat of major proportions. For the state to grant homosexuals preferential treatment, contrary to its own best interests, is therefore beyond comprehension, as is also the church's toleration of them in spite of the clear testimony of Scripture against them. This much becomes abundantly clear in this issue, in "The Shameful Sin of Homosexuality." We look to a future installment, to have such suicidal folly put into its proper biblical perspective.

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 49468-0603.

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
Kooles, 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
49468-0603
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.

Contentment

Contentment. A spiritual virtue.

It is the peace of heart and mind that remains unperturbed in the midst of all the trials and hardship that we may meet on our earthly pilgrimage. It is the assurance that we have everything that can be desired.

The very opposite is covetousness, which is the greedy desire for things that we do not have, or possibly for things God has entrusted to our neighbor.

Israel was guilty of the sin of covetousness when they craved the onions, the garlic, and the leeks they had enjoyed in the past, and which were still being enjoyed by the Egyptians.

Scripture calls this sin the root of all evil. All other sins — slander, stealing, adultery, murder, and so many more — find their source in this evil.

Think of the greed that creates jealousies, discontent, grumblings, and complaints about the many trials of life.

A grasping, avaricious person is never satisfied, but always craves more. Even the rich fool of the parable, who boasts of "my fields," "my grain," "my barns," in which he expects to find contentment for many years, still talks of more grain and bigger barns.

Contentment is the opposite of all that, but it is the opposite of more besides. It is the direct opposite of

worry. The word "worry" we often associate with a dog taking a rat by the neck and worrying it, shaking it back and forth until its neck is broken. Worry creates a troubled, tempest-tossed soul that can find no rest. Its companion, anxiety, can lead to frustration and despair. That is a far cry from contentment.

Nor does contentment have anything in common with cold stoicism. A stoic proudly boasts that, "I have will power, I can take it." He refuses to flinch or cry out in severest trials. He may seem ever so strong, yet he trusts in Self. The peace of contentment he can never know.

Contentment is a gift, a spiritual gift, attained only by a living faith in the God of our salvation.

It is the knowledge that God is God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the Almighty Sustainer, who upholds and governs all things by His sovereign power, who supplies us with all things necessary for time and eternity.

More than that, it is the assurance that this God is *my* God now and forever. He loves me with an eternal love in sovereign mercy. Why me, and not the thousands upon thousands who perish in their sins? I'll never know, except that I do know that it is His sovereign good pleasure that fills me with humble self surrender.

This God is the God of my salvation in Jesus Christ. He did not spare His only begotten Son, but gave Him over unto the accursed death of hell to save me from my sins. I stand amazed at the thought that God would rather give His Son unto the horrible death

of utter isolation in hell than to let me, along with all His people, perish in our sins.

He entrusts to me His holy Word, and gives me eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. He makes me a citizen of that kingdom, an heir of eternal life, with a foretaste of that eternal blessedness in my heart, a peace that passes all understanding, a joy unspeakable and full of glory.

That peace and joy give me contentment.

That was Paul's confession. Is it yours?

* * * * *

Contentment implies a certain need. It is in connection with his own daily need that Paul made this confession. In fact, the apostle wrote the epistle to the Philippians toward the close of his life, while he was a prisoner at Rome, where he would die a martyr's death.

The church at Philippi had sent him a gift, for which he was sincerely grateful. He explains, however, that it is not as if he suffered lack. Nor did he hold it against them that they had not sent a gift for some time, for he realized that their circumstances had prevented them. But he is especially grateful for the expression of their love and concern for him. That means even more to him than the gift.

Indeed, the apostle always had a need to one degree or another. Yet he had learned, in whatsoever state he might find himself, to be content.

We also have need. In fact, we always have many needs, such as

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

food, clothing, shelter, companionship, a place in our families, a place in the church, labor for our hands, medicine for our ailments, and many, many more.

In these affluent times our carnal inclination would be to add many luxuries to that list, as necessities to make our life complete. But our Lord has taught us to sum up all our needs in a few words: Bread for today. That teaches us to be satisfied with the mere necessities, and at the same time to let God determine those necessities. We learn to say, "Thy will be done." We place ourselves in Father's care, for He knows best. That is the basis for true contentment.

* * * * *

The apostle speaks of being content "in whatsoever state I am."

Contentment is a spiritual attitude, but it is more than that. It is the ability to stand unmoved, unshaken in every crisis that we meet along life's way, to persevere with a peace of heart and mind that exceeds our fondest imagination.

Adam and Eve possessed that gift before the fall, but lost it when they were confronted with the temptation of the devil. Covetousness took over and led them into sin. They fell through the lust of the eyes (the fruit of the forbidden tree looked so appealing), the lust of the flesh (the craving to taste the forbidden fruit), and the pride of life (I'll decide for myself whether it is right or wrong).

The old patriarch Jacob did not always possess that blessed experience. There was a time when he trusted in the arm of flesh, thinking he had to help God to attain the covenant blessing. And then there was that difficult time when Joseph was gone, Simeon had been left behind in Egypt, and the brothers wanted to take Benjamin from him, that caused him to complain in bitterness: "All these things are against me."

David had a similar experience. Even after he was anointed to be king over Israel there was a moment, as he wearied of fleeing from Saul, and in

spite of the fact that God had always before delivered him, that his soul cried out, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul."

Yet, even though the saints of old did not always experience the blessed gift of contentment, they did die "being full of days." This can only mean that they were satisfied, sated. They had everything that God had promised, everything that their hearts could desire, and were ready to lay down their weary heads to die in perfect contentment.

That same David who at one time feared he might perish without attaining the crown could later testify: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? ... Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident" (Ps. 27:1, 3).

Even Paul, that faithful servant of God, did not always experience that blessed peace. There was the time also in his life, of which he does not hesitate to tell us, when his thorn made life bitter. The messenger of Satan buffeted him. He could carry on only with great difficulty. He had prayed the Lord to take it away. On three different occasions he had prayed. The outcome was that he kept the thorn, but, even better, he received grace to bear it.

He could say: I am content, content in whatsoever state I am. The apostle reached a point in his life that he was sure that nothing, absolutely nothing, could shake his faith, could deprive him of the peace that passes all understanding, the assurance that, come what may, all is well. It was in that personal confidence that he wrote in his victor's song, Romans 8, "Nay, but in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

* * * * *

"I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."

You and I might hesitate to say

this, because it sounds so much like an idle boast. Yet boasting was far from the mind of the apostle. On the contrary, he was filled with deepest humility. He might have gone on to say, "I have the best of teachers, none other than the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ, who delivers me from my sinful self. I was taught under the most trying circumstances; my training was in the way of trials and afflictions, which some might refer to as 'the school of hard knocks.' I was not the most willing student, but my Instructor never failed me."

Blessed gift! Have you learned it? Do you seek it?

You may say, "But Paul never suffered what I suffer; he never faced what I must face." Were you unjustly cast into prison? Were you beaten five times over with forty stripes? Were you in peril of your life over and over again? Or did you suffer any of those trials that Paul writes about in II Corinthians 12?

When we lay our cross next to the crosses of others and find out what each cross implies, we would not trade our cross for any other, but take ours up again quite willingly.

We do so the more willingly, because we know that the path we tread, as difficult as it may seem, is the path that God has planned from all eternity to be the one and only way that can bring us to glory. It is our way, because it is God's way for us. And He knows best.

Along with all the other wonderful gifts of grace — rebirth, daily conversion, faith, assurance of our righteousness before God, growing in grace, perseverance throughout all the trials of life — God also gives that amazing gift, which He alone can bestow in the human heart; the gift of contentment!

Blessed gift! Attained only through godliness and prayer.

We look back upon our way and we say: "I have fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord" (Ps. 27:13, 14.) □

1994 Reformed Conference in Scotland

Have you always wanted to visit the British Isles?

Would you like to worship with the Protestant Reformed mission in Northern Ireland?

Does a week-long conference appeal to you that is a happy mix of good fellowship with Reformed and Presbyterian Christians of all ages from several nations; of guided tours to places in Scotland of beauty and historical significance; and of solid Reformed instruction?

Then you will be interested in attending the "Family Holiday Conference" scheduled for July 30-August 6, 1994 near Edinburgh, Scotland, the Lord willing. The conference is sponsored by the British Reformed Fellowship, an organization devoted to the promotion of the Reformed faith in the British Isles. The group is closely allied with the Covenant Reformed Fellowship of Northern Ireland, the mission of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

The British Reformed Fellowship has scheduled this conference a year in advance so that members of the Protestant Reformed Churches in North America and others have plenty of time to arrange an overseas vacation. Although the main purpose of the conference is to attract persons from the British Isles to the teaching of Reformed truth, the Fellowship hopes that large numbers of foreign visitors will come. It extends a hearty invitation particularly to the members of the Protestant Reformed Churches and promises to do all it can

to make this "holiday" pleasant and profitable.

Details concerning lodging and cost were given in the advertisements of the conference that appeared in the June 1 and July 1, 1993 issues of the *Standard Bearer*. Topics of the six speeches by the American speakers have now been determined. The theme of the conference is "Sovereign Grace." The speeches developing this theme will be "Sovereign Grace and Predestination"; "Sovereign Grace and the Cross"; "Sovereign Grace and the Preaching of the Gospel"; "Sovereign Grace and the Development of Sin"; "Sovereign Grace and the Work of Salvation"; and "Sovereign Grace and the Earthly Circumstances of Life."

In addition, the Rev. Sinclair Horne, leading figure in the Scottish Reformation Society and one of the most knowledgeable men regarding the history of the Scottish "Covenanters," will address the conference on this history. Rev. Horne will also conduct a tour of the outstanding sites of Covenanter history in and around Edinburgh. This will be a fascinating and informative education in the history of Scottish Presbyterianism.

The distance from the place of the conference to Northern Ireland is not far. Public transportation is available—train and ferry. Some will certainly desire to visit the Protestant Reformed mission in Ballymena, Northern Ireland in connection with the conference, as well as to do some sight-

seeing in the lovely glens of Ulster. The Covenant Reformed Fellowship and Missionary Ron Hanko and his family will welcome these visitors and will help in arranging their lodging.

