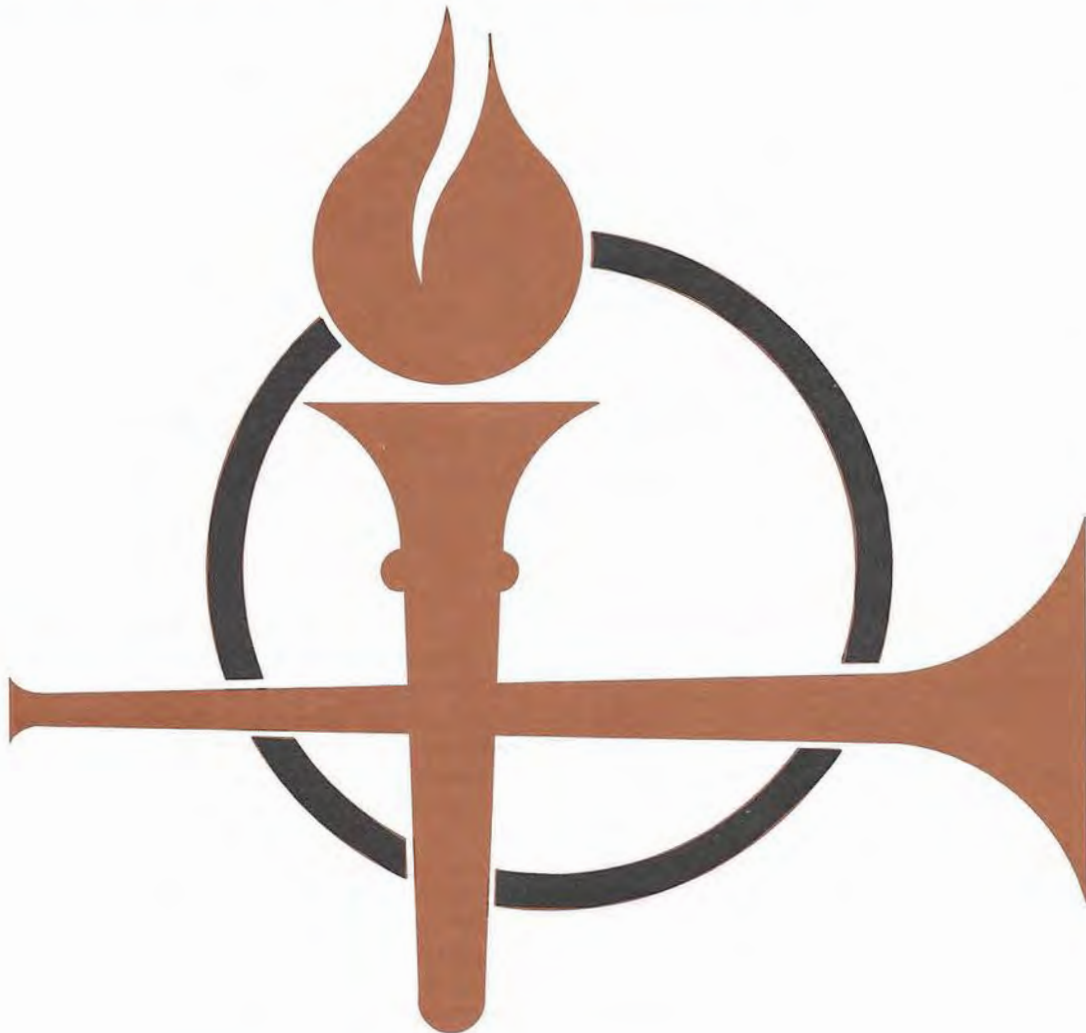


# THE OUTLOOK

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DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

OCTOBER 1980



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**ERA**  
**THE WRONG BELGIC CONFESSION?**  
**THE HOMOSEXUAL PROBLEM**

# DO WE HAVE THE WRONG BELGIC CONFESSION?

Peter De Jong

## The Churches' Alleged Mistake

The question may come as a surprise, but it is being seriously raised by the Christian Reformed Churches' Belgic Confession Translation Committee which in its 1979 Report alleged that the Reformed Churches have for over 400 years been holding as their official confession a wrong and inferior version of that creed. Faced with the assignment to make a new, up-to-date translation of this historic creed, the committee decided that it should go back to its earliest French version. It alleges that there is an early obscure draft of that creed which differs materially from those which the churches have officially adopted and held as their confession, and that this earlier version of Guido deBres was in the opinion of the committee preferable to the one in current use. The committee thereupon proceeded to translate this earlier version instead of the official one. Now the committee has been ordered to translate also the churches' official version; the matter is to be studied further and is to come up for resolution at the 1981 Synod. A prime mover in promoting the idea that we have through the centuries had a wrong, inferior version of this confession is Rev. Leonard Verduin, a member of the committee, who has done much specialized study and writing in the history of the Reformation and who has been industriously criticizing our official Belgic Confession in a series of some 18 (?) articles in the Christian Reformed Churches' *Banner*.

We may briefly trace the committee's argument. It alleges that while Guido deBres wrote his original confession in a time of persecution, soon after its publication in 1561 a change took place somewhat like that in the days of the Emperor Constantine. Churches which had been persecuted, were now able to get the support of the government. It claims that Calvin wanted to get such support while deBres did not.

It alleges that "John Calvin made his debut in the southern Low Countries with a tract in which he reproached the Flemish evangelicals for failing to work toward an established status for their version of the faith" and that there was a deep and serious rift between Calvin and the Flemish, including deBres, over this matter. "Less than two decades after Calvin spelled out to the Flemish how they should conduct themselves, deBres wrote his Confession, in 1559, from within that very camp that Calvin had chided. Again he apparently paid little attention to Calvin's call for a different policy." The committee claims that Geneva (and Calvin) kept this creed from being published "it seems, for two years;" after that it was printed anyway.

When deBres' Confession began to circulate in printed form steps were taken, almost at once, to divest the delinquent Flemish of their new creedal symbol. As early as 1565 it was proposed, by individuals who had begun to heed Calvin's advice, that "at each and every meet-

ing of synod henceforth the Confession is to be read in its entirety, as much to give opportunity for expressing our unity as to give opportunity for changes and improvement (p. 537).

The committee report gratuitously makes out of this last provision a somewhat less than honest attack on that creed, alleging that "The words 'as much to give opportunity for expressing our unity' seem to have served to assuage the bitter taste of those other words, 'to give opportunity for changes and improvements.'" The committee senses more politicking and even a conspiracy!

"The very next year, in 1566, an occult synod convened for the express purpose of revising the Confession . . . at it several conspiring nobles were present, not as spectators, it seems, but as voting members . . ." and "the prime purpose of the 1566 revision was apparently to give the creed . . . a new sponsor and to make it over into the product of the faction that was . . . advocating magisterialization of the reform." In the subsequent "tug of war" between the two factions and later church dealing with the creed, it is suggested in the report that "the question must be asked if this assembly even knew that an 'occult' synod had tampered with the text. It would seem that the 'occult' synod had been 'occult' indeed, and quite far off the record" (p. 538).

The report asserts further that while the revised text came "down to us by way of the Synod of Dordt," the earlier text "was almost forgotten and was actually lost until a copy was found in rather recent years." "So scarce did the original version become that it is doubtful if the fathers of Dordt were even acquainted with it at all." In fact, for practical purposes the committee is really presenting to the public a new discovery! "Our present report is, to the best of our knowledge, the only comprehensive comparison ever made of the original text and the later revision as channeled through the Synod of Dordt" (p. 540, 541).

The last part of the committee report devotes some 21 pages (pp. 582-603) to a comparison of the differences between the accepted version of the creed and the obscure earlier version which it preferred and translated. The differences are many, some minor, others more extensive. The committee, for example, finds the later, accepted version showing "a more rationally speculative and abstract tendency than we see in deBres" (p. 583). It observes that "while deBres accentuated . . . the dignity and nobility of God, giving him all glory in man's creation, the revisionists underscored much more the responsibility and capability of man as created by God" (p. 585). It finds a difference in the treatment the two versions give of the doctrine of predestination with the official version "moving" toward a more symmetrical theology of election and reprobation" (pp. 587-9), a move it sees as contributing to later and present problems with this doctrine. While

the earlier version stresses the *benefit* of excommunication, the official version stresses it as a duty with a more "punitive" purpose (p. 593). While deBres emphasized the destruction of the world in God's dreadful judgment, the accepted version stressed its cleansing (p. 597).

It observes a "higher" view of the sacraments as "signs and seals" in the official version than in the earlier one (pp. 593-594, 600-601). What it especially stresses, however, is the way in which the later, official creed seeks the support and official backing of the government as expressed in the controversial and later altered Article 36. Its preferences are clearly for the obscure older version which it saw fit to translate.

### Professor Faber's Study and Evaluation

Obviously not many people are familiar enough with 16th Century Reformed church history to fairly evaluate or dispute a number of the committee's allegations about the earlier version of the creed and how it came to be revised into the one officially adopted and held by the churches for three and a half centuries. One who is able to give us the benefit of such an independent study and evaluation is Professor Jelle Faber of the Canadian (and American) Reformed Churches' theological school in Hamilton, Ontario. He has written from time to time about this report in the Canadian Reformed Magazine, *Clarion*, of which he is editor, published in Winnipeg. His observations are the more significant in view of the fact that he comes across as a very careful scholar, remarkably sympathetic and charitable in dealing even with a heretical Roman Catholic such as Hans Kung.

### "Thrilled and Appalled"

In the July 19, 1979 issue of *Clarion*, introducing the report to his readers, Editor Faber stated that he was "both thrilled and appalled" by it. "I was thrilled by the fact that we now have a translation into modern English of the original, personal text of the Confession of Faith as written by Guido deBres and published in 1561." "I checked the translation with the original and, although I have some objections in detail, this translation evokes the freshness and lucidity of deBres' French." "At the same time I was appalled by the manner in which this scholarly fine translation is used in an unprecedented attack on the Confession of Faith in its revised and now ecclesiastically binding text." "The whole interpretation by the Christian Reformed Committee of the differences between the editions of 1561, 1566, and 1619 is debatable." "When it speaks about the 'course of conflict between two schools of thought', it overestimates the difference between the original text of 1561 and the revised texts of 1566 and 1619. While the main revision already took place according to a procedure set by the Synod of Antwerp 1565, the difference in church-state relationships and in 'theological nuances' were not great. Does Report 33 not invent fictions of contrasts between Calvin and deBres...? The Report reads in this respect as a bad detective story." The committee's

# THE OUTLOOK

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"And the three companies blew the trumpets . . . and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands . . . and they cried, The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon" (Judges 7:20).

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treatment of the creed as a mere "historical document" "shows that the Reformed concept of binding to an authentic text of the confession, established by a General Synod, is abandoned. Acceptance of deBres' original version by the . . . Committee is nothing but acceptance of a *historical* document without strict ecclesiastical binding in the present. So the scholarly translation of deBres' words becomes a weapon against deBres' and our *confession*. The first is thrilling, the second appalling and dangerous."

### A Fictitious Conflict

In the August 25 issue of *Clarion* Professor Faber continues the discussion of this report, observing, "Everyone likes a well-told story. There are some story-tellers who so ingeniously weave truth and fiction together that you are almost inclined to believe everything they come up with." "If the matter were not so serious and if the authors themselves were not so convinced of the reality of their narration, one would compare the writers of this Report with such story-tellers." He proceeds to show by citing evidence that the case which the Report seeks to develop is essentially such a piece of fiction.

On the basis of this study Professor Faber says, "I do not believe the story of Report 33 at all. I even become indignant when I see how Guido deBres is played off against John Calvin and especially how this fabricated story is used in an attack on 'the current confession.'" He points out that the Report ignores "the important study by F.L. Rutgers *Calvijn's invloed op de Reformatie in de Nederlanden* which "calls de Bres a pupil of Calvin, who stood in personal relation to the Reformer" showing that "deBres met Calvin, studied under his leadership and acknowledged him as his teacher, who had formed him theologically and still guided him. Already in 1556 deBres corresponded with Calvin, whom he must have regarded as his spiritual father."