For information or reservations, write or call one of the following:

Mr. Tony Horne
9 Church Road
Thornbury
Bristol BS12 1EJ
England
(Telephone: 0454-414517)

Mr. Bill Oomkes
6299 Wing Ave. S.E.
Grand Rapids, MI 49512
USA
(Telephone: 616-698-6697)

If enough people from North America desire this, it may well be possible to arrange a charter flight to Edinburgh from the Midwest. This would reduce the cost of airfare. Those who are interested in a charter should get in touch with Mr. Bill Oomkes soon.

Although the conference is billed as a family conference, it is equally suited to the single person. A number of singles attended the conference in Northern Ireland last year and were blessed. Our older young people would find the conference rewarding.

See you in Edinburgh! □

—DJE

■ Involved with the Alliance

Gladly I react to your editorial, "Aloof from the Alliance" (*Standard Bearer*, June, 1993).

It amazes me that the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) want to stay aloof from the Alliance of Reformed Churches (ARC). The PRC have so much to say to the Alliance. Permit me to put the following notes to your editorial.

The orderly way of dealing with heresy and unholiness in a Reformed denomination has been tried. For the longest time the "Concerned Members" have maintained that Howard VanTill should be disciplined; up to the present no such procedure has been executed. For the longest time the feminist leanings of Calvin Seminary have been condemned, but still it is training women for the ministry. As a matter of fact, the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches (OCRC) split off in 1980 already for the same reasons, if I am correct. The "Concerned Members" try to reform the church from within, just as the reformers tried to reform the Roman Catholic Church in the 1500s. But just as the reformers had to turn their back to the church then, so many are giving up now on the Christian Reformed Church (CRC).

The independence movement has not been a goal of its own. It became expedient to leave the CRC, but there are too many other factors which play also their roles. The independence movement came about because time was needed to think these things over, while at the same time fleeing apostasy.

One of the issues is that unity is equated in the CRC with loyalty to the denominational hierarchy. I am sure that the PRC as well as the Canadian Reformed Churches have a strong aversion to hierarchy. The "Concerned Members" are blamed for being schismatic. That is why we are trying to grasp what unity and schism

mean. The Alliance needs the input from the PRC here. Should unity be founded only on a confessional basis? Is it fair to label a secession because of confessional differences a schism? Should denominations which have the same confessions but differences in theology be labeled schismatic? Do theological differences justify a separate existence?

A sign of our times is that when one attends worship services in a mainline denomination, one will find only a few elderly women present. Would not the PRC also fight this phenomenon with tooth and nail? Are not the Canadian Reformed Churches also dreading if that ever should happen to them? Is it then proper to remain divided, when we fight for the same cause? Both the PRC and the Canadian Reformed Churches have sent delegates to the Alliance to seek unity as Jesus Christ Himself commanded. That was their duty and they faithfully obeyed.

Recently the independent churches in the Alliance met by themselves to discuss federation. At that meeting I contended that the formation of a new denomination should not be started unless proven to be necessary. There are so many orthodox churches. There is the OCRC, the Free Reformed, the Canadian Reformed, certain Presbyterian churches, and the PRC. It must be proven that individuals or congregations in the independent movement cannot in good conscience join any of these denominations. I am sure that you would contend that the PRC is a very worthy denomination and that a new denomination certainly would be inferior to your own. If new denominations would continue to be added to this list, would not we end up with a pope in each home? And what then if we happen to meet each other assembled before the throne of God? Clearly there is a fine line between unity and schism. Where is

that line? Human tendency is, once one belongs to a new denomination never to give up on it. Seeking unity after the establishment of a new denomination is closing the barn doors after the horse is gone.

You assume that the independents are still Christian Reformed in theology. But having experienced the results of hierarchy, for example, the independents are weary of all the features of the CRC now. It would be appropriate if the PRC would instruct the newcomers with 69 years of experience.

Your editorial catches me by surprise and brings out many points I had never thought of and had never been aware of. Just for that reason alone your editorial should be sent to the Alliance as a form of counsel. My request is that although you cannot recognize the Alliance as a proper ecclesiastical body according to the Church Order of Dordt, you will not stand aloof and will counsel this body, even treating it, if needs be, as you would treat a secular institution.

Praise God for the PRC and the *Standard Bearer* with such a strong savour! But may also the grace be found to nurture babes and to love others who also love the truth!

J.L. Reckman

Aylmer, Ontario, Canada

Response:

Your concerns are understandable, especially since you were a relative newcomer to the CRC and learned of the PRC only recently.

The PRC have always been willing to nurture babes in the faith and to help those who love the truth. This is their calling. But this by no means settles the question, whether they ought to have official contact with the ARC as an expression of their "sacred duty to manifest the true unity and catholicity of the Church on earth" ("Constitution of the Committee for Contact with Other Churches").

Nurturing and instructing others in the Reformed faith is not the exercise of contact but the labor of missions. Historically, the PRC have adopted and practiced the policy that instructing Christian Reformed people and groups in the errors of common grace and in the truths of sovereign, particular grace belongs to the work of missions. The PRC have stated as much in the preamble of their "Constitution of the Mission Committee":

We believe that ... missionary activity includes the work of church extension, and church reformation, as well as the task of carrying out the Gospel to the unchurched and heathen. However, we are convinced that our present duty lies primarily in the field of church extension and church reformation.

The leadership of the ARC is not interested in receiving such instruction. Its purpose is the union of existing Reformed churches in some kind of organization by way of setting aside such doctrinal issues as that of common grace versus particular grace as non-confessional, unessential, and irrelevant to the Reformed church at the end of the 20th century.

You will be happy to learn that the PR Synod of Hudsonville, 1993 authorized sending official observers to future meetings of the ARC.

— Ed.

■ Reckless Perceptions

My Protestant Reformed neighbor brought me the May 15 issue of the *Standard Bearer* and pointed out your editorial, "The Date is 1924," as recommended reading for a turncoat PR now these many years Christian Reformed.

Your "facts" in paragraph one are in error. You said, speaking of the CRC loss of membership in recent years: "Most have left because of the Church's opening the offices of minister and ruling elder to women and the Church's approval of theistic evolution."

It may appear to you that we are

heading in that direction but this is not the official current position of the CRC. To say so is to be reckless with one's perceptions.

I leave you with this thought: If the PRC are a gem with scarcely a blemish, they should not have to affirm themselves by dragging down others.

Harold Aardema
Doon, IA

Response

Not so!

I neither boasted of the PRC nor demeaned other churches. To do the former would be sin against humility: "What hast thou that thou hast not received?" (I Cor. 4:7). To do the latter would be sin against charity: "Charity suffereth long, and is kind ... doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil" (I Cor. 13:4, 5).

I simply demonstrated that the doctrine of common grace adopted by the CRC in 1924 is a fundamental cause of the developments in the CRC that now disturb that Church and that distress many of her members. My motivation, as the editorial stated, was "a concern of love (for) ... that Church whose only daughter we are." To do this is obedience to the apostle of Christ: "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15).

Whether the CRC and her members hear or forbear, it is profitable to the PRC and their members to be reminded that the truth of sovereign, particular grace — a doctrine essential to creedal Calvinism — is their God-given strength in the great apostasy of these last days. I affirmed the truth, not ourselves.

As for your puzzling challenge of my analysis of the present division in the CRC ("Your 'facts' ... are in error"), I only stated what those who leave the CRC themselves give as the reason for their separation. They themselves explain: "because of the Church's opening the offices of minister and ruling elder to women and the Church's approval of theistic evolution." Ask them.

Do you seriously question whether the CRC has approved theistic evolution and whether she has been opening up the offices of minister and ruling elder to women?

The CRC approved theistic evolution in her own college by decision of the synod of 1991 (cf. "Report 28: Committee on Creation and Science," in "Agenda for Synod 1991," pp. 367-433 and "Acts of Synod 1991," pp. 762-768, 773-777).

The synod of 1990 permitted "churches to use their discretion in utilizing the gifts of women members in all the offices of the church" ("Acts of Synod 1990," Articles 92-96, pp. 654-659). The synod of 1992 allowed "women to teach, expound the Word of God, and provide pastoral care, under the supervision of the elders" in the local churches ("Acts of Synod 1992," Article 105, p. 700). The recent synod of 1993 "gave churches and councils the option to nominate, elect, call, and ordain qualified women to the offices of elder, minister, and evangelist" (*The Banner*, June 29, 1993, p. 6).

The facts are not disputable.

The question is, "Why?"

— Ed.

■ Request from Romania

We are a monthly Christian magazine from Romania and we are interested to have a free copy of your special issue on "The Doctrine of Creation."

Thank you!

Mihai Suci, Editor
Crestinul Azi
Bucharest, Romania

Response:

We are sending you the issue of the *Standard Bearer* that you request. We are also giving you a subscription to the *SB* for a year.

We would like to hear about you, your magazine, and the condition and spiritual warfare of the church in Romania. □

— Ed.

■ Troubles among the Netherlands Reformed Congregations

A special synod of the 10,000-member Netherlands Reformed Congregations (NRC) has deposed the consistory and pastor (Dr. Joel R. Beeke) of the denomination's second largest church, the 1300-member First NRC of Grand Rapids. The two-day special synod met on June 30 and July 1 in the sanctuary of the First NRC on Crescent Street in Grand Rapids. The synod was called at the suggestion of the NRC's 100,000-member sister denomination in the Netherlands, the Gereformeerde Gemeenten. In January the Dutch synod sent a letter warning the American synod that "We cannot expect a blessing when we do not conduct ourselves in all things according to the Reformed Church Order, which is founded upon the Holy Scriptures. To act contrary to Church Order will only cause turmoil and confusion to become all the greater."

During the lunch period following the deposition, the vice-president and clerk of First NRC, Elders James Bazen and Gary Kwekel, and denominational attorney, Robert VerHeulen, asked synod president, Rev. J. den Hoed to have the synod meet elsewhere for its afternoon session. According to Bazen, "Rev. den Hoed said the building belonged to the denomination, we were no longer the consistory because they deposed us,

and they owned the building." Bazen disputed this statement saying, "That's not true according to our attorney, who says under Michigan law the buildings belong to the local congregation." VerHeulen, in addition to serving as denominational attorney, is a member of First NRC.