Faber further shows that the Report pointedly ignores the "well-known fact" that deBres' 1561 Belgic Confession closely parallels the French Confession of 1559. That French Confession "was the model" for and "is called the mother of the Belgic Confession." "Calvin wrote the draft of this French Confession and therefore the Reformer of Geneva can be called the spiritual grandfather—or 'ghost author,' if you like—of our Belgic Confession. Instead of playing off Guido deBres against Calvin, Report 33 would have acted more responsibly by pointing toward the similarity of thought of Calvin and deBres, the French and the Belgic Confession."\*

Professor Faber states further, "I do not believe the existence of a fundamental contrast between Calvin and deBres, or between the text of the Belgic Confession in 1561 and 'the Revision' . . . The political climate did not change soon after 1561; there is in 1566 no dawn of a new and different era." He shows how the committee report misrepresents the whole thrust of Calvin's tract. In that tract "Calvin did not reproach 'the *Flemish evangelicals* for failing to work toward an established status for their

\*Evidence for this is cited from the works of J.N. Bakhuizen van den Brink and C. Vonk.

version of the faith,'" but "He wrote against cowards who in their hearts acknowledged the truth of the gospel, but under seemingly pious appeal to the examples of Naaman (2 Kings 5:18) or Nicodemus continued to partake of Roman idolatry," a conviction exactly reflected by deBres in the last half of Article XXVIII of his Belgic Confession. "DeBres versus Calvin? Nonsense." "DeBres was no Nicodemite!" "Calvin's 'policy' . . . was also the 'policy' of his faithful student and pupil Guido deBres. Calvin's tracts and deBres' Confession agree rather than disagree. Report 33 is mistaken. It should be rewritten and publicly revoked."

### Concerning Predestination

In the November 3 *Clarion* Professor Faber considered at some length the claim of the committee report that there was a big difference between the deBres' earlier version of the creed and the later official version in their dealing with the doctrine of election and reprobation in Article 16. He shows that this is "another myth, comparable to the unhistoric fiction of a controversy between deBres and Calvin."

The committee translation of the early version he observes at one significant point appears to be the result of following an apparent printing error already corrected by the Antwerp Synod in 1565. "They restored the Confession according to deBres' original intention." "The whole story of Report 33 about a shift in dogmatic mood, namely, in the direction of a strict symmetry between election and reprobation, is nonsense. If you want to speak of a symmetry between God's attributes of mercy and justice, you will find it even more in the original, broader deBres version of 1561 than in the revision of 1566." Some scholars in the past, have, in fact, seen in the revision a toning down of the doctrine of election in deference to the Lutherans—exactly the opposite of what the committee claims! "Although I, for one" says Faber, "believe that the shortening of Article 16 in 1566 was a stylistic matter, it is remarkable that nobody ever in the revision of Article 16 discovered a trend to "emerging scholasticism" and a shift from Calvin to Beza, or some development of this kind. This is an invention by the Committee Report 33."

### Church and State

Finally in the December 1 *Clarion* Professor Faber considered the controversial Article 36 which deals with the relationship of the government to the church. He points out that whereas in the Netherlands a number of historians and theologians (he names 11 of them) had maintained that the "the revision of Article 36 in 1566 was caused by the new insight that the text of 1561 had commissioned the civil government with *too broad* a task in regard to the church" in America this committee (and others) have given an exactly opposite explanation, that the article was revised because the earlier version's assignment of responsibility to government was considered "*not broad enough!*" A contrast which can be read by scholars in two such opposite ways is hardly clear evidence for either claim. Professor

Faber's own opinion is that "the differences are, basically and really, slight" and he regards them "as mainly mere stylistic changes." Choosing one version instead of the other will not resolve the problems about Article 36.

### Dr. L. Praamsma's Observations

In our Christian Reformed Church circles it is unlikely that anyone could be found whose familiarity with the church history of the Reformation approaches that of Dr. Louis Praamsma. A biographer of John Calvin, who has taught in Calvin Seminary and recently wrote a number of volumes of church history in the Dutch which are in the process of being translated into English, and with a reputation as a careful scholar, he was asked by the C.R. Synod to serve as an added member of the translating committee but declined because of poor health. In the May 30, 1980 *Banner* (pp. 26, 27) he reacted to the series of articles on the 'career' of the Belgic Confession, written by Rev. L. Verduin," the member of the translating committee who was promoting the idea of the committee expressed in the Report. Dr. Praamsma expressed his "increasing amazement" as he read these articles. Especially in the accusation that there was a "hidden agenda at the Synod of Dordt" with that synod serving "political rather than theological purposes" he saw simply a rerun of old Arminian slanders of that Synod, which demanded his protest "because there is no solid grounds for it."

He wrote, "I would also protest against many of the theses of Verduin, because they are no more than hypotheses." Prominent among the 12 such groundless guesses which he lists are those which allege the conflict between Calvin the Flemish evangelicals and their churches. "With due respect for the scholarship and ingenuity of Mr. Verduin all these theses are, in my view, assumptions." Dr. Praamsma's observations parallel rather closely those of Professor Faber.

### Conclusions

1. As Professor Faber and Dr. Praamsma have indicated, we have in this report by the committee appointed to translate the Belgic Confession a case being made to justify the committee's setting aside the churches official historic creed in favor of an earlier almost unknown version. That case is based on the claim that there was serious conflict between the versions, and between deBres and the Flemish churches and Calvin and the other men of Geneva. Especially Professor Faber shows how implausible this case is because it lacks solid grounds and ignores evidence against it.

It is striking that although the committee report argues its case with vigor and enthusiasm, it at the same time tacitly admits that much of what it brings up is mere guesswork. The report is full of such qualifications as "apparently," "it seems" etc.

At the end of the argument seeking to promote the early version in opposition to the official revision we are given these remarkable conclusions: "We want to stress (1) that our analysis or interpretation of historical materials is also, of course,

provisional and ought to be regarded in that light." Again, "We want to emphasize (2) that we have no desire, in what follows to make an airtight case for the 1559/61 Confession in contrast to later revisions. The complications of history and historical rootedness of all man's efforts, including the very best, will not allow us to put this in black and white terms." (If it does not want to bring the church to any firm conclusions why has it labored so mightily to press such conclusions?) (p. 541).

Despite its disclaimers of wanting to reach firm conclusions the committee report at the end asks the Synod to approve its substituting of the old version for the revised and official one (p. 603)! It ought to be self-evident that such a collection of conjectures and guesses as these hardly constitute solid grounds that should induce a church to change its official creed.

2. Furthermore, the committee's manner of dealing with the creed, trying to substitute for it something else because it finds the older unapproved draft more in harmony with present day conditions and its own tastes than the one the church holds, is an irresponsible way to deal with the churches' official confession of faith. I may find this or that detail of the committee's argument personally appealing, but that does not give me or anyone else the right to smuggle our personal opinions or whims into the official confessions of the church! This procedure is, as Professor Faber properly observed, nothing but an effort to change the confessions without going through the proper gravamen procedure to make such changes.

3. The committee's approach to and handling of the creeds treats them as mere historical documents, subjects for discussion, but binding neither them nor anyone else. As Professor Faber aptly pointed out the committee said, "For by definition a creed written at a certain time, is an historical document. In our view it should not be rewritten or revised but only translated, at most, by later generations." "This statement shows that the Reformed concept of binding to an authentic text of the confession established by a General Synod, is abandoned. Acceptance of deBres' original version by the Christian Reformed Committee is nothing but acceptance of a *historical* document without strict ecclesiastical binding in the present. So the scholarly translation of deBres' words becomes a weapon against deBres' and our *confession*."

Faber is right. The Committee report is really, as he said, an "attack on the Belgic Confession," more insidious and more comprehensive, in its implications, than that of Dr. Harry Boer on the Canons of Dordt. It really reduces all the creeds, just as did the Presbyterian Confession of 1967, to a mere collection of historical antiquities which bind no one.\* As such an "attack" our synod should firmly reject it, as the recent synod (too politely) rejected Dr. Boer's misrepresentation of the Canons of Dordt. ●

\*It may be recalled that Rev. Philip Holtrop, one of the members of the committee, in the Feb. 1977 *Reformed Journal* proposed exactly this policy of treating creeds as historical documents, not to be used to bind anyone in the present. See my article "A New Sales Pitch for Modern Theology" in the May, 1977 *OUTLOOK*.

## *Reformed Women Speak*

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# ERA - THE EQUAL RESPONSIBILITIES AMENDMENT

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Laurie Vanden Heuvel

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The Equal Rights Amendment has attracted national attention in recent days. The Republican Party at its National Convention removed from its platform support for the ERA. Presidential candidate Ronald Reagan made it clear that the GOP was not thereby removing its support for women's rights, but was, in fact, *promoting* women's rights by *protecting* women from some of the abuses which are certain to result from passage of the ERA. He also pointed out that women have achieved many of their rights, such as equal pay for equal work (contrary to what the noisy ERA proponents are saying), and whatever wrongs remain to be corrected (if there are any) can be resolved by individual legislation.

The State of Iowa Republican Party similarly removed support of an ERA plank from its platform. The citizens of Iowa, however, will be put to a critical test when on November 4, 1980 they will be voting on an Equal Rights Amendment to the state constitution which says:

All men and women are, by nature, free and equal, and have certain inalienable rights — among which are those of enjoying and defending life and liberty, acquiring, possessing and protecting property, and pursuing and obtaining safety and happiness. Neither the State nor any of its political subdivisions shall, on the basis of gender, deny or restrict the equality of rights under the law.

At first glance, the amendment sounds generous and harmless. But a clear examination reveals that the amendment is dangerously ambiguous and broad. We are living in a time of social revolution and there is abundant evidence that the feminists and pro-abortionists stand ready to *exploit* this amendment on the federal and state levels to advance their goals. They parade the amendment as new "rights" for women when actually the amendment removes privileges from and increases the responsibilities for women.

### **A Deceptive Defense of Abortion**

Abortion is one of the "rights" that feminists hope

to cement into the constitution by federal and state ERA amendments. Abortion pioneer Lawrence Lader, in his book *Abortion II, Making the Revolution* makes the following statements:

No woman can call herself free who does not own and control her own body . . . I was convinced that abortion must be completely legalized as a backup emergency measure to contraception . . . the biggest step was to demand legalization as an inalienable right of woman, protected by the Constitution's Bill of Rights.

The pro-abortionists rationalize their position by insisting that since a man does not have to bear a child, a woman must have the "equal right" not to bear a child. If she finds herself pregnant, she should have constitutional protection and federal funding to abort her child. The language of the federal and state ERA amendments are broad enough to allow this interpretation of their provisions by any court.

Passage of the federal and state ERA amendments would also jeopardize the conscience clauses which now give hospitals and medical personnel the right to refuse to perform abortions. It could in fact, make it mandatory that hospitals and personnel perform abortions.

In an attempt to get their amendment passed, many pro-ERA enthusiasts insist that such interpretation will not be made by the courts. But it is important to remember that *an amendment will be interpreted by the language in which it is couched* not by the wishful thinking of some of its proponents. If ERA can be interpreted to give a woman her rights to abortion and federal or state funding for the same, it *will* be interpreted this way.

It is naive to think that feminists and pro-abortion organizations such as NOW (National Organization of Women), Planned Parenthood, National Abortion Rights Action League and American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) are not exploiting the ERA for their own purposes. Betty Friedan, founder of the NOW organization, fearing that some future Supreme Court may overturn the infamous decision to permit abortion taken by the Supreme Court in 1973, states:

as for reliance on future Supreme Courts — that's the reason we need ERA. If ERA goes through, no Supreme Court can overturn the decision of 1973.

### Other Abuses of Women

There are other changes which could result from the passage of ERA. On a national level, it could become impossible for a woman to draw social security benefits on her husband's earnings. This would force her out of her home into the labor force to earn her own income on which to claim future benefits.

On a national level, it could become *imperative* for women to be drafted and to be assigned to combat duty. The Yale Law Journal article of 1971, one of the best sources for understanding the purposes and effects of ERA says:

1. The amendment permits no exceptions . . . women will serve in all kinds of units . . . including combat duty. (p. 978)
2. Neither the right to privacy nor any unique physical characteristic justifies different treatment of the sexes . . . pregnancy justifies only slightly different conditions of service for women. (p. 969)
3. It will require the military to see women as it sees men. (p. 970)
4. All standards will have to be sex neutral. (p. 971)

### A Threat to Religious Freedom

As a result of the passage of either the national or state ERA, churches could lose their tax-exempt status for refocusing to ordain women to the offices of pastor, elder or deacon. Feminist movement NOW, in its leadership manual, *Revolution: Tomorrow is NOW*, states:

We demand that Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act be amended so that religious groups no longer have legal sanctions to discriminate on the basis of sex.

A constitutional amendment such as ERA would meet their demands.

### A Moral Threat

As a result of the passage of ERA, men and women could lose privacy in restroom privileges in public places.

Women could lose the special courtesies they are shown in places where they work.

Divorce laws would no longer favor the mother in alimony and child custody rights.

Homosexuals would also be given the right to marry, adopt children and teach our children.

Many pro-ERA enthusiasts deny that these things could happen as a result of the passage of national and state ERA amendments, but history has shown that all these changes are in the plans of those who

are working overtime to effect massive social change.

Several years ago former Senator Sam Ervin, chairman of the committee on Watergate proceedings, offered *amendments* to the national ERA which would allow for reasonable and beneficial distinctions for women under ERA. On behalf of women he proposed:

1. exemptions from the draft and combat duty,
2. preservation of protective labor legislation (much of which was won by the original "women's movement"),
3. preservation of laws which allow mothers, widows, or wives to remain in the home,
4. support from the father or spouse,
5. retain privacy between men and women,
6. maintenance of laws which make sex offenses against women punishable as crimes, and finally
7. an amendment that would recognize the physiological or functional differences between men and women.

All of these amendments *were defeated!* This shows how much headway the feminist movements have made in the federal government of this country.

The Equal Rights Amendment could better be renamed the Equal Responsibilities Amendment because it robs women of a privileged and protected position and places on them burdens and responsibilities which have been assigned by God to the husband as protector and provider.

Let no one think that there is *other* legislation which will protect women. Because ERA is a proposed amendment to a *constitution*, it takes precedence over any existing legislation which grants special consideration to the physiological or functional differences of women.

### Needed Action

On April 21, 1972 the Iowa State Legislature made a hasty decision to ratify the federal ERA with very little solicitation of the reactions of Iowa citizens. May the State of Iowa not make another perilous decision because of the inaction of Iowa citizens when they face an important referendum on this issue on November 4. I invite and urge concerned citizens of Iowa to write me to find out what concrete action they can take to defeat this amendment.

Let those who do not face a state ERA drive please pray that the federal ERA may *not receive* the ratification it needs from 3 more states before June 1, 1982 in order to become law. It must be defeated for the preservation of God's revealed will as it applies to church, family and national life. ●

*The address of Mrs. Vanden Heuvel, writer of this article and editor of this department, is 207 Kansas, N. W., Orange City, Iowa 51041.*

## "Knowing Ourselves as Sinners Who Live by God's Grace" (6)

Peter Y. De Jong

(Translation of Prof. C. Veenhof's *Om Kerk to Blijven*)

The church, let it be remembered, is the fellowship of those for whom Christ has become all in all.

This makes it radically different from and much more than a company of people who happen to profess and defend the same orthodox ideas and insights. All that is very well possible even when we can no longer speak in any sense about a true church. The Jewish "church" in the days of Christ's sojourn on earth affords classic and horrifying proof of such a situation. It was at that time God's people who in God's name and on the basis of God's Word killed God's Son as a blasphemer.

In sharp contrast the true church is that fellowship of people who truly see themselves as ungodly sinners; who therefore are humbled and broken before God's face; who now live only and continually according to God's Word by grace as it has been and is being revealed in Jesus Christ.

In a variety of ways Scripture describes for us what such knowledge of ourselves as sinners and such living by God's grace is and means for the church.

Christ speaks of this when characterizing His disciples as those who deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Him."

Here the Savior describes the essentials of true discipleship, that is, of being truly a member of His church.

Denying yourself — that means saying "No" to your self-centered, self-righteous, opinionated "I" and always and in all things seeking only Jesus Christ and His kingdom.

Taking up your cross — that is to accept willingly everything which God sends upon you in the way of difficulty, suffering, disappointment and sorrow, because God seeks through such experiences to stimulate you to put off the "old man" and put on the "new man" and so works that His grace is sufficient for you.

And following Jesus — that is steadfastly believing in and obeying the Gospel no matter along which dark and painful and dangerous ways this may lead.

The apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians binds upon the soul of the believers that in their mutual relationships they must be filled with the same "mind" which is also in Christ Jesus. This is the "mind" (attitude) which led Christ, when existing in the very form of God, not to count His being on an equality with God something to be maintained at all costs, but rather to surrender this by being born in the likeness of men, to assume the very form of a slave, to humble Himself to the lowest possible depths and so to become obedient unto death, yea, the very death of the cross.

This "mind" must induce the members of His body

to break radically with the basic sin of mankind, namely that of pleasing and maintaining oneself at all costs, in order humbly to account others worthier than self. By this (mind) each looks not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others.<sup>2</sup>

In addition Paul accentuates continually and emphatically that within the church a totally different life must become manifest than in the world.

Members of Christ's body, so he writes, are to put to death their members which are on earth. Resolutely and completely, they must break with the life-style which characterizes those who are without Christ and still live under the dominion of sin. Instead of serving sin they must put on the "new man" which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of God who has created them.<sup>3</sup>

Paul expresses the same thought when saying that believers must break with "the works of the flesh" and in place thereof reveal "the fruit of the Spirit."<sup>4</sup> All fornication, impurity, debauchery, sinful desire, covetousness, licentiousness, idolatry, witchcraft, discord, dissension, rancour, envy, fits of rage, vehemence, malice, self-seeking, divisions, factions, anger, slander, evil speech, drunkenness, orgies, etc. must be banished from the lives of those who are members of Christ's body. In their stead love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, compassion, goodness, humility, gentleness, longsuffering, self-control, etc. must be reflected in their lives.<sup>5</sup>

The new life which the Spirit of Christ quickens in His body, which is the church, Paul describes elsewhere as *faith which works through love*.

Such believing consists not in intellectual manipulations. Neither is it made manifest in the cultivation of ceremonies, religious emotions, experiences or activities. Nor does it appear in a painstaking preservation of custom or tradition. Indeed not! The activity of true faith consists in exercising an unbroken communion with Jesus Christ in whom God's love becomes fully manifest in the world by the power of God's Word and Spirit. Therefore faith reveals and works itself out in sincere love. Such believing is in its deepest reality an unfolding of energy, a demonstration of power in and through love.

In that love faith lives out its life to the full to give proof of its authenticity, its genuineness, its faithfulness and power.

Such love is the life-sphere of the church.

It is the bond of perfection, the indispensable unity of the congregation.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Matt. 16:24; Mk. 8:34; Luke 9:23; cf. also Matt. 10:38; 1 Pet. 2:21. <sup>2</sup>Phil. 2:1-11.

<sup>3</sup>Col. 3:1-15.

<sup>4</sup>Gal. 5:19, 22. Here Paul makes a precise, appropriate distinction.



He speaks about the works of the flesh, which are always and fully the work of men themselves. In sharp contrast he speaks about the fruit of the Spirit, wherein is "nothing of man." That "fruit" is entirely the work of the Spirit.

<sup>5</sup>In many places and in various ways throughout the New Testa-

ment the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit are mentioned and contrasted. Cf. Rom. 1:28f; 8:9, 13; Gal. 5:19f; Eph. 5:1f; Col. 3:5f; I Tim. 1:9f; 4:12; 6:11; II Tim. 2:22-26; Jms. 3:13f; I Pet. 2:11f; II Pet. 1:5f.

<sup>6</sup>Gal. 5:6; Col. 3:14; 2:2.

## A WORD LESSON

Stefan Trenev

Many words in the Bible have more than one meaning.

For instance: The primary use of the word "Pastor" is for shepherd, of "Elder" is for old men and women and of "Deacon" is for servant.

If we do not consider the difference between primary and other uses of words, then all shepherds will be ordained ministers of the Word, all old men and women ordained elders, all servants ordained deacons.

Notice in particular how this consideration applies to a proper understanding of Rom. 16:1.

"I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant (deaconess) of the church that is at Cenchreae:"

As we already saw "deacon" means "servant." But when we come to the Church of Christ, the Bible instructs us of two kinds of deacons.

First: All believers are called to be servants (deacons) in the assembly of Christ. "If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant (deacon) be: if any man serve me, him will the Father honor." Jn. 12:26

Second: Scripture tells us that there are also appointed, ordained deacons in the Church of Christ.

"Look ye out therefore, brethren, from among you seven men of good report, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business." "whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands upon them."

Acts 6:3, 6

"And let these also first be proved; then let them serve as deacons, if they be blameless." I Tim. 3:10

It will be against the teaching of the Bible for women to have authority over men, but ordained deacons do have authority in the Church of Christ in supervising various services to the believers, and of being a back-up of all that the ordained elders are doing.

Acts 6:1-4 I Tim. 3:8

So from Rom. 16:1 we conclude that Phoebe is a servant in the Church of Christ, just as all believers are called deacons. She is a "deaconess" not because she is ordained, but because she is a faithful servant in the church. To say that she is a deaconess because she is ordained is to deprive her and those like her of all the honor and praise that the Lord gives to them in commending them for their good deeds; and therefore the privilege to be rightly called **SERVANTS (DEACONS) OF THE CHURCH.**

Again it would be a ridiculous conclusion that wherever one reads the word for servant or "deacon" in the Bible to conclude that they all are ordained deacons in the church; for then all believers

would be ordained deacons.

Jn. 12:26

Furthermore all policemen will be ordained deacons too. "for he is a minister (deacon) of God to thee for good. . . ."

Rom. 13:4

What I think is lacking is not clarity on part of the Word of God, but fear on part of the people before the Word of God.

Brothers and sisters, our forerunners in the faith did not hold vain traditions of man, but were upholding the purity of the faith, once for ever delivered unto the saints, when they stated in the Belgic Confession, Article XXX:

"We believe that this true Church must be governed . . . when faithful MEN are chosen . . ."

Now may the Lord, who is the giver and preserver of His Holy Scripture grant us the same faithfulness and determination as to our forerunners in the faith and together with them to confess that we ". . . offer our backs to stripes, our tongues to knives, our mouths to gags, and our whole bodies to the fire, rather than deny the truth expressed in this Confession."

Belgic Confession, A.D. 1561

The word "Deacon" as it is used in all places in the New Testament:

### diakonos.

Mat. 20:26 let him be your *minister*;

22:13 Then said the king to the *servants*,

23:11 greatest among you shall be your *servant*.

Mar. 9:35 be last of all, and *servant* of all.

10:43 among you, shall be your *minister*:

Joh. 2: 5 His mother saith unto the *servants*,

9 the *servants* which drew the water

Joh. 12:26 there shall also my *servant* be:

Ro. 13: 4 For he is the *minister* of God to thee

— he is the *minister* of God, a revenger

15: 8 a *minister* of the circumcision for

16: 1 Phebe our sister, which is a *servant*

1 Co. 3: 5 *ministers* by whom ye believed,

2 Co. 3: 6 also hath made us able *ministers*

6: 4 ourselves as the *ministers* of God,

11:15 if his *ministers* also be transformed as the *ministers* of righteousness;

23 Are they *ministers* of Christ?

Gal. 2:17 (is) therefore Christ the *minister* of sin?

Eph. 3: 7 Whereof I was made a *minister*,

6:21 beloved brother and faithful *minister*

Phi. 1: 1 with the bishops and *deacons*:

Col. 1: 7 for you a faithful *minister* of Christ;

23 I Paul am made a *minister*;

25 Whereof I am made a *minister*,

4: 7 a faithful *minister* and fellowservant

1 Th. 3: 2 Timotheus, our brother, and *minister* of God,

1 Ti. 3: 8 Likewise (must) the *deacons* (be) grave,

12 *deacons* be the husbands of one wife,

4: 6 thou shalt be a good *minister* of

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# THE ALL SUFFICIENT WORD OF GOD

John Blankespoor

**"Abraham said unto him, They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them" (Luke 16:29).**

## Questions about "the Other Side"

Who has never thought about what lies on the other side of the grave? Or even, perhaps, asked himself, "Are we sure that there is another side?" Many times the thought has passed through my mind when someone has died, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if he could come back for a moment and tell us about the other side! That would be extremely helpful! An old man sitting on a park bench one summer day was asked a question by one of us regarding the other side of the grave. His immediate reply was, "no one has ever come back to tell us about it."

All such questions and thoughts even on the part of Christians arise out of some measure of unbelief. Suppose that someone would claim that he had come back from the other side; would people believe his 'story'? Responses would vary. One might say, "How do we know that he's speaking the truth?" Or, "How do we know that he was on the other side?" Another might suggest that it was all a fantasy. This is not the way to learn about the "other side."