At this point the synodical delegates were escorted out of the church and reconvened at Covell Avenue NRC, the denomination's other congregation in Grand Rapids. The synod adjourned later that afternoon. Synod president den Hoed declined comment on the actions that synod had taken on the ground that the matter had not yet been completed.

Later that evening, First NRC sponsored an informational meeting restricted to its own church members. The congregation voted by a 191-53 margin, with five blank ballots, to "continue the present consistory and reject the synod's deposition." The 77% vote in favor of rejecting the synod's decision, which, following customary NRC practice, counted only male professing members, amounts to a de facto split in the American synod. First NRC pastor, Dr. Joel Beeke, told the meeting that the consistory intends to ask the Gereformeerde Gemeenten if they can remain in fellowship with the Dutch synod.

The deposition was precipitated by the question of whether First NRC would agree in advance to accept a synod decision on the controversial question of whether officebearers may retain their positions if declared to be the innocent party in a divorce caused by the biblical ground of adultery. Dr. Beeke was divorced on biblical grounds after accepting a call to First NRC in 1986. In 1988, the NRC synod accepted the report of a committee

which had been studying the matter for four months and ruled that "an officebearer who is declared an innocent party in a biblical divorce situation by means of adultery may not be disciplined" and "stressed that this case was now closed and is not to be surfaced again." However, the issue has continued to cause unrest. The special synod dealt with a Classis East request "that the matter of divorced officebearers be further discussed in light of God's Word since difficulties are expressed regarding this" and a Classis Midwest request that synod "address and respond in a clear decisive way the clear and much needed answer to the issues of: (a) officebearers who have been divorced and are now in active officebearing in the NRC, (b) those who have been divorced and remarried and are now in active officebearing in the NRC."

On Wednesday, the synod voted down an appeal from First NRC against the procedure used by a synodical investigation committee to gather evidence for a reconvened December 1992 synod. The synodical officers then met in closed session and at the strong urging of the Dutch fraternal delegates recommended that a new study committee be appointed. The Dutch delegates said they knew of no Reformed denomination in the Netherlands which prohibited innocently divorced spouses from remarrying and that officebearers could not be disciplined for actions which would be permitted for laymen.

By Thursday morning, synodical sentiment had moved toward immediate resolution rather than appointing another study committee. Dr. Beeke then read a letter from his consistory stating that they would obey Scripture and the Church Order. When accused of promoting schism

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

by reading the letter, Beeke reiterated that his church's obedience would be to Scripture and the Church Order. When pressed on whether First NRC would agree to obey the decision of synod, Beeke responded that he could not speak on behalf of his consistory but would be willing to hold a special consistory meeting and return with an answer. The First NRC consistory — all but one of whose 19 members were present at the synod — met for a half hour and returned with the answer that they would withdraw their letter because it had been misunderstood but reiterated their obedience to Scripture and the Church Order.

Following the consistory's response, the synod voted by a 15-4 margin to depose Dr. Beeke and his consistory because they would not affirm in advance of synod's vote that they would comply with synod no matter what synod decided. Synod demanded a yes or no answer and would not accept the response, "We will follow Scripture and the Church Order."

Not only is the synod divided, but the First NRC is also divided. Members of the congregation received a letter dated July 2 informing them that "the remaining officebearers, Elder J. Fluit, Deacon Dan Breuker and Deacon Henry Rosendall, have been recognized by synod as the official consistory of the continuing First Netherlands Reformed Congregation." This letter also states that "because we are willing to submit to the authority of synod and had no part in the statement read or the actions at synod, we have been informed that we are not welcome at Crescent Street." The minority group reportedly held a worship service under the leadership of Rev. A.M. den Boer at Grand Rapids Baptist Academy on Sunday, July 4.

Future developments will be interesting. Will the split spread to other NRC congregations in the U.S. and Canada? Which side will the Dutch denomination support?

Reformed Believers Press Service

■ PCA General Assembly Rebukes CRC for "Departure from the Scriptures"

The highest ecclesiastical court of the second largest conservative Reformed denomination in North America voted on June 9 to rebuke the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) by "calling the CRC to repentance over its departure from the Scriptures in its doctrine and practice." The resolution also instructs Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) delegates to the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC), the major denominational fellowship of conservative Reformed denominations in the United States and Canada, "to express concern and to communicate our desire to see the CRC correct these errors and repent of these sins."

Formed in 1973 as a secession from the former Presbyterian Church in the United States, a southern denomination which merged into the mainline Presbyterian Church (USA) in 1983, the PCA currently numbers 242,000 members in 1,226 congregations. Its dramatic growth rates over the last few years have made the PCA one of the fastest growing denominations in the United States.

The PCA action is the strongest official objection to date from a fraternal body and the first to declare that the CRC has sinned and must repent. The resolution cites eight grounds for its adoption, three related to women in office, two to homosexuality, and one to theistic evolution. Two concluding grounds note that "32 churches containing over 7,250 members have withdrawn from the CRC because of its unfaithfulness to God's Word in these and other issues," and that "the CRC has deposed and harassed faithful ministers of the gospel, who have spoken out on these issues, in some cases banning them from preaching in CRC congregations, while leaving other ministers in peace who favor these innovations."

The PCA's action is not the first official objection to trends in the CRC from other members of the conserva-

tive Reformed community. NAPARC sent a communication to both the 1991 and the 1992 synods of the CRC urging it "to reverse the action of the 1990 synod leading to opening of the offices of minister and ruling elder to women, as contrary to the Scripture and the Reformed standards." In 1991 the PCA General Assembly sent a communication to the 1992 CRC synod declaring that "it is then, with respect and humility and gratitude toward you, and with deep concern for the retention and propagation of the Reformed faith that we entreat you to reverse the 1990 action opening the offices of minister and ruling elder to women. We believe this to be contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture (I Tim. 2, 3) and the Belgic Confession (Art. 30)."

It is highly unlikely that the CRC will reverse its latest decision to open all offices in the church to women. How this will affect the CRC's position as a member of NAPARC is uncertain. Will NAPARC go beyond expressing concern and asking the CRC to correct these errors? Will NAPARC expel the CRC, one of its founding members? □

*Christian Renewal
Reformed Believers Press Service*

REMEMBER!
Introductory
subscriptions to the
Standard Bearer
are still
half
price!!

Hull's Congregation in New Church

The Lord has blessed our Hull, Iowa Protestant Reformed Church in a very special way, by the gift of a new church building in which to worship. At the time of this writing we have already worshiped in our new building for two Sundays. We were overwhelmed by the sense of complete unworthiness on our part to have such wonderful facilities in which to worship. God however has been pleased to be with us and to cause us to grow, also numerically, so that it became necessary to construct a new building. Then He has also in abundance given us the means to have this place in which to worship. Our new building is constructed to accommodate 465 people on the main floor and another 110 people in the balcony. The building includes a fellowship hall that will be able to satisfy our needs, as well as other rooms and a pastor's study. We are thankful, and we are fully persuaded of the calling that we have to continue to serve our God faithfully in the new building, holding fast the Word of truth.

The following two writings, one by the building committee chairman, in which he summarizes the history of the construction of the building, and one by our pastor, reminding us

of our calling to thankfulness and obedience at this time, will give you a little taste of the gratitude and joy that we experienced at the time of our dedication of the new building. We had a dedication worship service for our congregation on Wednesday the 26th of May, and a dedication program to which the sister churches of Doon and Edgerton were invited, as well as the community of Hull, on Friday the 28th of May. On this same Friday there was also an open house at which approximately 600 adult visitors were in attendance.

History of the Planning and Building of the Hull PRC

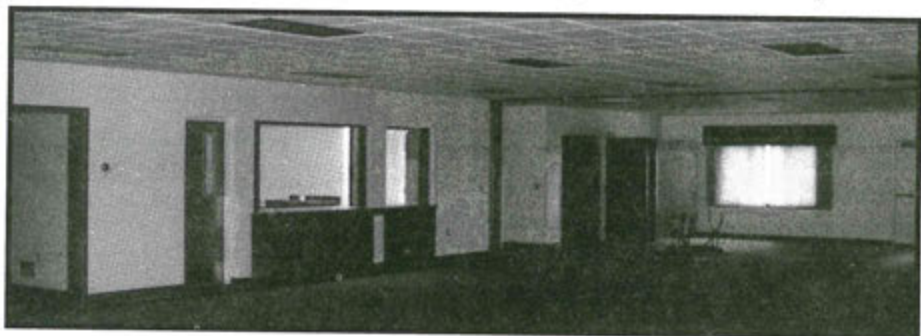
On July 5, 1988 a committee was appointed to study and present the future needs of our place of worship. The three options to consider were these: build new, modify and remodel the old church, or look into starting a new church in Rock Valley. This committee came back to the council in October, 1988 with the recommendation to build a new church by the year 1995. In February of 1989 the building committee of the church was instructed to look into purchasing property for a new building. After looking at a few different pieces of

property the committee came to the council with their recommendation. The council adopted the committee's recommendation, and on September 10, 1990 the congregation also overwhelmingly approved it. On that same evening a building committee for the new church was appointed.

Because the goal of beginning construction in 1995 was moved up to 1992, the building committee set to work at once looking at various churches in the area to gather ideas of what they would like to see in the new church. They worked then with an architect and by May of 1991 they had blueprints and cost figures ready to present to the council. Between this time and the end of the year many critical decisions were made. The first decision dealt with trying to down-size or cut back on the plan without giving up the quality or integrity of the building. Basically, however, the plan remained unchanged. A few "extras" were deleted to help bring the cost down to a point where it was feasible for the congregation.

Toward the end of the year (December, 1991) we held a drive which fell just short of our goal to collect approximately two-thirds of the money in cash and pledges to begin the project. After some deliberation, the council decided to try again to reach our goal in January, 1992. By the 20th of the month our goal was met, and in April work on our new church began. After that, we were able to watch as the foundations were laid, the walls and roof went up, and more recently the interior was finished.

Now we are able to worship God in a new church that meets the needs



Fellowship Hall

of the congregation. We thank God for His faithfulness to us and for providing the means to build this new house of worship. May the Lord continue to dwell in us and with us as we now inhabit our new church home.

Alvin Bylsma,

New Church Building Committee
Chairman

Message from Rev. R. Moore

Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.

Psalm 127:1

Dear Congregation:

As we enter the new church building that God has granted to us for worship, it is necessary that we remember the above words of the psalmist. We have labored to build a new church building. This has meant that many hours were spent in preparation for the building, by various committees and the council, by many of our members that were called upon to help with some aspect of the construction, etc. Further, in order to finance the building there is much labor that is required on the part of the members of our congregation to pay for this project. But were we to assume an attitude of "look what we have done," then it is all done in vain.



Sanctuary

It is necessary that we see that it is God that has given us this new building in which we might worship Him. This is so because it is He that maintains His church. He has given us the truth of His Word, and by His Word He has faithfully gathered His church here. He it is who has given to us the hunger and the thirst for the truth, and has led us to live here serving Him in that which we do. He it is that has placed in our hearts the faith to trust in His care. And He it is that has provided so abundantly for our needs that we also have been able to build this church building.

He it is also that will provide us the grace to continue to serve Him

here. It is necessary therefore, as we begin to worship in our new church building, that we continue to acknowledge that He is the God who builds the house and guards the city. This means that we must continue to bow before His Word in all that we do. May it rule our hearts and lives. Then by God's grace our labor will not have been in vain, nor shall it be in vain. But we will know the great blessings of our God in Christ. For as we read in Psalm 126:1, "They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever."

Your Pastor,
Rev. Richard Moore

A Cloud of Witnesses

Prof. Herman Hanko

Heinrich Bullinger: Covenant Theologian

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

Introduction

The truth of God's covenant is part of our precious Reformed heritage as Protestant Reformed Churches. We are not always aware

of the fact that this truth goes back to the time of the Reformation. Prior to the Reformation this truth was unknown; it has its roots and origin in the Reformation in Switzerland, par-

ticularly in the work of Zwingli and Bullinger. It is to the latter that we call attention in this article.

Early Life

Heinrich Bullinger was born on July 18, 1504, the youngest of five sons, to a parish priest in Bremgarten, Switzerland near Zurich. Bullinger's father, though a priest, was married—in keeping with the loose enforcement of vows of celibacy which Rome required of all its clerics. Although not much is known of Bullinger's parents, Bullinger's father, when a very old man, came to believe and confess the doctrines of the Reformation, probably under the influence of his gifted son.

Bullinger began his formal education in the school of The Brethren of the Common Life in Cleves. His father gave him no money, believing that poverty was necessary for his son to develop good habits in life. Bullinger, like Luther, was required to sing to earn money to support himself.

During these studies Bullinger wanted to enter a Carthusian monastery, but was dissuaded by his brother. Instead, in 1519 he went to Cologne, Germany where he earned a BA in 1520. At Cologne Bullinger studied the scholastic theologians of the Middle Ages, but soon became so disgusted with them that he turned to the church fathers, particularly Chrysostom and Augustine. The one point which impressed him in the writings of these church fathers was their copious use of Scripture. Spurred on by their apparent determination to ground all their doctrine in God's Word, Bullinger turned to a study of the Scriptures. It was this study of Scripture which enabled Bullinger to read the writings of Martin Luther with pleasure, as they were then being circulated throughout Germany.

After earning his master's degree in 1522, Bullinger returned to his beloved Switzerland. Although already influenced by Reformation thought, he accepted a call by Wolfgang Rüpli, abbot of a monastery in Cappel, to teach in the cloister school. He taught

the monks from the New Testament and from Philip Melancthon's *Loci Communes*.¹

Sent to Zurich, where Zwingli preached, Bullinger spent five months listening to Zwingli, perfecting his Greek and beginning his studies in Hebrew. It was here that he became more thoroughly acquainted with Reformation distinctives. The result was that, when he returned to the cloister school in Cappel, he persuaded the abbot and all the monks to accept the teachings of the Reformation.

In 1529 Bullinger was called to be minister in the church at Bremgarten, where he succeeded his father as pastor. Here he preached until the battle of Cappel, when Zwingli was killed and the Reformation in Switzerland was brought to a temporary standstill. In these years at Bremgarten he developed his skills as a preacher and pastor, and served the congregation well. But when Zwingli was killed in 1531, Bullinger was forced to leave his congregation. His absence from the pulpit, however, was brief, for he was soon called to be Zwingli's successor in the prestigious congregation of Zurich. Here he remained till the end of his life. Here, in the early years of his ministry, he preached six or seven times a week; later, only on Friday and on the Lord's day.

His Work

The death of Zwingli seemed to be a deathblow to the Reformation in Switzerland, but God provided for the churches there a man who could keep a steady hand on the tiller.

Bullinger was a devoted pastor, not only as a powerful preacher, but also as a faithful shepherd who visited his sheep day and night, opened his house to all who needed help, exposed himself to dangers when he

visited those who were struck down by the plague that several times visited Zurich, and brought comfort and strength to the dying.

Although he lived on a very meager salary, his charity was known throughout the country. He freely distributed money, food, clothing. He refused any gifts, but gave anything beyond his salary to hospitals and institutions of mercy. He nearly always had in his home strangers and exiles for whom he provided shelter and food. He secured a pension for Zwingli's widow, took her under his roof, and assumed responsibility for the education of Zwingli's two children. His Christian love and charity brought him the respect and devotion of all his parishioners.

Bullinger was deeply committed to Christian education. He served as superintendent of the schools in Zurich. He was instrumental in the staffing of the Seminary with able theologians. He actively participated in the regulation of the schools according to the Word of God.

Bullinger was a devoted family man. In 1529 he married Ann Adlischweiter, a former nun from Zurich, and with her had several children. His biographers speak of the fact that his home was a happy place, in spite of the fact that almost always strangers were lodging with them. He romped with his children and grandchildren and was deeply conscious of his covenant calling to teach them the ways of the Lord. When his parents could no longer care for themselves, Bullinger and his wife cared for them in their own home.

Theologian

After Zwingli's death, Bullinger became the theologian of the Swiss churches.²

The Swiss Reformation, outside Geneva, produced two remarkable and beautiful confessions: The First and the Second Helvetic Confessions.

¹ Philip Melancthon was Luther's co-reformer, and the book referred to was the first systematic theology of the Reformation.

² This is, of course, other than Calvin, who labored in Geneva.

The First Helvetic Confession was the work of Bullinger, along with several other theologians: Megander, Grynaeus, Myconius, and Leo Judd. The Second Helvetic Confession was Bullinger's personal work, written as a personal confession of faith, and adopted by the Swiss Churches in 1566.³

When controversy rose in Switzerland over the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, Bullinger not only defended the Reformed view against Lutheranism, but also worked with John Calvin to bring uniformity among the Swiss. The result of their cooperative effort was the *Consensus Triguinus*, an important Reformation document on the doctrine of the Lord's Supper.

Bullinger's influence extended throughout Europe, even though he never traveled beyond Switzerland. When exiles from England sought refuge in Zurich during the reign of Bloody Mary, Bullinger took them into his home and taught them more carefully the truths of Scripture. Through an astonishing correspondence Bullinger exerted influence on theologians everywhere. He corresponded with Swiss, German, and English theologians; he wrote to kings, princes, and queens. When he died, the English mourned his passing as a calamity, and repeatedly expressed their great debt to this preacher of Zurich.

In one controversy, however, he showed a weakness. When Calvin in Geneva was struggling with the heresies of Bolsec, the Consistory of

Geneva sought the advice of the other Swiss theologians. Although in general these theologians agreed with Calvin in his doctrine of predestination (Bolsec denied sovereign predestination), with the exception of Farel, they cautioned Geneva to proceed with care and questioned Calvin's strong statements on God's predestination of sin and sovereign, unconditional reprobation. Bullinger was among them.⁴ When Calvin drew up his *Consensus Genevensis*,⁵ Bullinger refused to sign it.

Of great value to us is a controversy which Bullinger carried on in his debates with the Anabaptists. Against them he wrote no fewer than six books. In his defense of the biblical position on the doctrine of infant baptism, Bullinger developed his ideas of God's covenant of grace. It is in these writings that we have the first development of this doctrine which has meant so much to the cause of the truth. All subsequent covenant theologians, in both Reformed and Presbyterian circles, owe a great debt to Heinrich Bullinger.

Bullinger's Death

Bullinger's last days were filled with suffering. The great burden of the work undermined his health. In 1562 he wrote to a friend: "I almost sink under the load of business and care, and feel so tired that I would ask the Lord to give me rest if it were not against his will." In 1564 and 1565 he nearly died from the plague, which took from him his wife, three daughters, and a brother-in-law. In all his sufferings he bore his burdens with

great patience and submission to the will of God. Though often lonely and heartsick, he continued his labors until death overtook him.

Bullinger died on September 17, 1575 after suffering intensely from calculus, a disease which was probably what we would now call kidney and bladder stones, for which there was no cure in the 16th century. His youngest daughter, Dortha, cared for him in his last years. When near death, he assembled the pastors of Zurich about him and exhorted them to purity of life, unity among the brethren, and faithfulness in doctrine. He warned them against temptation, assured them of his love, thanked them for their kindness towards him, and closed with a prayer of thanksgiving.

After shaking hands with all of them, with tears (as Paul did with the elders at Ephesus), he died reciting Psalms 51, 16, and 42, the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. His son-in-law preached the funeral sermon.

Bullinger was the man chosen by God to maintain the Swiss Reformation after the death of Zwingli. He was equipped by God with extraordinary spiritual gifts for this task. He was a man of patience, firm faith, courage, moderation, and endurance who "proved that the Reformation was a work of God" when, through Bullinger's work, it survived the catastrophe at Cappel.

To him we, who love the truth of God's covenant, owe a great debt under God. □

Reminder to College Students:

Send us your new address
as soon as you know it for
the coming year.

We will send your
Standard Bearer to you at
college, free of charge!