We must never forget that the other side is spiritual and invisible to us who are still on this, the earthy side. How can we who are earthy understand or even perceive things that are spiritual and heavenly? We can't. Jesus Christ is the only one who can answer our questions about the other side. He arose on the other side, the spiritual side, of the grave. He also came back in earthly form to tell us about the other side and the blessings that lie beyond for His people. All of this is related to us in the Bible, the all-sufficient Word of God. We must constantly listen to it. It alone tells us all that we need to know. That, no doubt, is the main lesson of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

## Jesus' Parable

The first scene of the story reveals two men, opposites. Interestingly, the name of the poor man is given, but not the name of the rich man. The rich man lived in luxury, wore purple and fine linen every day. The poor man, Lazarus, was covered with festering, painful, untended sores, hungry, eager to be fed with whatever fell from the rich man's table (or, we would say, whatever was thrown into the garbage can). Medical help, he couldn't afford. Imagine him in his hunger, the dogs licking the sores which covered his body. We are also given a glimpse of the spiritual life of the rich man. Later he speaks of the need for repentance, something which he evidently did not have. Evidently he was a member of the church, for he calls Abraham his "father" and Abraham, in turn, calls him his son, suggesting that he was in some way in the covenant. He may have

been a Pharisee, with a formal religion, living by work-righteousness. But he apparently knew nothing of salvation by grace, of repentance, godliness, and the love that fulfills the law, even though he may have been in good standing or even a leader or elder in the church.

The second scene is in the hereafter. Both men died. We don't read anything about Lazarus' burial, but are told that the rich man was buried, which may imply that he was buried with honor and dignity, with mourners and friends in attendance—but no angels. Thereupon one of the men finds himself in heaven, the other in hell. Naturally, every detail mentioned in the story cannot be spiritualized. This we should never try to do in studying parables. We surely can't conclude from this story for example, that there will in the case of all people be some kind of communication between heaven and hell. But for the sake of the lesson which the Lord wants to teach us with this parable, he describes a conversation between these two men. We must try to understand and apply that lesson.

What is the lesson of this story? Its point is that this rich man did not listen to the powerful Word of God. Follow his reasoning. He asks that Lazarus be sent back to earth, being raised from the dead, to warn his five brothers. He must tell them that he has seen their brother in the place of torment and warn them lest they experience the same fate. Imagine what a moving testimony and message Lazarus could bring! He could tell the people that he had actually been in heaven and had also seen Dives (as the rich man is sometimes called) in the indescribable torments of God's wrath. What a sensational message that would be! That would surely move his five brothers to repent! This is the way he reasons.

His proposal implies that the testimony of Lazarus would be far more effective than the Word of God. In the parable that Word is called the Word of Moses and the prophets. Not the Word, but something special, phenomenal, tangible, is needed to really touch these people and bring about their conversion.

This idea is as common as human nature. People always crave something different, something special and visible. In the Roman Catholic Church for centuries this desire and demand has been met with the tangible images in the church and its worship. In the mass the literal body and blood of Christ are allegedly given.

What is Abraham's answer to the rich man's proposal? Let the five brothers on earth hear Moses and the prophets. And if they will not listen to them, they will not listen to someone who has actually returned from the other side of the grave, the heavenly side, to speak to people on earth.

Visualize someone such as Lazarus returning to

earth in our day, and appearing on the TV networks—the appearance of someone whom people knew had died and been buried! Who wouldn't tune in? Wouldn't watchers consider it the most fantastic experience of their lives? Wouldn't a message so given be effective in bringing thousands to conversion? "Not so," Abraham would answer. "If they don't listen to the Word they would not listen to someone who actually returned from the dead." This suggests how uniquely powerful the Word of God is. Listen to it!

### **Believing God's Word Precedes Seeing**

This is the time of the year in which we especially remember the great 16th Century Reformation. In it the Lord restored to the church especially three truths, (1) the sufficiency of Christ's blood for our righteousness, (2) justification by faith alone, and (3) the authority of God's Word. The last is, undoubtedly, the most important. The Word is the Word of Almighty God. Someone raised from the dead might, with the preaching of "hell and damnation" try to scare people into heaven, but he would actually save no one. When the dead hear the voice of the Son of God in His Word, they will live (John 5:25).

Let the rich man's brothers hear this Word. Let us listen to it. True sons and daughters of the Reformation respond to the good news of this Word.

To hear and listen to the Word means to receive it in faith, to trust in Christ and live by His Word. Then the love of Christ overwhelms us. It brings us to our knees in sorrow for sin and makes us love the Lord.

The rich man had, no doubt, heard the Word in some form, but he did not really listen to it for he did not repent and show that change by helping poor Lazarus.

Who of us does not hear the Word? Perhaps we go to church twice per Sunday and read the Bible daily. Is it possible that despite all of this exposure to the Word we do not really hear it? It surely is. That this parable teaches us. How can we know whether our faith in God's Word is genuine? The parable suggests a proof. Real faith produces repentance and helping the poor.

Real hearing of God's Word means daily living with it, meditating on it, feeding our souls with it, obeying it. Not the spectacular display of a man who would return from the "other side," but genuine, daily, listening to the Word is the way of the Lord. This is the spirit of the Reformation.

Lord, give us and our children faith in the Word. Let this be our daily prayer. May it never be said of us or our children that the Lord has taken His Word from us because we neglected to do anything with it.

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## **MORE ABOUT THE HOMOSEXUAL PROBLEM**

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Ring Star

With much interest I read the article of the Reverend W. Haverkamp in THE BANNER of April 25, 1980 with regard to the homosexual problem and the stand taken on it by the Reformed Church of the Netherlands. I am referring to this article because it gave renewed impetus to my concern which I have always felt about the position our own Christian Reformed Church has taken in the matter. Let me explain that concern.

### **A Synod Decision: True but Weak**

Our Synod of 1973 adopted as follows: "Homosexuality—as explicit homosexual practice—must be condemned as incompatible with obedience to the will of God as revealed in Scripture." With the truthfulness of this decision one can find no fault. However, some comment can be made.

The records of Scripture make it clear that the homosexual act is a most God-provoking sin, arousing His fury to the limit. When these records tell us that the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah was exceedingly great God in His mercy anthropomorphically said that He would go down and see if the sin of the cities was as great as the cry of it indicated. And when God came down to Sodom He saw the most revolting scene of homosexual intent at the home of Lot. And the pouring out of the fury of God's wrath over what He had seen could hardly wait for Lot and his family to find safety.

It goes without saying that other great sins besides homosexuality were committed within "the cities of the Plain" which contributed to the full measure of their guilt. But sin has a way of climaxing itself. It is worthy of note that just now within our nation when there is so much violence, disregard for authority, divorce, extra marital relations or forbidden sex, etc., there is an alarming upsurge of homosexuality. I do not exclude the possibility that within the borders of our nation—or for that matter over the world—sin will climax itself in much the same form as the sinful situation that brought on the downfall of Sodom and Gomorrah.

In connection with this outrage of homosexual perversion one cannot pass by the shameful raping of a Levite's concubine at the home of an elderly man at Gibeah of Benjamin. The above mentioned 1973 Synod Report 42 passes over this ugly incident without comment; but Scripture goes to great length (Judges 19, 20, 21) describing this sin and its consequences. As in the case of Sodom, God's holiness could tolerate no further delay in the execution of His justice. And the seriousness of the sin concerned (which was nothing less than homosexual lust running wild) is indicated by the fact that in the ensuing war it cost the nation of Israel besides the tribe of Benjamin 40,000 able-bodied men; and Benjamin itself was practically exterminated.

From this gruesome picture one cannot escape

the implication that throughout Israel generally, spirituality at the time was at a very low ebb. The result was the outrage at Gibeah. Sodom in its extremity of sin has been called a cesspool of immorality. The same may be said of Gilbeah. And Revelation figuratively refers to the world at the end of time as a great city which in its utter sinfulness is called Sodom (11:8). Of this sinfulness one may safely conclude homosexuality, along with other types of sex perversion, will constitute no small part.

These considerations call for stronger language to describe the sin of homosexual practice, so provoking to the justice of God, than the general terminology of being "incompatible with obedience" to God's will, true as that may be.

### Synod Denying the Sinners Responsibility

But there is another matter which has added much to my concern. It is occasioned by the following decision of Synod: "Homosexuality (male and female) is a condition of disordered sexuality which reflects the brokenness of our sinful world and for which the homosexual may himself bear only a minimal responsibility." From this quotation and other parts of the report one may definitely conclude that the intended idea is that the homosexual has little or in some cases no moral responsibility for his misdirected sexual condition. In somewhat different words, as I understand the reasoning of the matter, we are being told that the homosexual's sex drive in its origin is not sin but only then becomes such when complied with in the overt act of sexual satisfaction. That might very well lead one to dispose of the lustful scene at Lot's home as follows: the sexual desire that drove the Sodomites there may not in itself be looked upon as sinful, but only then became such when a desperate attempt was made to satisfy it.

At this point lies my difficulty. Speaking of males only, how does a man know whether he is homosexual? Simply by desiring sex relations with one of his own sex. (The word covet could be used here for desire.)

Now all coveting is not sin. There is virtuous coveting. But when coveting leads to an act that is forbidden by Divine law, then not only is the act sin, but also the coveting leading to the act. This is a Divinely inspired norm to which the Holy Scriptures know of no exceptions. How then can a homosexual be excused of most or all responsibility for a desire that if complied with leads him into sinful practices than which the Bible knows no greater?

The Report, as I understand it, explains the matter in somewhat this fashion! Even as a person cannot be held responsible for an unsightly birthmark or for that matter a physical or psychic handicap to which he himself wilfully has contributed nothing but which follows from the curse that lies upon nature, so the homosexual cannot be held responsible for his misdirected sexual condition. He himself has wilfully contributed little or nothing to bring it about, and therefore bears little or no responsibility for it.

Let us pause here for a moment's reflection. Does

it follow that to the extent that the homosexual has not wilfully contributed to his abnormal sex condition he cannot to that extent be held responsible for it? David said in Psalm 51 that he was brought forth in iniquity and that his mother conceived him in sin. The psalmist clearly acknowledges that the underlying cause of his sin with Bathsheba was his inborn depravity. And although he had in nowise wilfully contributed to that condition David assumed full responsibility for it. The homosexual has a desire. That desire if complied with leads him into the appalling sin of sexual copulation with another man. Who is prepared to say that that desire is not rooted in total depravity? And if it is, the homosexual, although not having wilfully contributed to his misdirected sex drive, is as much responsible for it as David was for the sinful condition that led him into the sin with Bathsheba.

### Misdirected Desire is Sin

To me the following is an inescapable conclusion. Jesus says in His sermon on the mount that "anyone who looks upon a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:28). How can anyone escape applying this to the homosexual? He then should read: "any man who looks upon a person of his own sex lustfully desiring sexual copulation with him (and that by the way is the only way the homosexual becomes aware of his homosexuality) has already committed adultery with that person in his heart." The Bible knows of no exceptions to the tenth commandment—all coveting that leads to sinful acts is in its essence sinful. How can the homosexual get from under this Divinely instituted injunction?

### The Miracle of God's Grace

Just one brief concluding remark. In the report under consideration one may read the following, and I quote: "To expect the means of grace and prayer to redirect a firmly fixed homosexual is to expect a miracle." The implication seems to be that to expect such a supernatural act to take place is beyond the limits of sound Christian faith. To me it is a Biblically sound position (and this is not to bypass the means of grace) that the process of sanctification from the beginning to the end is accomplished by the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit. What then is there wrong about a homosexual earnestly and prayerfully petitioning God to be healed of a condition that is constantly egging him on to commit the immorality of the exceedingly abominable homosexual act? If this is asking for a miracle then I for one still believe in miracles and believe that the petition is rightfully placed. And God will certainly comply with it all the more because the homosexual lust in itself is sinful. ●

*(Editor's Note: We recall that the Apostle Paul informed us that Corinthian Christians had been delivered from exactly these vices. I Cor. 6:9-11, "And such were some of you: But ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.")*

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# THESSALONIAN LESSONS

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Henry Vander Kam

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## AN EXHORTATION TO GODLY LIVING.

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### Lesson 5

### I Thessalonians 4:1-12

In all of the Pauline epistles there is a doctrinal section and a section dealing with the practical life of those whom he is addressing. Usually the doctrinal section comes first according to the rule: the practical life is based on the doctrines which are confessed. In this epistle he follows a somewhat different order. He spoke of practical matters from the beginning of this letter and later he will deal with a doctrinal matter.