³ Our readers can profit from reading these confessions. They are not very easy to obtain. Schaff has them in his "Creeds of Christendom," but they are in Latin and German. The First Helvetic Confession can be found in "Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century," edited by Arthur C. Cochrane. The Second can be found in "Creeds of the Churches," edited by John H. Leith.

⁴ The interesting correspondence can be read in "The Register of the Company of Pastors in Geneva in the Time of Calvin," edited by Philip Hughes.

⁵ Later published under the title, "A Treatise on the Eternal Predestination of God." This is included in "Calvin's Calvinism," published by the RFP.

Renewing the Battle (4)

Drama, Television, and Movies

"Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so, every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit."

Matthew 7:16,17

In Greek mythology, Augeas, King of Elis, owned a gigantic herd of 3,000 oxen. But for 30 years no one had cleaned out the stalls of these oxen: A mammoth, almost impossible task faced any who would put forth the effort.

Then Hercules, Greek hero, had to redeem himself for the murder of his children in one of his episodes of divine madness. To expiate his crime, he was assigned twelve monumental (thus, "Herculean") tasks. One of them was to clean out Augeas' stalls. By a superhuman effort, Hercules diverted the waters of the Alpheus and Peneus rivers through the stalls, and accomplished the work.

Since then, tasks of ridding of corruption and filth that seem hopelessly difficult, as well as distasteful, are referred to as "cleaning the Augean stable."

Movies, drama, and television are, by any estimation, an Augean stable. Even worldly, unbelieving critics agree that 95% of movies are devoid of any social value (notwithstanding the claim of some reformed Christians that even the worst of them have redeeming value). Most television programs and movies are thoroughly antichristian in content. This has been the burden of the first three articles on "Renewing the Battle."

The logical question is, Can the Augean stable of dramatic presentations be cleaned? Is there a new Hercules that can divert some river of God's grace to flush this medium of its foul-smelling filth?

The answer is "No."

And if some superhuman work could or would do it, the oxen of drama will only produce more filth.

There is a reason why, down through history, this art-form has been the source of such vile things. Drama itself is not a legitimate art-form. Drama itself is not pleasing to God.

This article is a "herculean" effort to demonstrate that this is so.

Please be reminded that we are not questioning pictures that move, as though documentaries, home videos, and travelogues are improper. Please be reminded that a great objection to movies and drama is their awful content, and that some programs with drama are not explicitly evil. In addition, please be aware that

a criticism of drama is not an indictment of fiction, as though novels in themselves are to be rejected because of their fiction. Although a novel may be read in an unchristian way, or may be unchristian in its content, no person is acting the part of another person.

This is a questioning of *drama*.

By drama is meant an actor's or an actress' playing the part of another person's life or part of his life. Movies and most television are drama.

And because drama is not a pursuit for a Christian to be engaged in personally, it is not something by which he may be entertained, instructed, or edified.

I am well aware that this is a challenge to a multi-billion dollar institution and industry. I am also aware that it is a challenge to a way of life for some of God's people. Some of

Rev. Gritters is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Byron Center, Michigan.

us were members of the college thespians, maybe youthful "Governor Bradfords" in the grade-school presentation of the Pilgrim landing. Many of our readers were probably reared on "Lassie," "The Lone Ranger," or more recently, "Little House on the Prairie."

I am aware that this is not a popular theme.

Why, then, this questioning of drama?

Because I love the church. And I see what happens to the church which recommends drama as a legitimate pursuit.

*...because drama is not
a pursuit for a Christian
to be engaged in personally,
it is not something by which
he may be entertained,
instructed, or edified.*

And I am aware of Ezekiel 33:1-11. "If...he blow the trumpet, and warn the people; Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head.... But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand." I pray God will use this warning.

Our objections are biblical and appeal to the spiritual senses, the renewed heart, of God's people. With your God-given, sanctified conscience, consider with me the following.

IMPERSONATION. To some, impersonation is objectionable. Because God has made each of us a distinct person and personality, and

called him to develop that person and personality that he is, acting out the life of another seems inconsistent with that calling. Is the child of God to try to take on the personality of another? He should not pretend that he is someone else. He is to be an imitator of God (Ephesians 5:1) and of the apostles (Philippians 3:17). He is not called to pretend to be them, but to model his life after theirs.

NINTH COMMANDMENT.

Some also find that acting something or someone that you are not is objectionable. Is acting lying? Oprah Winfrey¹ recognized this, until she silenced the voice of her conscience. At the beginning of her career in acting, thinking of her Christian upbringing, she said, "How can I act and be truthful at the same time? Isn't that a contradiction?"² Oprah is not our authority. But does not her witness show that "the works of the law (are) written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another" (Romans 2:15)?

Is acting violation of the ninth commandment? "Thou shalt not bear false witness" is explained by the Heidelberg Catechism, "...that I avoid all sorts of lies and deceit, as the proper works of the devil...." The intent may not be deceit; what of the action?

THE ROOT. But there can be no question marks behind what is most objectionable. Acting out either the *holy life* or the *sinful deeds* of others is sinful and must violate the sanctified conscience of every Christian. Whether the persons whose lives are acted out were real or fictitious, whether it is done for entertainment or education, acting out either *holiness* or *sin* is not proper.

-
1. Oprah is a nationally famous actress and talk-show host.
 2. *Reader's Digest*, February, 1989, page 104.

There is no action that is not one or the other.

To act out the sinful deeds of another is sin itself. As Nineveh will rise up in judgment against Israel, unbelieving Muslims (who also have the works of the law written on their hearts) will judge the foolishness of our "Christian" society and of the churches that promote acting sinful deeds. In an article in the *Straits Times*, Singapore's Islamic leader responded to a staged play in which Muslim actresses played Catholic nuns and made the sign of the cross. "Theatre practitioners must remember that what the Quran (i.e., "Koran" BLG) deems sinful in daily life, is still a sin committed by the actor if performed on stage."³

We Christians should know that better than an unbeliever.

May a Christian young lady play the treacherous, ruthless, murdering, Lady Macbeth, who urges her irresolute husband to murder King Duncan? Or the suicide Juliet? What plays, other than Shakespeare, will schools teach the children to act? And if there are others, what can be acted without acting sin?

May a young Christian man play one of the drunken, naked, Israelites dancing around the golden calf while Moses sits atop the mount, or even the angry Moses casting down the tablets of stone? May a Christian play Judas, the betrayer of the Lord? Or Peter in his denial of Christ? He may not. Which means, does it not, that biblical plays cannot be something a child of God wants to engage in?

Just a few months ago our church received an invitation from a local Christian High School to announce in our church bulletin that the musical, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, would relate "the familiar story of Joseph in a refreshing way with humorous scenes and contemporary music." Altogether aside from the unbelievable attempt to inject humor into this biblical story, may a Christian young woman play the

-
3. February 19, 1993.

temptress of Joseph when he gets to Egypt, asking him to lie with her? To play the story, someone must. For education. Christians may not; nor may they be "taught" by someone who does.

And if one argues that he can play something more innocent, probably "neutral," he understands neither the gravity nor the subtlety of sin (to say nothing of original sin). "All that is not of faith is sin."

The other alternative is to act out holy lives of God's people. But for a person to act out the *holy life* of another is dreadful. To pray, repent of sin, love your wife, or any other calling of God, is too serious to pretend, aside from any good motive.

*Acting out either the
holy life or the sinful deeds of
others is sinful
and must violate
the sanctified conscience
of every Christian.*

For *entertainment*, it is blasphemous.

Usually, if parents wanted to let their children watch a "good" program on television that included acting, "Little House on the Prairie" was the one. You may have seen Michael Landon on that program leading his family in prayer to our God. Michael Landon. The same Michael Landon who, on the next channel, was "playing" an angel on "Highway to Heaven." Michael Landon, praying with our children. For *entertainment*.

May you? I cannot answer in the affirmative.

To act someone else's *holy life* for *education* is no different. A Christian may not pretend he is praying, may not pretend he is loving a wife (probably it's not even his wife), may not pretend sorrow for sin, joy in Christ, all the while thinking not about prayer but about how the audience receives his performance. Holiness is too serious to be acted.

For *edification* in spiritual things? Calvin College recently invited our church to observe their Sacred Dance Class present a sacred dance of "The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids." I am glad it was not my daughter playing the foolish virgins ... or the wise.

This spring, a local Reformed church invited us to witness their Easter presentation of Leonardo da Vinci's "Living Dramatization of the Last Supper." In that play (I saw a videotape of it), members of the church played the disciples of Christ. One at a time, they rose and said, "I am Peter...", "I am Philip...", each time relating their feelings about Jesus. Yes, one said, "I am Judas...." Another played Christ. Although "Jesus" said not a word, the pastor gestured towards him as "Our Master." As I watched, I could not help but think that the children would refer to the "one" in the middle as "Jesus."⁴

This was a "moving" presentation, appealing to the flesh. We are tempted to say that it was done reverently. But they *acted* the parts. Pretended they were disciples of Jesus. Pretended grief in Christ's death. Pretended anger that someone would betray Christ. And pretended to look like ("be") Jesus Christ, God the Son in the flesh. It is no more possible to do this reverently than it would have been possible reverently to show a pornographic film. God is offended, highly, by such behavior.

When I met the pastor of the church at the Post Office a few days after the presentation, I asked him if someone really "played" Jesus. Knowing my thoughts, he said something

4. In addition to our warning about the drama of it, this was an official worship service in which communion was served. The play took the place of the preaching. And the Reformed confession in the back of the songbook of that church says, "We must not pretend to be wiser than God, who will have his people taught, not by dumb images, but by the lively preaching of his word."

like, "Well, Barry, I guess we have a little different theology and philosophy, don't we?" "Indeed," I thought, "your theology, which is no longer Reformed, allows you to make an image of God." After explaining how "uplifted" he was, he pleaded, "But does not the end justify the means?" "No, Pastor, it does not." As I walked home with the mail, I thought I recognized that thinking from something recent. "Yes, I've got it. Doctor Kevorkian. The suicide doctor. Of course, 'The end justifies the means.' " The end does not justify the means. Not for education; not for edification.

If this is drama at its "best," and acting sin is drama at its worst, what other kind of drama is there?

Brother Christian, Sister Christian, you have prayed for sanctification. You have prayed to be kept from sin, led away from temptation. Your desire is to stay as far away from sin as possible. But when you know that drama brings you into direct association with it, why will you practice it?

And if it is illegitimate to engage in sinful drama yourself, why will you be entertained by it on television, at the movies, or on the stage? "He that worketh deceit shall not dwell in my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight" (Psalm 101:7).

Fellow Christian, you have prayed for a heart warm with affection toward Him. You have promised to prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Let us repent of our foolishness, "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness," and "abstain from all appearance of evil."

Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things. "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you." □

Next time: What has the church in the past thought about drama and acting?

The Shameful Sin of Homosexuality (II)

Some Statistics

The statistics relating to homosexuality are shocking. Not only do the statistics bring out the seriousness of this perversion, but plain for all to see is the judgment of God associated with this sin. Even from a human point of view, there is every reason to be appalled at the consequences of homosexuality. If only from a medical standpoint, everything ought to be done to rid our society of this menacing evil.

That the homosexuals prefer to be referred to as "gays" is surely one of the great ironies of our day. The word "gay" means "happy, joyful, carefree." The truth is that the homosexual is anything but gay. The consequences of his sin, as well as the shame and guilt that the homosexual feels on account of his sin — themselves consequences of the sin — make for constant misery and preclude any real earthly happiness. In the homosexuals' own publications, in the writings of psychiatrists who treat them, according to the testimony of ministers who try to help them, there is constant repetition of the loneliness, the fear, and the despair that are associated with the homosexual lifestyle. Most homosexuals are anything but gay.

The statistics bear this out. Depression, suicide, alcoholism, and

drug abuse all occur disproportionately among homosexuals. The reality is that the homosexuals often cannot live with themselves, cannot go on bearing the heavy burden of the guilt of their sin and the shame that they have brought on themselves.

The greatest fear of the homosexual is death. Statistics indicate that homosexuals who do not have AIDS have a median life expectancy of 42 years. If they contract AIDS, the life expectancy is 39 years. Lesbians have a median age of death of 45. This is the kind of lifestyle that many want to reward with special protection. The homosexual lifestyle could better be termed a death-style. More than one hundred thousand people have now died of AIDS. This year alone as many will die as have died in all the previous years put together. More young men have now lost their lives to AIDS than have died in the entire Vietnam War. God's Word is fulfilled, "The years of the wicked shall be shortened" (Prov. 10:27).

Many homosexuals die violent deaths. They are 100 times more apt to be murdered and 25 times more apt to commit suicide than the rest of the population. Violent crimes are also associated with homosexuals. The six leading serial killers in the U.S. are: Donald Harvey (37 victims), John Wayne Gacy (23 victims), Patrick Kearny (32 victims), Bruce Davis (28 victims), Corli-Henley-Brooks (27 victims), and Juan Corona (25 victims). *The New York Times* has quoted detectives as saying that all were "... motivated by a sense of shame after

having (homo) sexual relations with their victims." Fully one-third of all child molestations are committed by homosexuals. In fact, child molestation is a part of the lifestyle of many homosexuals.

Well documented are all of the diseases associated with the homosexual lifestyle. Although homosexuals represent only a tiny fraction of the population, less than 3%, they account for 71% of AIDS cases, 50% of syphilis cases, and 51% of throat gonorrhea. Nearly three-fourths of all gay men have had hepatitis B. Amebiasis, shigellosis, and giardiasis are so common among homosexuals that doctors call these diseases the "Gay Bowel Syndrome." All of these diseases are directly connected to homosexual sexual activity.

Smoking is considered harmful because of the diseases associated with it. Because of these health risks, smokers are discriminated against by higher insurance premiums and high cigarette prices. These same policies encourage non-smokers to stay non-smokers. The health risks associated with homosexuality suggest that their activities are considerably more dangerous than smoking.

The frightening thing is that, because of the promiscuity of homosexuals, all these diseases are spreading rapidly and, in some cases, reaching epidemic proportions. A 1982 U.S. Centers for Disease Control put the number of sexual partners for typical homosexuals interviewed at 500. AIDS sufferers individually studied: 1,100. In a Kinsey Institute sur-

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

vey, 43% of white male homosexuals estimated 500 or more; 75% 100 or more; 28% over 1,000. 79% said over half of their partners were total strangers. "Monogamy" is virtually unknown among homosexuals. Rampant promiscuity breaks down the immune system because of exposure to so many bacterial cultures from different partners.

There are financial consequences of homosexuality. Besides the loss of millions of lives, unrestricted homosexual activity results in billions of dollars in health care costs and the loss of trillions of dollars in the gross national product. Los Angeles alone spent over 11 billion dollars in health care for 1992, most of this for AIDS related cases. More will be spent on AIDS this year than on any other single health problem. The skyrocketing costs of the health problems associated with homosexuality, especially AIDS research and care, threaten to bankrupt America's health care system.

Churches' Acceptance of Homosexuality

Not only are the homosexuals pushing for the recognition of their lifestyle by society, but they are also pushing for the approval of the church. Many churches have succumbed to the pressure of the homosexuals. Practicing homosexuals are admitted as members and are even permitted to occupy the special offices. Neither is this confined to the mainline, liberal churches. In many Reformed and Presbyterian churches there is a vocal lobby on behalf of the homosexuals. Already in the 1980s the GKN voted to allow practicing homosexuals to be full communicant members and to hold all offices, including pastor.

Typical of the churches who have gone in the direction of increased acceptance of homosexuals is the Christian Reformed Church. In 1973 the CRC declared that "homosexuality," that is, explicit sexual practice, is sinful, but orientation to homosexuality is not sinful because it does not arise from conscious choice.

The leading spokesmen defending this position of the study committee were Rev. Clarence Boomsma and Calvin Seminary professor, Dr. Mel Hugen.

In the last year, the CRC has been confronted with an admitted homosexual minister, Rev. Jim Lucas. Lucas says that he is celibate, but refuses to express his views on whether the Bible allows homosexual marriages. Lucas has been permitted to retain his ministerial credentials and many have risen to his defense.

More recently, a prominent Christian Reformed professor of philosophy has taken up the cause of the homosexuals. Dr. Hendrik Hart, a professor of philosophy at the denominationally-supported "Institute for Christian Studies," in Toronto, Canada who is licensed to exhort in Classis Toronto, publicly defended his position in an article in *The Other Side* magazine. In his article, "Romans Revisited: How I Came to See Paul's References to Homosexuality in a Radically New Light," Hart takes the position that "what is said about same sex behavior in Romans 1 is not intended by Paul to invoke in us a condemnation of homosexuality." He goes on to say that "... we need not read the Bible as calling for the very same attitudes called for in biblical times." After studying Romans 1:18-32, Hart has come to the conclusion "... that this section might present not Paul's own proclamation of God's condemnation of sin, but the Jewish tradition's understanding of the consequences of sin — the wrath of God. Paul, in contrast to the view expressed in Romans 1:18-32, would see sin as needing a different approach, one based in the justice of God which is mercy." With a straight face and apparently in all seriousness, he expects us to believe this new insight into Romans 1 that up until now has been hid to the church.

What Says the Scripture?

But what do the Scriptures really teach regarding homosexuality? Is the increasing acceptance of homosexuals by the churches due to the fact that the Scriptures condone or at least

call for toleration of homosexuals? Is it at least possible that the Bible is ambiguous and contradictory in its teaching on homosexuality?

Unlike much contemporary writing on homosexuality, the Bible's teaching is clear. In both the Old and New Testaments, God's Word teaches plainly that homosexual practice as well as homosexual desire are sinful in God's sight, even shamefully so. In the most explicit language, Scripture condemns homosexuality and the impenitent homosexual. And the Bible warns that homosexuality is not to be tolerated but punished; the homosexual not to be accepted but rejected.

God's condemnation of homosexuality in the Old Testament is plain. The account of God's dealing with Sodom and Gomorrah recorded in Genesis 19 stands as a monument to all of history respecting God's attitude toward homosexuality. The Word of God to the children of Israel in Leviticus 18:22 is, "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with woman-kind: it is abomination." In Leviticus 20:13 God spells out the judgment that was to be carried out against those who committed this abomination: "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them." The punishment for homosexuals in Israel was the death penalty. Still today that penalty ought to be enforced. Rather than to tolerate and approve homosexuality, the churches ought to excommunicate the impenitent homosexual and the state ought to put him to death. In I Kings 14:24, included in the list of the sins that Rehoboam the son of Solomon was guilty of is his toleration of the sodomites (homosexuals): "And there were sodomites in the land: and they did according to all the abominations of the nations which the Lord cast out before the children of Israel."

This condemnation of homosexuality continues in the New Testament. In I Corinthians 6:9 the apostle writes, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?"

Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate (homosexuals), nor abusers of themselves with mankind." The same apostle writes in I Timothy 1:9, 10, "Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that de-

file themselves with mankind (homosexuals)...." In II Peter 2:6 the apostle Peter makes reference to the history of Genesis 19: "And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly." In Jude 7 we read, "Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over

to fornication, and going after strange flesh (Homosexuality), are set for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire."

One of the most extensive treatments in the Bible of the sin of homosexuality is that of the apostle Paul in Romans 1. Because of the importance of the instruction of this passage, we will give separate treatment to it in the next article. □

Travail

To travail is to experience birth pangs; it is to bring forth a child by way of deep, excruciating pain. All other physical pains are evidence of disease, decay, and death; birth pangs are the only pains that are a sign of life. "A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world" (John 16:21). The word "travail" is often found in context with the words sorrow, pain, grief, pangs, and vexation. It was part of God's curse on the woman that pain would attend her bringing forth of children (Gen. 3:16). Some mothers die bringing forth children; for example, when Rachel travailed and had hard labor, she died (Gen. 35:16-18). Birth pangs are characterized by two things as the time of deliverance approaches: they increase in frequency and they grow in intensity.