#### The Christian "Walk"

He does begin a somewhat different topic at the beginning of this chapter. He begins to speak of practical matters more specifically than he has done in the first three chapters. He has a very healthy attitude to life and seeks to instill this attitude in the hearts of his readers. Doctrine may be perfectly sound but the life of a believer must correspond to the faith he professes. He therefore admonishes the Thessalonian Christians to live in such a manner that they may therein please the God they are serving. The Bible often speaks of life as a "walk." They have received instructions how they were to walk while the Apostle was with them. This was not his own teaching, but he spoke with the authority of his Lord. He has also discovered that they do seek to walk in such a way that they may be approved of God. For this he is thankful, yet, he would have them "abound more and more." They have not attained to perfection—and that is the ideal set before them. Now that they have come to the faith they must endeavor to walk "worthily of God, who calleth you into his own kingdom and glory" (2:12). They are, therefore, to remember the instructions which he gave them while he was with them.

#### "Called to Holiness"

The will of God for their lives is their sanctification. When a person has received salvation he has indeed received a great gift, but there is more to it. To be justified is wonderful, but God's purpose doesn't stop there. One of the greatest weaknesses among men, is that they stop here. They are saved! What more can be desired? There are even some who believe that they can then do as they please. Paul shows them that God desires their sanctification! Their lives are to be "set apart" for His service. He

demands a life of devotion and of gratitude for the salvation which they have received. They are therefore to abstain from fornication. This sin is singled out because it was so common in the heathen world of that day. Women were held in low esteem and the readers of this epistle lived in one of the important and busy cities of that day. There immorality was common. The person who professes faith in Jesus Christ may not live as the majority of the people of that day lived. They are set apart! The sanctifying work of the Spirit of God is taking place in their lives. They must co-operate in this work.

#### Holy Marriage

This sanctified manner of life is also to be reflected in the marriage relationship. The immorality of the day had undermined the marriage relationship, in fact, it became the first victim of that immorality. God's people are to live in a different manner. Each man is to take a wife according to the rules of the Word of God. God has instituted marriage and He also lays down the rules for it. The taking of a wife is to be done according to the holiness which is to characterize Christians. They are to marry in the Lord. They are to hold the wife in honor! This is the opposite of the manner of the heathen of their day. They are not to live with their wives in the passion of lust which disregards all decency. This the Gentiles do, and these Christians may not live as the Gentiles. For, those people do not know God (Rom. 1) and as a result they are a law unto themselves.

There is considerable difference of opinion on the meaning of verse 6. Some believe that the author is here dealing with a different subject from the one treated in the previous two verses—that he here deals with the matter of defrauding a brother in business dealings. However, I believe that he is still dealing with the subject of immorality. No one should go beyond what is proper in the matter of obtaining a wife or living with her. Whenever men do go beyond what is proper, they defraud someone else, they take someone else's wife or daughter. Immoral conduct always brings injustice to another. The brother who is defrauded may not even be aware of the injustice which has been done him, but God sees and He is avenger!

We forewarned you and testified to you about these things, says the Apostle, while he was with

them in Thessalonica. We should not lose sight of the *many* things he taught them in that short time he was with them. He had to bring the gospel so that they might know the way of salvation. Besides this, he taught them the proper manner of life. All in the space of a few weeks! What is the secret of such comprehensive teaching? He brought them the whole counsel of God! He preached the Word! He did not lead them to salvation and then allow them to flounder.

The conclusion of the whole matter is this: God called us not for uncleanness, but in sanctification. He has given wonderful gifts and He demands the thanks for those gifts. No uncleanness can ever be approved by Him. Real faith produces "fruits" of virtuous living. "By their fruits ye shall know them." Justification must lead to sanctification.

Those who might reject this teaching of Paul are not just rejecting him but are also rejecting God. He is fully persuaded that the message he brings is indeed the Word of God. In this, of course, he is simply repeating what his Lord had also taught. The rejectors obviously reject God because He has sent His Spirit Who testifies to the truth of the Word spoken. They thus reject the works of the Spirit. That Holy Spirit is at work in making Christians more holy.

### Brotherly Love

Love of the brethren is a common New Testament theme. John writes about it in his Gospel and also in his epistles. Paul also mentions it again and again. Of course, this belongs to the very nature of the Christian life. As a result, Paul does not feel that he has to write at length about this subject because they are taught of God. Anyone who believes the gospel from the heart will naturally love his brother. Note that he speaks of love to the *brethren*. That is a different love from that to those who are outside of the brotherhood. Today love is often the only theme men know—but the Apostle makes it very clear what love is and then does not engage in an elaboration of the obvious. Where true faith has been instilled in the heart, this love will become evident. He therefore also makes mention of the fact that these Christians do show this love to the brethren in "all Macedonia." Living in the kind of city that Thessalonica was, they come in contact with believers scattered throughout Macedonia and their dealings with these believers reveal the faith they have embraced. This is wonderful, and Paul is very pleased with it. Yet, he would urge them to "abound more and more" (see vs. 1). There is always room for improvement, and they are to be encouraged to persist in their Christian walk.

### Learn to Be Calm

The words "and that ye study to be quiet" are not very clear to anyone reading this epistle in our day. It would be a better translation to read: "and be ambitious to live calmly." Then one sees that the Apostle is urging them to try to live as calmly and soberly as possible. This does not mean that he is

cautioning them against a zeal for the gospel or against a zeal for holy living. His own life shows that he is filled with a consuming zeal for the cause of Jesus Christ. What does he have in mind? He is writing to the Thessalonian church which is "worked up" to the extreme concerning the return of Christ. This is a theme which has often been neglected in the history of the church, but it can also be over-emphasized. This theme of the Lord's return had been overemphasized among the Thessalonians. He urges them to strive to live calmly. They must be about their "own business." They have meddled in the affairs of others and are making it difficult for the leaders in the church who do not share the extreme feelings about the return of the Savior.

### Diligent Workers

One of the things which is necessary for the calm life which he encourages is that they work with their own hands. Apparently the great majority in this church were laboring people. But, if Christ will return soon, why work? That is the extreme to which their faulty view of the return of Christ had led them. Manual labor is not to be held in contempt. They will not be engaged in a lesser activity if they are found working with their hands when the Lord comes again than if they were engaged in prayer or some other "spiritual" activity! Of course, they also do not know the time of His return. Let the church, the people of God, go diligently about its business, regardless of the time. His people are called to be faithful! They are to be obedient! Again he refers to the fact that he had instructed them in these matters while he was with them! Certainly, the coming of our Lord must color the whole life of believers—but not in the sense that they may neglect their work and calling in the day in which they live.

This command to do the work to which they have been called is also necessary for them to make the proper impression on those who are outside of the circle of believers. If they are not faithful in doing their common work, but look only for the return of Christ, they will be judged as extremists by those who are without. The person who is only able to talk about and engage in "spiritual" things, has lost his balance. It is totally unnatural and we should be natural concerning spiritual things and spiritual about the natural things! There is also another very practical side to the issue: the one who stops working with his hands is not going to be able to support himself and will become dependent on others. The Apostle admonishes Christians to work diligently with their hands so that they will not suffer any material need. Our Lord has indeed commanded His people to take care of the poor, but He also wants His followers to work so that they will not be in need but will be able to help those who are in real need. Poverty in itself is no virtue! It is to be avoided if at all possible.

So the Apostle has given them some guidelines for the godly life. Here the words are addressed to people laboring under a false conception concerning the time of the return of Christ; but these words are timeless. They are needed in our time.

### Questions for discussion:

1. What is the nature of a truly Christian life? Is it one of commandment upon commandment? How are freedom and commandment related in a Christian life?
2. Paul was in Thessalonica only a few weeks. What does his example of teaching and preaching say to us in our mission work? What does it say to those who believe that everything must be made very simple?
3. What is sanctification? How does it differ from

justification? Is it important to know the difference? Some never get beyond the joy of being saved. What do you think of that attitude? Is it dangerous?

4. How does our faith influence our marriage relationship? Family relationship?
5. Are the labors of our hands "good works"? (L.D. 33) Is work a blessing? Explain.
6. Is it an indication of true spirituality if one always talks about spiritual things and neglects his daily work?

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## CONCERNING THOSE WHO DIED BEFORE THE LORD'S RETURN.

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### Lesson 6

### I Thessalonians 4:13-18

As we have said before, the Apostle had covered a large number of subjects in the brief period of time he had been permitted to work in Thessalonica. This is instructive for the church of later ages because it is thereby advised as to the method of preaching the whole counsel of God. Of course, Paul had spoken to the Thessalonians concerning the work accomplished by Jesus Christ while He was here on earth. He had emphasized the need of repentance and faith. He had instructed them in the kind of life which is to be the product of faith. But, he had done more. No gospel is complete which fails to deal with all the events which have taken place or are to take place in our redemption. Consequently he had also spoken to them about the return of Christ.

### Worry about Christians who Have Died

It need not surprise us that these Thessalonians did not immediately understand all the things in which he had instructed them. Nor should it surprise us that various problems arose among them when they reflected upon the teaching which they had received. There was also the possibility that they might have misunderstood some of the things which they had been taught. This passage deals with one of their misunderstandings. They seem to have received the impression that Christ would return soon—in their own life-time. Some of their brethren who had been converted as a result of the Apostolic preaching in their city had died. Their concern is: are those who have died going to be at a disadvantage when the Savior returns? They have no doubt concerning the salvation of those who have died, but, will they not have the glorious experience of welcoming the Christ of God when He returns to take His people to Himself? Paul answers this particular problem in this section.

He introduces the subject in a manner which is common in the Pauline writings. He does not want them to be or remain in ignorance concerning this matter. Such ignorance would rob them of the comfort which they ought to possess. Their concern regarding this subject gives evidence of a real love

relationship which they have toward those who have passed away. They want these to share the same benefits which they themselves will enjoy when the Savior returns. They fear that those loved ones who have departed from this life will not share the same blessing which will be theirs. However, this rests on a misunderstanding and the Apostle will not allow them to continue in this ignorance.

### Hope for those Fallen Asleep

He speaks of the departed ones as "them that fall asleep." It is significant that the New Testament reserves this figure of speech for the believers who have died. Death is not final for them, no more than sleep is final. Sleep is a necessary experience for a healthy life. Sleep gives rest and also gives the promise of awakening! Ignorance concerning these must be removed because otherwise there is the danger that the Thessalonian Christians will sorrow for them in the same way that the heathen who have no hope sorrow. Wrong views always rob the individual of the riches which have been given him to enjoy. The rest, i.e., the heathen, have no hope. Theirs is an impoverished life. Their view of the body, both in Greek and Roman thought, is that it will perish. They had considered the body to be the "prison house" of the spirit. But, they also have no hope concerning the spirit! Because they have no hope they, of course, have no comfort. Surely, such a view may not be entertained by those who have learned to know Christ!

### Dependence on Christ's Resurrection

Paul now seeks to lay a firm foundation for the Christian hope and comfort. He refers to the resurrection of Christ. That is the only hope. The words he uses are translated as though the matter is conditional — "If we believe." This is not his purpose at all. It is a form he often uses whereby he takes for granted that those to whom he is writing believe it without a doubt. It is certain that Jesus died and rose again. What is the effect of this resurrection? If

you believe that He rose — you must conclude that those who are His will also rise. The original has "through Jesus" instead of "in Jesus." Grammatically there are problems in this verse, but the clear meaning is: when the resurrected Jesus comes again God will bring those who have fallen asleep in Jesus with the Lord! In other words, their departed loved ones will accompany Jesus when He returns! Therefore, they are not excluded from the blessings and glory of His return!

### **The Lord's Revelation**

The subject with which he is dealing and concerning which he will have much more to say later, is one which is tremendously important. It is still future so that it is more difficult to understand than those things which have already happened. Paul is not going to give his own view on this subject, but realizes that only the Lord Himself is able to speak to this subject. He now refers to a word of the Lord which we cannot find in the gospels. This is no problem, however, to those who take the Bible seriously. John tells us at the close of his gospel that there were many other things which Jesus did which are not recorded in his gospel (John 21:25) and, no doubt, there were also many other things which were said by our Lord which have not been recorded. Acts 20:35 is an instance of this as well as verse 15 of this chapter. This word of Jesus was known to Paul. The Lord had made it clear that those who would be alive at the time of His return would not precede, be ahead of, those who had fallen asleep. These Thessalonians may therefore rest assured that their departed loved ones will not be at a disadvantage when He returns.