Scripture uses travail in several figurative senses. In a very beautiful way the church of the Old Testament, spiritually considered, is the mother of us all (Gal. 4:26). When Paul writes this, he has in mind Isaiah 54:1: "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord." The church of the old dispensation underwent sore travail in bringing forth Christ and all that are His. This same mother-church is seen by John in vision as a great wonder, "... a woman clothed with the sun ... and she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered" (Rev. 12:1, 2). Despite the opposition of a great red dragon who would devour her child as soon as it was born, "she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God and to His throne" (Rev. 12:4, 5).

The Apostle Paul, when combating the influence of false teachers upon those with whom he formerly labored, likens this difficult labor to painful birth: "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you..." (Gal. 4:19). His motivation for working day and night, laboring and travailing, is that "he would not be chargeable unto any of you" (I Thess. 2:9); now would he eat any man's bread for the same reason (II Thess. 3:8). The difficulty of preaching the full counsel of God in the face of apostasy and worldliness is not less today; it can only be compared to labor and travail. But when the fruit of the gospel is that Christ is formed in a man or woman, that travail, also, is forgotten!

Finally, the Holy Spirit of inspiration likens the signs of the coming of Christ and the end of the world to travail. After Jesus has mentioned false Christs, wars and rumors of wars, ethnic

Rev. Kuiper is pastor of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

uprisings, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes, He summarizes by saying, "All these are the beginning of sorrows" (Matt. 24:8). Literally the Greek states, "All these are the beginning of travail or birth pains." Terrible, terrible things are happening in the church, in the nations, and in nature. As time speeds to the end, these signs occur with greater frequency and intensity. And the comfort that these words of Jesus give us is not only that we know that He rules through these things, but also that these painful signs are sure signs of life and health! They end with the birth of the new heavens and earth wherein righteousness dwelleth! And so we read in Romans 8:22-23 of the whole creation which "groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" and the church groans with the creation, "waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." The cursed creation will not be annihilated by fire, but fire will be the catalyst that changes this creation into the heavenly creation. As a womb convulsed with pain, the whole creation brings forth the heavenly state where God's tabernacle is with men. As "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18), so also when we are delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God, we will remember no more the travail that God used to bring us to Himself in the covenant of grace made perfect. □

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. Tom Miersma

The Doctrine of the Trinity (3)

Thus far in our consideration of the Trinity we have seen that while God is one, yet He reveals Himself to us as a plurality of persons. God speaks to us as the "I am that I am" (Ex. 3:14), and yet within Himself He speaks in the plural, "Let us make man in our image..." (Gen. 1:26). Moreover, we have seen that God reveals Himself as three, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, by His works of creation, redemption, and sanctification. By the threefold character of His works *outside* Himself, God reveals Himself in such a way that we are directed to His own life and glory *inside* Himself as the Triune God (L.D. VIII). These works are not ascribed to one person apart from the others, for

all of God's works are Triune, but in such a way as to reveal the persons of the Trinity to us as to their "particular offices and operations" toward us (Belgic Confession of Faith, Article IX).

The Distinct Relation of the Three Persons Revealed in the Language of Scripture

How we develop this doctrine from the language of the Scriptures is therefore important. God by His revelation of Himself to us by His works points us to that which He is in Himself. The Word of God in careful, consistent language distinguishes the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost and Their relation to each other and to us. This revelation of God by His works also sets before us that there is in God a certain divine order: the Father is first, the Son second, and the Holy Ghost third in order, yet in such

a way that all are partakers of the same divine glory and nature. They are one God, co-eternal and co-essential, in which none is behind or before another as to the divine glory. That divine order reveals itself in all of God's works, whether creation, redemption, or sanctification. All things are of the Father, *by* the Son, the Word, and *in* the Spirit or Breath of God.

This language is the language of Scripture. Jesus Christ "... of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption" (I Cor. 1:30). God is the "Father of lights, with whom is no variable-ness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). God is the Creator, the God of our salvation, the Father of whom are all things. The Son is He *by* whom are all things. "All things were made *by* him," that is *by* the Word which was God (John 1:1-3; Col. 1:17), and "*by* him" all things are reconciled

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

to God (Col. 1:20). The Holy Spirit as the Lord and giver of life, both natural and spiritual life, is He who is *in* us and we *in* Him. We possess all things *in* the Spirit, in the sphere of His power and work and gracious influence. Thus "ye are not in the flesh but *in* the Spirit" (Rom. 8:9). Even the very prepositions which Scripture uses together with the names of God and the revelation of God by His work direct us both to the truth of the Trinity in God Himself and to the relation of the three persons.

The early church and our Reformed fathers, when they returned to the Word and reformed the church, sought carefully to express the doctrine of the Trinity in the language and terms of Scripture so as to confess that which Scripture has said and revealed without transgressing these limits. They sought to confess both the unity of God and His distinct Triune life. They did so by confession both of God's revelation in relation to us *outside* Himself and as that revelation reveals Him to us also as He is *inside* Himself. They did so that we might rightly believe and confess Him as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in the manner and in that order in which God has spoken to us. It is in harmony with this revelation of God that we confess "... the Father is the cause, origin and beginning of all things visible and invisible; the Son is the word, wisdom, and image of the Father; the Holy Ghost is the eternal power and might proceeding from the Father and the Son" (Belgic Confession of Faith, Article VIII).

The Importance of This Scriptural Language

We cannot reduce this Scriptural language to mere labels with no real distinctions, as if the Father is the name of God as Creator, the Son merely a different name of God as Savior and Redeemer, and the Holy Ghost as yet another name for God in some aspect of His work. The Triune God in relationship to us reveals Himself indeed as our God and Father in Jesus Christ by His works, particularly by the grace of our adoption in

Christ. Thus, when we pray, "Our Father which art in heaven..." we are not addressing the first person of the Trinity only, but the Triune God, for we draw near *in* the Spirit and *by* Jesus Christ the Son, our Mediator, unto God Triune as our Father. Yet it is by this revelation of Himself *outside* Himself in relation to us that God also makes known to us His own distinct internal life and relations *inside* Himself as the Triune God, distinguished in three persons in a certain order and with certain distinct personal properties.

What one says therefore about God, about the persons of the Trinity and their relations *outside* of God in His works, and the divine order of those persons, determines also one's confession of God as He is *inside* Himself. To tamper with the language of Scripture in this respect, or to fail to confess it faithfully or completely, is to tamper ultimately with God Himself, for we know Him only by His revelation of Himself to us. It is thus that the early church struggled to give a faithful account of all that Scripture said of God and was led to confess the doctrine of the Trinity as we now hold it. Errors and mistakes were made as the church sought to understand the Scriptures.

Corrupting the Language of Scripture Involves Corrupting the Truth of God

These errors invariably involve either a failure to take seriously the language of Scripture or a corruption of its meaning and significance. An example of this is that which would treat the names of God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as mere labels denoting but one person. To reduce God to one person, with three names associated with different works, is to destroy the truth of God. This error manifested itself in the early church. It is called Patripassionism. It taught essentially one person of God — that the Father is the Son distinguished in name only, and therefore that in reality the Father died on the cross under the name Son. Underlying this error is the idea that God's revelation of

Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is a matter of mere names in relation to us, having no internal reality.

The modern attempt to redefine God and our relation to Him in feminist terms is a warmed-over version of this same error. Calling God "Our Mother" or praying "Our Mother which art in heaven" involves not simply a change in our perception of God and our relation to God as He is *outside* Himself. It involves a fundamental rewrite of the whole doctrine of the Trinity, of God as He is *inside* Himself. It treats God's names as mere labels and not as that by which He has revealed Himself to us. God is not She, a goddess, neither is God internally Mother, but Father. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, not the daughter. He is the "Only Begotten of the Father" (John 1:14). The Father speaks His Word in eternity and begets a Son by eternal generation of the Father, the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person (John 1:1-3; Heb. 1:1-3). The Son is not born out of the womb of a divine Mother. The attempt to rewrite the language of Scripture at this point involves an arrogance which presumes to be wiser than God, to stand above the Word, by whom God has spoken, even His own dear Son, and to question the very Holy Spirit of God.

This pernicious blasphemy is not far from us. It has taken deep root in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands and is making strong strides in North America. The only mother goddess the Scriptures know of, by whatever name, is Ashtoreth. To be saved one must faithfully believe and confess the truth of the Trinity as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (Athanasian Creed). Those who would introduce goddess worship in doctrine or in address to God are idolaters who walk in unbelief, and, except they repent, they shall perish. They are not Christians. The Christian has indeed a mother as well as God His Father, but she is not God. She is the Israel of God, the church who is the wife of Jehovah, the bride of Christ, and God's beloved. □

Book Reviews

The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women, by John Knox. Dallas, Texas: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1993. 95 pages. \$5.95 (paper). [Reviewed by the Editor.]

This is *the* John Knox, and this is his notorious condemnation of women's governing ("regiment") in society. Written in 1558 from Geneva, the "blast" was aimed at two Roman Catholic queens, Mary Tudor of England ("Bloody Mary") and Mary of Guise in Scotland. But it soon struck Protestant Elizabeth I of England, permanently alienating her from the Calvinistic Reformation. The book embarrassed John Calvin, who tried to placate Elizabeth by dedicating the second edition of his Isaiah commentary to her: "To her serene highness, not less illustrious by her own virtues than by the splendor of royalty, Elizabeth, Queen of England." Calvin's effort was unsuccessful.

Knox damned all rule by women in society, particularly in the political realm, as monstrous. The opening line of the body of the work carries the message:

To promote a woman to bear rule, superiority, dominion, or empire above any realm, nation, or city, is repugnant to nature; contumely (insult) to God, a thing most contrary to his revealed will and approved ordinance; and finally, it is the subversion of good order, of all equity and justice (p. 19)

The basis was, first, Knox' low view of the abilities of women in general:

For who can deny but it is repugnant to nature, that the blind shall be appointed to lead and conduct such as do see? That the weak, the sick, and impotent persons shall nourish and keep the whole and strong? And finally, that the foolish, mad, and frenetic shall govern the discreet, and give counsel to such as be sober of mind? And such be all women, com-

pared unto man in bearing of authority. For their sight in civil regiment is but blindness; their strength, weakness; their counsel, foolishness; and judgment, frenzy, if it be rightly considered. . . . Nature, I say, does paint them forth to be weak, frail, impatient, feeble, and foolish; and experience has declared them to be inconstant, variable, cruel, lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment (p. 20).