### **The Sound of His Coming**

The writer now describes, in a general way, the manner of the return of Christ at the last day. We must note that he is here describing that return only as it has reference to believers. This is a very important passage dealing with our Lord's return and must not be overlooked when we consider other passages such as those in the book of Revelation. The first coming of the Lord was in humiliation — the second is not. Few realized that the Son of God had come into this earth at the time of His first coming — the whole world will know it at the time of the second coming. There are, of course, many other dissimilarities. He begins by saying that the Lord will descend and utter a shout! It is really a shouted command. It is a word used in military circles where the leader gives such a shouted command to his troops. It is used of leaders calling those under them to action. So Christ will descend and shout His commands. It will be a shout which is creative and life-giving. At that shout the dead will rise! It is a shout which penetrates where no word of anyone has penetrated before. It is a shout of victory and by means of it He claims all that which He has earned with His redemptive work.

The voice of the archangel will also be heard. Although we are by no means certain concerning the

orders of the angels, Scripture leaves no doubt regarding the first importance of the archangel. Michael is called archangel in Jude 9 and he is the only one so named in Scripture. Daniel calls him one of the chief princes (Daniel 10). This mighty angel now raises his voice as the mighty Christ descends from heaven to earth. The shout of Christ and the voice of the archangel make it clear that the return of Christ will be public and open and audible. No one will have to be told: lo He is here! The shout of Christ reaches into the graves and it will then certainly reach the ears of those still living. The voice of the archangel resounds through the whole universe. The trumpet of God will also sound. Christ shouts; the archangel raises his voice; and God blows the trumpet! The "day of days" has arrived! All heaven rejoices! The mighty "Conqueror" comes to claim all that is His.

### **Christ's Dead Rise First**

Having given this brief description of the manner of Christ's return, the writer now returns to the subject he had begun to treat. When He so returns, the dead in Christ shall rise first! This is just the opposite of their fears. Instead of being at a disadvantage — they are the first to profit from His return! All their fears are groundless. Now they can have true comfort concerning those who have preceded them in death. From this point of view, it is no advantage to be still alive at the time when Christ returns in glory.

### **What of the Living?**

"Then we that are alive, that are left . . ." There is, of course, no neglect of those who will still be living at that time. They also shall share in that glorious renewal. The fact that Paul uses the word "we" in this connection has led some to believe that he thought he would be among those still living at the time of the second coming. However, this is unwarranted. It is rather: we, the living — in contrast with those who have fallen asleep. In other places Paul has made it very clear that there are various things which must happen before the Lord returns, which things could scarcely happen during the short time he would still live.

### **The "Rapture"?**

The following words have become the occasion for all kinds of fanciful interpretations. A rapture? What kind of rapture? We must listen closely to the words which the Apostle has written. He indeed speaks of both those who had previously died and those believers still alive at His coming being caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. This is Scripture! The emphasis falls on the suddenness. It includes both groups of believers and nothing is here said about unbelievers. The two groups of believers are not caught up to Him at different times. Nothing is done in secret. There will be no time left to convert. The die is cast, He comes to judge.



Believers shall meet Him in the air. This is the kind of welcome which is reserved for dignitaries of the highest rank. Ever since they believed they were the property of Christ. Paul speaks time and again that the true believers are "in Christ." But, the relationship in which they will stand to Christ after His return will be much more glorious. "So" shall we ever be with the Lord! Their bodies have been resurrected or have been completely changed in the twinkling of an eye. Now with redeemed bodies as well as souls — "so" shall they ever be with Him. Never shall this glorious union be dissolved.

They must now comfort each other with this truth. Ignorance of these truths had brought much misery into their lives. Now that they know the truth — they will be able to go their way rejoicing.

#### Questions for discussion:

1. Does ignorance of the truth often rob us of comfort? Can it also give ungrounded hope? What does considering these questions teach us regarding the importance of true doctrine?
2. What is the present state of "those who fall asleep in Jesus"? Is it a "perfect" state? Explain.
3. Does one who questions the historicity of Christ's resurrection have any hope?
4. Is it a loss for us that we don't have all the words Jesus spoke? Explain.
5. What is the work of angels? Has enough attention been paid by the church to the Scriptures' teaching concerning angels?
6. Do you think that modern day evangelism pays sufficient attention to the doctrine of the second coming of Christ? If not, is it a full gospel? ●



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## CHURCH GROWTH IN CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCHES: DE GEREFORMEERDE KERKEN IN THE NETHERLANDS.

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Neal Hegeman

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### Introduction

In this series of articles on Church growth in the Christian Reformed Churches around the world we can also include an analysis of a sister church to which the CRC has historical, ethnic, theological and ecclesiastical ties. Like the CRC, the GKN is a product of the Afscheiding (Secession) of 1834 and the Doleantie (Kuyper) movement of 1886, when certain Reformed Christians within the state church of the Netherlands separated from the state church and formed their own congregations. The separation or secession was due to many factors which included the liberal and oppressive hierararchical condition of the state church, as well as the pietistic and independent spirit of the seceders. The Doleantie added a rational and culturally progressive dimension to the secession churches. The CRC, which came into formal existence in 1857, is also a by-product of the Afscheiding and Doleantie, as the bulk of its membership were Dutch and Reformed immigrants.

Historically, the Dutch state church (Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk: NHK) was considered liberal in her deviations from Biblical and Reformed standards, while the GKN was considered more conservative and orthodox in her interpretations of Scripture and confession. That traditional view has radically changed. Now one finds conservatives within both the NHK and GKN as well as many liberals. Both churches are theologically split. Conservatives with the NHK are organized in fellowships such as

the Gereformeerde Bond (Reformed Fellowship) or individual churches take it upon themselves to call orthodox ministers and perpetuate orthodoxy at the local level. In the GKN there seems to be very little organization among the conservatives.

The curse of theological pluralism within the denominations has crippled the church. Its condition reminds one of the words of Jesus:

"Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand" (Mt. 12:25).

One finds regrouping taking place within the denomination, as well as outside of these denominational walls. Churches such as the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (CGK), Gereformeerde Gemeenten (GG), Oude Gereformeerde (OG), find their roots in the NHK, while the Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt), both the Binnen Verbond and the Buiten Verbond find their roots in the GKN. It seems that this process of splitting has proceeded far enough to provide the Dutch Reformed Christian with a smorgasbord variety of religious and reformed expressions to suit his taste.

Religious pluralism has come into the Reformed Churches not only over conservative doctrinal hair-splitting, but also because of the lack of discipline against liberalism. Liberal teachings which openly deny the truth of Scripture and the integrity of the confessions are allowed to remain within the confines of the church (GKN). Men such as Wiersinga

and Kuitert remain in the denomination without being disciplined and attract a following of ministers, members and even churches. Secular notions concerning evolution, humanism, and communism (to name the obvious) are well engrained in the Church. Liberalism is heard from the pulpits. At a service which I attended the preacher informed the congregation (on the basis of Psalm 1:1, and Mt. 25) that it did not matter whether we were Jewish, Christian, Muslim or whatever; as long as we did what was right, that was good enough. He continued by saying: "Het is niet wat je gelooft maar wat je doet" (It is not what you believe but what you do). Then came the gospel call: "Do mee, Do mee, Do mee" (participate, participate, participate). When the preacher finished preaching it was disappointing to see the elder shake his hand (which is the traditional sign that the sermon was acceptable) and together with the minister walk out of the door to the consistory room. It is understandable that preachers deliver liberal sermons (The CRC is not immune to that either.), but it is far more serious that the elders do not discern what is gospel and what is cheap grace. If the elder cannot discipline the preaching of the Word, then the true administration (and meaning) of the sacraments, as well as the exercise of discipline will falter. A complete reversal is taking place within the GKN. The factors of liberalism, hierarchical oppression, and apathy which caused the seceders to form new churches, are now clearly manifested within the GKN.

What has happened within the GKN? There are many ways in which to analyze this question and, depending on one's own presuppositions to give a variety of answers. The presuppositions in this article will be the Biblical teachings as found in the 3 forms of unity of the Reformed Churches. The instruments used to analyze the above question are church growth statistics in which we find evidences as to how the Church is growing and why she is growing this way. Church growth is measured by gathering statistics on evangelism growth, transfer membership growth, natural growth and total numerical growth. The information was gathered while on a trip to the Netherlands when it was possible to purchase a 1980 Yearbook, read articles, interview and speak with members, office-bearers and ministers. For an outsider to the GKN it is difficult to make a detailed analysis but for a member of Christ's Church it is possible to know what's going on in the Christian Church universal, due to its common basis. The statistics cited are from the 1980 Yearbook which contains the 1978 information. The interpretation of the statistics will indicate what is happening within the GKN and what would be applicable to 1979 and 1980.

### Evangelism Growth (EG)

According to the 1980 Yearbook of the GKN, evangelism growth was minimal, which suggests that the GKN is neglecting her evangelistic responsibilities.

The irony that is portrayed in the Yearbook is

that only 470 adult baptisms were recorded in a church with a membership of over 866,000. A total of 593 members came to the GKN from non-church backgrounds. Added to this irony is the fact that 13,000-14,000 members were actively involved in the GKN evangelism programs. Even though there is interest in doing evangelism, the GKN records a minimal amount of converts from outside of the church.

The traditional definition for evangelism in the GKN was "the proclamation of the gospel to them who are estranged from the gospel" (Yearbook, "Jaaroverzicht," pg. 520). More specifically this refers to the non-church people. The GKN has outreaches to Muslims, 3rd world students and Surinamers. Efforts and plans are being made to reach the growing number of non-church people in the Netherlands as well. However, despite all the programs and good intentions, the adult baptism figure stands at 470.

Perhaps some will say that converts are not important, and that as long as there is a witness in Word or Deed, the rest is up to God. This is not the experience of a healthy Body of Christ. A healthy Church plants but also harvests. (Acts 2:41) Perhaps the harvest is not the same in every church, but there must be a harvest. Is the GKN able to receive new Christian converts into her churches? Will new converts be filled with the milk and meat of the gospel?

There is an attempt to redefine evangelism (Yearbook, "Jaaroverzicht," p. 520) as witness in life-style, good deeds and working together. The emphasis is more on Deed than Word ministry. Hopefully the Church will recover her Word ministry and keep the balance between Deed and Word. We must always realize that good works are prepared by the Lord so we can carry them out. The recipients of the 'good works' should know where these blessings are coming from and why (Eph. 2:10, Romans 2:4).

Another area of evangelism toward which the Church is starting to direct itself is among the baptized members who have left the church. The Yearbook reports 1896 baptized members leaving the GKN. As one member of the GKN put it: "Before we can expect to evangelize in the world we must evangelize in the church..."

Evangelism within the church is necessary before evangelism to the world can be properly and fruitfully practised. The Yearbook reports that some members within the GKN present an obstacle to evangelism in that they either don't know the gospel or they are not interested in the gospel or they are against the content of the gospel. Such resistance undermines effective evangelism growth.

The following are popular theories as to why results of evangelism are so meager.

- 1) The Netherlands contains so many nominal and confessing Christians, that non-church people are hard to locate.
- 2) New converts are more attracted to fundamental and evangelical Churches than the GKN.
- 3) The GKN has too much cultural and doc-

trinal baggage involved in her tradition which makes it difficult for an outsider to join the church.

The above might be good sociological reasons for slow evangelism-growth, but they are no valid excuses for failing to carry out the evangelism mandate (Mt. 28:19f). Reformed churches in similar situations and facing the same factors have more growth than the GKN. The GKN must examine their lack of fruitfulness in gathering in the non-Christians. Any leadership, membership, theologies and other factors which would prevent them from being evangelistically responsible must be rooted out.

What has the Church gained if she wins a few members through the evangelism committee while she loses thousands of baptized members and confessing members? The evangelism committee might add a few names to the Church rolls but the elders scratch them off by the dozens. As with the CRC in America, the GKN must become the kind of church which is spiritually responsible and able to fulfill her evangelism mandate in the world, and be part of the building of the Body of Christ.

### Transfer Growth

Transfer growth is calculated by adding the members coming into the church and subtracting those who left. A gain of 1 person does not mean that only one person transferred but that the overall gain was 1.

The GKN Yearbook has an interesting title for transfer growth, namely: "Grensverkeer," or "Border-crossings." There are many Church borders and non-Church borders which GKN members are crossing. These borders can be divided into four categories 1) Reformed, 2) Catholic, 3) Evangelical, and 4) non-Church.

The Reformed groups experienced a moderate number of border crossings. Of these groups, only the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken gained more than they lost to the GKN (-74). The GKN gained 30 from the GK, 312 from the NHK, 25 from the GG. These border-crossings can be both theological or sociological. Many cross-denominational marriages take place and hence occasion transfer of membership. In 1978 there were 2848 cross-denominational marriages in the GKN. One also hears of membership transfer due to theological issues. Sometimes whole sections of a church switch denominational titles. Considering the turmoil in the GKN between the liberals and conservatives one can expect a continuation of the regrouping process under the conservative element of the GKN and Reformed Churches.

The GKN gained 150 more members than she lost from the RCC. Again this could be purely sociological or perhaps theological. Within the Reformed Churches there is an effort to work with the RCC. Exchange of pulpits and ecumenical meetings are very common.

The GKN lost more members to Fundamental and Evangelical Churches such as 104 to the Baptist, 71

to the Free Evang. Congregation, 18 to the Salvation Army and 357 to the Pentecostal groups. Considering the total membership of the GKN and the tremendous impact Pentecostalism has had, these numbers are not very high.

When we review the membership transfer between churches we notice a movement from the right to the left. Members are being gained from the RCC and NHK but being lost to the Evangelical Churches. The GKN comes out as moderate, being able to accommodate both the right and the left.

The largest transfer movement was to non-Church categories, totaling 1869 loss.

The total transfer loss amounted to 1,196 in 1978, contributing to the overall loss of over 2,000 members in the GKN in 1978.

### Membership Growth

The number of people becoming confessing members in the GKN increased in 1978. There were 477,685 members in 1978 and 476,601 members in 1977 an increase of 1,084. On the other hand, the GKN lost 3,005 baptized members since 1977. Interestingly enough, the lowest source of membership loss was through church discipline. In 1978 only 20 confessing members were disciplined from the Church. This number was lower than the 23 in 1977 and the 81 in 1976. Also, 39 baptized members were disciplined from the Church bringing the total to 59. This number seems very small when one considers that 231 were disciplined in 1979 in the CRC, which has a total membership of roughly one third the size of the GKN.

Membership growth is not primarily due to evangelism, nor because of transfer growth, but mainly due to the Christian family. Biological growth is the greatest source of membership. There were 389,258 baptized members in the GKN of which 11,433 were children of GKN members baptized in 1978. The Christian family as well as the Christian schools and societies provide a positive environment for church growth, a marked and consistent feature of most Reformed Churches.

### Natural Growth

Natural growth consists of biological growth and loss within the Church. We have mentioned the large amount of births within the Church. Deaths were about one-half that amount, 477 baptized members died and 5,855 confessing members passed away. Despite the number of deaths, the natural growth within the church accounted for 5,131 members in 1978.

Natural growth, as a source of Church membership, is decreasing within the GKN, as well as in the CRC. This drop can be attributed to smaller family planning and changing attitudes toward the family. An increasing threat to the family, perhaps not within the church, is the acceptability of abortion in the Netherlands. Even the new Christian party, the CDA is not strong on its abortion stand.

Natural growth is the strongest element of Church growth within the GKN.

## Total Numerical Growth

The following summary of statistics are recorded in the Yearbook and arranged according to church growth categories.

1) Evangelism growth	470	Adult baptisms	
	593	Total from non-Church background	
2) Transfer growth	-1,195	Figured in with membership growth	
3) Membership growth			
	A. Baptized memb.	-338	
	B. Conf. memb.	-1,857	
	Total	-2,195	
4) Natural growth			
	A. Bapt. memb. of GKN	11,433	
	B. Bapt. memb. who died	-447	
	C. Conf. memb. who died	-5,855	
	Total	5,131	
5) Total membership	1978	1977	1976
A. Bapt. memb	389,258	392,263	394,856
B. Conf. memb.	477,685	476,601	473,016
Total	866,943	868,864	867,872

## Conclusion

In interpreting the 1978 statistics we have the advantage of living in 1980 and seeing whether the church growth analysis is accurate or not. Do the same patterns continue? Where are the GKN going? It would take more of an expert on the GKN to answer these questions in detail, therefore the writer will conclude with some closing comments.

There seems to be an erosion of *authority* in the GKN. Whereas in the past the authority of the Church was based on the Bible and the 3 Forms of Unity, now the 'silence of Scripture' is a popular argument. Other voices are listened to such as those of science, political ideologies and philosophies which contradict Scriptural teachings. This split authority is seen in interpreting the Bible, carrying

out the duties of office as well as living the Christian life.

No doubt every Church faces the issues of increasing secularization and liberalization but it is the mark of the true Church to withstand and counteract the non-Christian movements and to do this as a whole Church. The GKN as a denomination is faltering in this area, though some local churches still seek to and do manifest the marks of the true Church (Belgic Confession, Art. 29). The question arises: "Can the CRC maintain fellowship with a Church which is manifesting the marks of the false church?"

How can the GKN be helped? Undoubtedly the revival or reformation has to come from within. This will be very difficult because the basic means for Church action and discipline, the eldership or consistory has been undermined to include members who Biblically and confessionally should not be there. The recent report and decision to allow practicing homosexuals to be church members and office-bearers undermines the building of Biblical offices in the Church. It will be difficult to obtain or maintain the true preaching of the Word, as ministers are allowed to be liberal or conservative. It will be difficult to have communion of the saints, if the elders cannot properly oversee the members and the administration of the sacraments.

The CRC has opportunity to address the GKN through the Reformed Ecumenical Synod as well as through synodical action. The ecclesiastical sins must not be tolerated but addressed seriously. The CRC must also prepare for the onslaught of the same heresies. We historically know that some leaders in the CRC follow the trends in the Netherlands. We can expect the issue of children at the Lord's Supper to be raised within the CRC as it has already been raised in the Netherlands. Those who are concerned about these issues should formulate a Biblical and confessional stance so that they will be prepared to meet the challenge when it arises.

Finally, may it be our hope and prayer that the GKN will return to her only source and strength, Christ as revealed through Word and Spirit, and so bring glory to God. ●

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# MENDELSSOHN ON THE MINISTRY

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Peter De Jong

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One of the most thrilling portrayals of the gospel ministry in all of the world of music has to be Felix Mendelssohn's dramatization of the call to it in his famous oratorio, *St. Paul*.

In the words of Scripture, interspersed with some of the grand old chorales, the composer recalls the martyrdom of Stephen and the emergence of Saul as bitterest opponent and persecutor of the Christian faith, and then sets to music the dramatic Biblical ac-

count of his conversion on the road to Damascus. (Undoubtedly Mendelssohn's own Jewish background helped him to enter the more sympathetically into these events.) After the recitative of Saul's encounter with the Lord in the way, the composer introduces a chorus singing the words of Isaiah 60:1,2, "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross

darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee." And he immediately follows this with the chorale which is the theme song of the whole oratorio, familiar to us in the English words, "Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying."

Returning to the Biblical narrative, the composition follows Saul to Damascus and his encounter with Ananias, completing his conversion from a persecutor into a confessor and preacher of Christ. Then in a remarkable turn (that may suggest to us a characteristically "Calvinistic" understanding of Scripture) the composer has us reflect on the meaning to this tremendous event in a chorus that exegeses, word by word, more carefully than many a preacher, the lines of Paul's great doxology in Romans 11:33,36, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! . . . to whom be the glory for ever. Amen." The reiterated Biblical words are sung in a musical climax that is indescribable and unforgettable!

Part II begins at this point reminding us in another chorus that "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ . . . for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest" (Revelation 11:15, 15:4). In the framework of this announcement Paul and Barnabas are then in the words of Acts 13:2,3 ordered and sent out on their mission. The composer follows this commission with Barnabas and Paul singing as a melodic duet, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead . . ." (2 Cor. 5:20). By repetition the music drives home the astounding fact that we are to

speak in the "stead" of CHRIST — that GOD admonishes through us! The chorus comes in to acclaim with the words of Romans 10:15,18 the incomparable vocation of the messengers, "How lovely are the messengers that preach us the gospel of peace! Their sound is gone out to all the lands and their words to all the world."

After this what more could be added? The composition takes another fascinating turn. After informing us that the missionaries went out joyfully bringing their message the soprano soloist invites each hearer, "Let us sing of the grace of God and declare His truth for ever!" A fitting way to conclude this remarkable musical reminder of the glory of the gospel calling.

If this splendid piece of gospel music is not familiar you ought to get acquainted with it. When so much music, even religious music, seems thin and transient, we ought to learn, as notably Martin Luther and some of his great musician followers did, how the gospel themes of God's grace and glory may be sung as well as spoken in some of the greatest of classical music.

Note: Mendelssohn's sensitivity to gospel themes, so profoundly expressed in the middle section of the St. Paul, regrettably seems to falter when later in the oratorio he has the apostles address the idolatrous pagans in Lystra (Acts 14:8ff.) with the words borrowed from the letter to the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 3:16,17) "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" Great musicians can fumble just as well as theologians. And we have to learn to discriminate in our appreciation of great Christian classics, helped by their Biblical insights, but avoiding their errors.

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# THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

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Lubbertus Oostendorp

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## FAITH AND SALVATION

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### The Great Salvation

Salvation is a complex and many-sided thing. Christ's own teachings clearly demonstrate this fact. Nor are the Pauline doctrines less comprehensive. Salvation has a past, a present and a future. It involves a justification which God effects outside of us (for us), a sanctification which Christ effects in us, and a glorification which involves a redeemed environment. When Paul says that the Gospel is the power of God unto *salvation* to everyone that believes, he implies the whole salvation is the portion of the believer. All things are ours by faith.

### "Faith" Becomes Popular

"Faith" is the in thing today. Philosophers and scientists who once contemptuously rejected this distinctively human function, now speak respectfully of faith. It has in fact become the secret weapon of politicians and the magical charm of the psychologist. A stream of books try to teach us how to have faith in ourselves. Basically President Eisenhower summed it all up with the profound advice that we must have "faith in faith" (which may be some kind of idolatry).

## Emphasis on Experience

For many years the distinction between historical faith and true saving faith has been recognized. As the bane of a dead orthodoxy marred the faith of seventeenth century Protestantism, many serious ministers began to warn against a mere intellectual faith. Pleas for a vital or experiential faith were heard in both Lutheran and Reformed churches. With the advent of Pietism the issue took on new vigor and a basically new form. Once the object had been to create a vital approach to doctrine. Now Pietism declared all doctrine to be suspect. "No creed but Christ; no doctrine but a life" became the slogan.

### "No Creed but Christ"

In its more radical forms Pietism rejected all historic creeds. Sometimes it replaced them with simpler creedal statements or new doctrines. More often it tried to present the person of Jesus without any doctrine. While an earlier revivalism had led to a widening gap between a large visible church and a narrow group of true believers, the modern non-doctrinal evangelism seems to have a very different result. Once it was necessary to accept doctrinally and morally a body of truth and hopefully experience and live all this in a vital experimental way. Now one has only to "accept Jesus" or "want to be saved."

### "No Propositional Truth"

Now comes the "existential gospel." Kuitert in his *The Reality of the Faith* sees a direct historical and logical connection between Pietism and Existentialism. Only existentialism has gone several steps further. Pietism had irrational elements. Existentialism is irrationalism! Kuitert rightly describes this as the "faith in a Christ of the vanishing point." The radical existential theologian goes far beyond the Pietist. For the latter, creeds might be true but of little use. For the committed existentialist there is no propositional truth. The purpose of the Gospel and the faith which it creates have little relationship with the historical concept of "true saving faith." A Christian becomes then that person who experiences true existence or becomes an authentic person through some kind of confrontation with the "Person" of Jesus Christ.

### Toward a Meaningless Faith

For most "Christian" existentialists the Gospel need not be factually true. Its truth lies in its effect. Myth serves this end as well as objective truth! Since believing is always and only a momentary experience, "salvation" is at best a series of existential moments. Thus both salvation and faith have lost their Scriptural meaning.

### I Must Know My Sin

In all this confusion, the Heidelberg Catechism

still serves as a most helpful guide. By placing saving faith in the context of sin and redemption, the Catechism describes the essence of salvation. As we have seen in a previous article and again in existentialism, failure to diagnose the illness inevitably leads to the prescription of a wrong cure. This is not only theoretically true. It is of utmost experiential importance to know "how great my sins and miseries are." Since sin and the just judgment of a righteous God are not merely a guilt feeling, but objectively real, we need a Savior to deal with the sin problem. Too much modern evangelism has ignored the basic need. Not having begun at the beginning it cannot proceed toward the right ending.