This was presented as the testimony of "nature."

Second, Knox appealed to those passages of Scripture that enjoin submission to their husbands upon all wives and that forbid women to rule in the instituted church. Knox mentions Genesis 3:16; I Corinthians 14:34, 35; and I Timothy 2:11ff., offering exegesis of these passages that requires all women to be in subjection to all men. Because all men are the head of all women, a kingdom with a woman ruler is a monstrosity since it is headless.

Knox' error was twofold. He applied to all women in relation to all men what Scripture applies to wives in relation to their own husbands. Then he extended to the sphere of society what the Bible limits to the home and to the church institute.

There was a reason why Knox extended the exclusion of women's rule from the church to the state. Knox viewed the state as an "administration of God's grace":

The administration of the grace of God is denied to all (every) woman. By the administration of God's grace, is understood not only the preaching of the word and administration of the sacraments, by the which the grace of God is presented and ordinarily distributed unto man, but also the administration of civil justice, by the which virtue ought to be maintained, and vices punished (pp. 38, 39).

With other of his contemporaries, Knox failed to distinguish sharply the calling of the church from the calling

of the state. God gives the means of grace only to the instituted church. Civil government, for all that it is a servant of God, administers no grace in its maintenance of outward order in society.

Worse is Knox' advocacy of sedition against the authority of the female ruler. Appealing to Jehoiada's killing of queen Athaliah, Knox called on both estates and people to do the same to their female rulers:

The same is the duty as well of the estates as of the people that have been blinded. First, they ought to remove from honour and authority that monster in nature: so I call a woman clad in the habit of a man, yea, a woman against nature reigning above man. Secondly, if any presume to defend that impiety, they ought not to fear first to pronounce, and then after to execute against them the sentence of death (p. 83).

The advertisement of a future, "second blast" of this trumpet (which Knox never uttered) promised to instruct the people further in their right and duty not to obey tyrants, idolaters, and "notorious transgressors," but to "depose and punish" them (pp. 89, 90). No wonder that Queen Elizabeth looked askance at the Calvinistic Reformation in her realm. No wonder that John Calvin, who forbade rebellion against even the most godless, cruelest tyrant as revolt against the authority of God Himself (as is the teaching of Romans 13:1ff.) distanced himself from this writing of Knox.

James Atkinson has written that *The First Blast of the Trumpet* "permanently damaged his (Knox') career and effectiveness as a reformer" (*The Great Light*, Eerdmans, 1968, p. 226).

Making available in modern English anything that Knox wrote is a worthy endeavor. But the publication of this work will be of no help to Reformed Christians in their struggle against the movement to have women ordained as officebearers in the church and to have wives "liberated" from the authority of their husbands at home. □

Young Peoples' Activities

The month of August for the young people of our congregations means it is time for another young people's convention. This year's convention is being held the first week in August on the campus of Dordt College in Sioux Center, IA.

The young people's societies of the Doon and Hull, Iowa PRCs, along with the First PRC of Edgerton, MN, this year's host societies, have chosen for their theme, "Spiritual Youth in a Carnal World," based on Ephesians 5:8-21.

Now, as many of the regular readers of this "news" column know, the young people's societies of the PR churches spend much of their fund-raising time raising money to pay for annual conventions. Young people and raising money for conventions seem to go together. That's good, for conventions are certainly worthwhile.

Let me just mention here a couple of activities that caught my attention recently, fund-raisers that were just a little out of the ordinary.

First, everyone in the congregation of the Hudsonville, MI PRC was invited to a Senior Y.P. sponsored "Beast Feast" dinner at Hudsonville church. Those who dared could enjoy a meal comprised of a wide variety of excellent home-cooked wild game. Selection included perch, wall-eye, elk, deer, and even wild boar. For those not so bold, there were also domestic dishes available, such as domestic pig or casseroles. Profits were used for the convention, and also to cover expenses for a white-water rafting trip planned for late June.

The young people from the congregations of South Holland and Peace (Lynwood) in Illinois, along with the Ladies' Auxiliary of South Holland Christian School, got together to spon-

sor what has become an annual Waffle and Pancake Breakfast, Car Wash, and Plant Sale, an event which no doubt had something for everyone. Proceeds, of course, went for the convention and the Christian school.

But not all the young people's activities are intended to raise money for conventions. Recently the young people of the Pella, IA PRC donated money to pay for a new church sign and landscaping around the church.

And, finally, just a note about next year's convention. That convention, sponsored by the Lynden, WA PRC's young people, will be held at Western Washington University in Bellingham, WA, a city south of Lynden, right on the coast. We can also report that Lynden's young people are already busy raising money with various projects, including a rummage/garage sale held at the Lynden fairgrounds in June.

Ministerial Activities

Rev. J. Slopsema, presently serving as pastor of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI declined the call he received to serve as pastor of the Southwest PRC of Grandville, MI.

We are also happy to report that Rev. G. Lubbers, one of our churches' emeritus ministers, continues to make a good recovery after being involved in an auto accident last year. This recovery has enabled Rev. Lubbers to preach four times this summer at the Christian Rest Home in Grand Rapids.

Since this year's Synod decided that the Mission Committee and First PRC in Grand Rapids be instructed to discontinue calling a missionary to Jamaica, and to close the field there, Rev. W. Bekkering, who had just recently received a call to serve as missionary there, will no longer consider that call.

Rev. A. Spriensma, pastor of the Grandville, MI PRC, spent two weeks in June as Chaplain with the 46th Infantry Brigade, Michigan National

Guard at Camp Grayling, MI. His duties as Chaplain included conducting preaching services and doing counseling work with the troops.

Evangelism Activities

Rev. R. Cammenga, along with two elders from the Loveland, CO PRC, recently met with seven families and three individuals from the Alamosa/Monte Vista area who have expressed a desire for our churches to begin a work in the San Luis Valley. This area is in south-central Colorado. After this visit, Loveland's consistory decided to begin preaching services there on June 20. Services will be held at the St. Stephen the Martyr Episcopal Church, 729 Third Ave., Monte Vista. Plans call for a morning and an afternoon service.

Denominational Activities

The PR Sunday School Board recently invited all Sunday School teachers and parents to come and hear Mrs. Gertrude Hoeksema speak on "Teaching the Bible in the Home: not Supplemental, but Fundamental."

This meeting was designed to encourage and support teachers and parents in the important work of teaching and nurturing our covenant children.

Food for Thought:

"If this world with its fading pleasures is so much admired, what must heaven be, which God prizes."

— William Tiptaft (1803-1864) □

NOTICE!!!

The new Secretary of the Foreign Mission Committee is:

Rev. Russ Dykstra

P.O. Box 163

Doon, IA 51235-0163

(712) 726-3382

All material concerning Foreign Missions should now be sent to him.

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Their 12 children and mates, 59 grandchildren, and 14 great grandchildren express their thankfulness to the God and Father of Jesus Christ for the married life of

DEWEY and DENA ENGELSMA

on their 55th wedding anniversary (July 30).

In covenant faithfulness and mercy, we are blessed through their fearing the LORD, and they see their children's children and peace upon the church (Psalm 128).

We are "mindful always of His covenant; the word which he commanded to a thousand generations" (1 Chronicles 16:15).

Hope, Walker, MI

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Adult Bible Study Society of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church expresses Christian sympathy to our members, Mr. and Mrs. James Swart, in the recent death of Mr. Swart's sister,

MRS. MARIAN ONDERSMA.

May they find comfort in the words of Isaiah 15:11, "Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away."

Rev. Dale Kuiper, President
Mrs. Christine Batts, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies' Aid Society of First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids express their Christian sympathy to Adrian Griffioen and family in the death of their wife and mother

MRS. HARRIET GRIFFIOEN.

May the family find comfort with our Lord's words: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you: not as the world giveth, I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 15:27).

Jean Dykstra, President
Lena Baar, Secretary

IN MEMORIAM

On June 13, 1993 it pleased our heavenly Father to call our beloved father and grandfather,

DICK KOOIENGA,

to his heavenly home at the age of 90 years.

"The eternal God is thy refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27)

Children:

- Robert and Joan Miedema
- Earl and Lois Dykstra
- Roger and Lucille Kooienga
- Arnold and Donna Dykstra
- Donald and Judith Sall
- Donald and Mary Kooienga
- Stanley and Bette Dykstra
- 35 grandchildren
- 86 great grandchildren
- 1 great great grandchild

Hope, Walker, MI

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Martha Ladies' Society of the Hull Protestant Reformed Church expresses its sincere Christian sympathy to Lois VanMaanen and family in the death of her brother,

JIM SANDBULTE.

"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7).

Rev. Richard Moore, President
Hildred Hoekstra, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Martha Ladies' Aid Society of the Hull Protestant Reformed Church express our heartfelt sympathy to Betty Kooiker and family, in the death of her mother,

MRS. ALBERT (MARIE) VAN ROEKEL.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Rev. Richard Moore, President
Hildred Hoekstra, Secretary

OFFICEBEARERS' CONFERENCE

Classis West
Meeting in Lynden, WA
August 31, 1993

Theme:

Reformed Missions and Evangelism

Keynote Address:

Acts 13:1-4

"Missionaries Sent Out From Antioch"

Rev. Russ Dykstra

Sectionals:

"Missionary-at-large"

Rev. Richard Moore

"Active Congregational Involvement"

Rev. Ron VanOverloop

"The Macedonian Call"

Rev. Carl Haak

"Preparing to Give an Answer"

(1 Peter 3:15)

Rev. Steve Key

"A Critique of the Modern
Church-Growth Evangelism"

Rev. Charles Terpstra

"Distinguishing Between Essentials and
Non-Essentials on the Mission Field"

Rev. Wayne Bekkering

NOTICE!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, September 8, 1993 at the First Protestant Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Jon J. Huisken, Stated Clerk

NOTICE!!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Lynden, Washington, on Wednesday, September 1, 1993, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing.

Rev. R. VanOverloop, Stated Clerk