### Salvation by True Faith

The Heidelberg, moreover, does not speculate about salvation outside the areas of true faith. Karl Barth seems to have touched off a mass movement toward some kind of universalism. Although he abounds in ambiguous explanations of his position, he always comes back to a humanity forgiven prior to and apart from faith. He does speak about "saved by faith" or "justified by faith" but explains it subjectively as a knowing or experiencing of what is already there for all men. The Catechism takes all of this into the area of objectivity. "Only those are saved who are ingrafted into Christ by a true faith." Here no comfort at all is offered to unbelief!

### No Universalism

The leaven of a speculative universalism is everywhere. The Roman Catholics talk of the "church incognito" while Protestant missionaries carry on dialogue with other religions. Compromise and cooperation are extended to unbelieving Jews and Rabbis are included in ministerial associations. In a long conversation in Nigeria with the late Dr. Kato, I was given an insight into what he called the "incipient universalism" in African missions. Rightly he insisted on the duty to preach to the pagans as to those who are lost and need to accept Christ to be saved.

### Salvation Only by Faith

A modified universalism is being supported by a great variety of speculations. Calvin warned against trying to arrive at salvation from the nature of God rather than from His expressed will. Formerly liberalism argued from a universal fatherhood or an absolute love. To this has been added the "triumph of grace." Or if there still remain questions one can always appeal for almost any position to the "freedom of God." One can at least "hope that hell will be empty." Or try to picture all men redeemed by the very fact of the incarnation.

The list could be longer. But one thing characterizes all of these speculations. They lay the foundation for an unwarranted comfort to the unbeliever. The utmost earnestness of the Gospel is being lost. We can offer to sinful humanity only one way. Saving faith — what is it? ●



**SATAN CAST OUT: A Study In Biblical Demonology**, by Frederick S. Leahy. Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh. 1975. 181 pages, paper. \$2.50. Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien, pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa.

The subject of demons, though not a pleasant one, is being discussed today especially because of the rise of the occult. Christians want to know what the Bible says about them. There are several books available on the subject, but this one is by far the best. It avoids extremes. The pastor of the Kilraughts Reformed Presbyterian Church of County Antrim, Ireland has given us a thorough study of the subject (though some in the Reformed tradition might disagree with his explanation of elect and reprobate angels).

Leahy explains the Biblical teaching of angels — both good and evil. He gives an amillennial picture of Satan's present position. He deals with the strategy of Satan and how he is our adversary. Then he looks at passages from both the Old and New Testaments which discuss the phenomenon of demon possession. Demonic activity since New Testament times and the present day evidences of demon possession also come up for discussion. Several important appendices conclude the book.

Pastor Leahy takes the position that demon-possession is a present reality but that only unbelievers can experience this. The believer has been transformed and delivered from even the possibility of being possessed by demons.

Perhaps the key to the importance of this volume is a quote from page 47: "We must strike a Scriptural balance between the truth that Satan is a crushed, defeated foe, and the truth that he is on the prowl like a hungry lion. In other words, we must avoid the extreme of regarding him as a reigning foe, and the extreme, equally wrong, of not taking him seriously. Both extremes are condemned by Scripture."

**THE LIVES OF PHILIP AND MATTHEW HENRY**, by J. B. Williams. Banner of Truth, Edinburgh. 1974. xlviii + 488 + xxxii + 323 pages. \$11.95.

**THE LIFE AND LABOURS OF ASAHEL NETTLETON**, by Bennet Tyler and Andrew Bonar. Banner of Truth, Edinburgh. 1975. xvi + 454 pages. \$8.50.

Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien, pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa.

Both of these volumes are reprints of volumes no longer available to hunters for books in the secondhand stores. The one on Nettleton was first published in 1854. The one about the Henrys (father and son) is really a combination volume. The first part of the volume which is the life of Matthew Henry's father was written by the commentator and published in 1698. J. B. Williams wrote a life of the famous commentator which was published in 1828. About the same time he corrected and enlarged the life of Philip Henry.

Obviously the volume on the Henrys is a fine addition to the already impressive set of reprints that the Banner of Truth has done. It takes its place with the other volumes on Church History and Biography. This like the others is worthy of a place beside also their volumes by recent authors.

Many a student for society meetings uses the commentaries by Matthew Henry. His name is still a household word. Perhaps few really know about the Presbyterian minister at Chester who faithfully broke the bread of life to God's people there for some 25 years. If one can get past the old style of writing in this volume he will find it full of precious spiritual insights and some helpful insights into the history of the Christian Church.

The same can be said about the volume on Nettleton. Written somewhat later, however, its style is easier to read.

Who is Nettleton? Few of us have ever really heard of him, I am sure, but many of us have met him through his works. When we sing, "Come, thou Fount of ev'ry blessing . . ." we are singing a beautiful hymn by Asahel Nettleton. Of course, he was known for more than his hymn. He was an evangelist who was active in the days of revival in the United States from the late 1790's through the early 1840's. His evangelism was that which was in line with Brainerd and Edwards but which was in distinct opposition to that of Finney and those who followed him. Finney's evangelism was, of course, distinctly Arminian in nature. Nettleton wanted to be true to the truths of the Reformation. He would give warning, however, that the rise of Finney's type of evangelism would bring an eclipse to the true preaching of the Gospel. And he was right!

In a day such as this when we hear much about evangelism and when we are encouraged to do it from what we are told is the only Christian approach — that of Arminianism — it is good for us to know about Nettleton and his presentation of the Gospel nearly 200 years ago. His theme was, just as we sing in his song, "O to grace how great a debtor.

Daily I'm constrained to be."

**FOUR ESSAYS ON THE CONFESSIONS**. The Reformed Fellowship of Canada. \$2.50. Reformed Fellowship of Canada, 44 West Ave., St. Thomas, Ontario, N54 3RF, Canada. Reviewed by Rev. John Byker.

One of the basic commitments of the Reformed Fellowship of Canada from its inception was the production of various materials which would be usable in the preservation and promotion of the Reformed faith. The objective of this relatively small body was born in the midst of a controversy in which the foundation of that faith was in jeopardy.

As a result of that commitment, the Reformed Fellowship of Canada produces "The Reformed View," its official monthly organ, and "Viewpoint," a periodical intended to assist believers in understanding and preserving the historic faith.

The subjects covered in Four Essays on the Confessions are: "The Origin and Function of the Confessions" by Rev. Neil Pronk; "The Content of the Creeds," by Herman C. Hanko; "Living the Confession," by Peter DeJong; and "Do We Need a New Confession" by J.G. Vos.

Pronk makes clear why and to what extent the confessions are under attack, particularly today. He defines a creed as "a fixed formula summarizing the essential articles of the Christian religion and enjoying the sanction of ecclesiastical authority." The definition is followed by a valuable delineation of various creeds, familiar to a Reformed believer. Philip Schaff is quoted to indicate the value and use of the creeds: "They are summaries of the doctrines of the Bible, aids to its sound understanding, bonds of union among their professors, public standards and guards against false doctrine and practice."

In his examination of "The Content of the Creeds," Hanko says, "The Church brings this, 'Scriptures,' organic unity to expression in her Confessions." Before proceeding to give in summary the teachings of the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, and the Westminster Confession, the writer discusses interpreting Scripture by Scripture. This analysis serves as an excellent introduction to the study of the content of the various creeds.

DeJong, in "Living the Confession," emphasizes that the Creeds are the fulfillment of the Lord's promise "to guide His people into all truth;" that by the teaching of doctrines of the gospel delineated in the Confessions, spiritual life is initiated and develops. Because teaching and living are inseparable, the author stresses the necessity of renewed appreciation of our heritage expressed in the Creeds.

The notion "mere church creeds" is discredited by Vos in "Do We Need a New Confession." He points out that twentieth century attempts to formulate new creeds have been retrogressive rather than progressive; have produced less and not given the church greater riches.

Vos's concluding statement focuses penetratingly on clamor for creedal revision and of new expression. He says, "The Church and its people have to struggle desperately today to maintain a grip on the

old Reformation confessions. Not until we have really mastered them and practiced them, and stood on the shoulders of the godly men who were used to produce them, do we need something more and something beyond. Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

A review can but give a flavor of a literary production. An understanding of the issues expressed in these essays are vital for those who desire to impart a commitment to the preservation and promotion of our Reformed heritage. It would be difficult to speak too highly of this work. It should be read by believers who value the historic faith, be used as a reference, and as a text book for catechumens. I can think of no one who could not profit from these essays.

In his presentation, Professor H. Hanko concludes by observing, "It is because of the sad fact that the creeds are unknown, that heresy easily enters into the church and runs rampant, robbing the church of her confession. But to the extent that the church does not know her confession and loses the truth of the Scriptures, she becomes also no longer the church but only a caricature of the body of Christ. It is therefore of utmost urgency that the church today once again know her creeds, know her confession, and know that her confession is the very truth of the Word of God and the very truth of God Himself, Whom to know is life eternal." This statement expresses the urgency with which the Reformed Fellowship of Canada produced the booklet, and the fervency with which I recommend it.

**ABRAHAM KUYPER**, by Frank Vanden Berg. St. Catherines, Ont.: Paideia Press, 1978. \$4.95. 282 pp. Reviewed by Joseph Hall, Associate Professor of Church History and Librarian, St. Louis, MO.

For those who wish to know at length what a many-sided distinctly Reformed man Abraham Kuyper was, this book will be a revelation. For those who wish to be entertained with light reading and beau-

tiful prose, this book will bore them stiff.

Vanden Berg's *Kuyper* is not an easy book to read. One must appreciate and, indeed, have some background knowledge of, the Dutch socio-religious situation before he can really profit from the work.

Vanden Berg's subject — not his style which indeed is wooden to a fault — makes the book profitable. It is not hyperbolic to say that Kuyper was the dominating figure on the Dutch scene certainly for a generation around the turn of the century (say, 1885-1915). Seldom have God's gracious gifts been so replete and varied in one individual. The gifted preacher, university founder, theological professor, reformer and politician met in Abraham Kuyper. One controlling thought pervaded Kuyper's thinking and doing — God as sovereign savior must also be Lord over all of life. Practical implications were not simply that the Church should be sound in the biblical or Reformed faith but also that education, society, arts, politics, *et alii* must be brought under the aegis of conscious recognition and articulation of God's sovereignty.

Indeed Kuyper had great reason to underscore the sovereign, unilateral nature of God's grace. Had he not been educated under some of the continent's most erudite liberal theologians and imbibed their liberalism? Had he not been providentially placed as pastor in a country church where Christian people ministered to him, the pastor, the Gospel of God's saving grace? Had not God marvelously changed the liberal Kuyper into a man who claimed Christ alone as Savior and Lord? The answer returns with a resounding affirmative!

How then should Kuyper serve his Lord? For Kuyper God's sovereign grace meant nothing less than total subordination in all of one's life. Perhaps no modern man exhibits better than does Kuyper what Christian holism is all about. The book presents such a man.

Vanden Berg chooses primarily to highlight the polemical Kuyper — as church reformer and statesman.

As a church reformer Kuyper, as the leader of a reforming group, laudably wished to reform the church from within. Not wishing to secede or form another communion this group desired to theologically educate the state church membership over a period of years. Partially toward this end the Free University of Amsterdam was founded. Secondly, the reformers wished to "cast off the yoke of 1816" by which the church became subordinate to the state. Thirdly, the plan called for reforming and revitalizing the church according to the Dordt Church Order. Lamentably their plan could not be brought to fruition due to early liberal opposition. The result was expulsion and the formation of a new church independent from the state. Throughout the struggle Kuyper looms as a Herculean figure busily writing, exhorting and encouraging the return to a sound Reformed faith.

Today we do well to appreciate the Reformed legacy given us. Not only vigilance, but also a vital practice is needed to secure continued freedom in this precious faith. May we have Kuyper's appreciative spirit if not his necessary polemics.

Finally Kuyper is presented as a statesman *par excellence*. Reaching the highest elected post, Prime Minister, Kuyper brought Reformed Christian principles to bear in politics. As a leader of a Christian political party Kuyper was successful in bringing about notable, lasting and just changes primarily in labor and education.

Kuyper's influence was not limited to the Netherlands alone. Indeed his reputation is international. In 1898 he was elected to give the Stone Lecture Series at Princeton Theological Seminary. These lectures were published and are entitled *Calvinism*.

It is hoped many may read Vanden Berg's *Kuyper* and may catch something of the same spirit of this great man who sought to be true to the Reformed faith but, equally important, attempted to bring it to bear on every human endeavor, to the glory of God!