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**William Tyndale**

Published by  
The Christian Education Committee  
of  
THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

January, 1994

# ORDAINED SERVANT

## Statement Of Purpose

*Ordained Servant* exists to provide solid materials for the equipping of office-bearers to serve more faithfully. The goal of this journal is to assist the ordained servants of the church to become more fruitful in their particular ministry so that they in turn will be more capable to prepare God's people for works of service. To attain this goal *Ordained Servant* will include articles (both old and new) of a theoretical and practical nature with the emphasis tending toward practical articles wrestling with perennial and thorny problems encountered by office-bearers.

## Editorial Policy

1. *Ordained Servant* publishes articles inculcating biblical presbyterianism in accord with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and helpful articles from collateral Reformed traditions; however, views expressed by the writers do not necessarily represent the position of *Ordained Servant* or of the Church.

2. *Ordained Servant* occasionally publishes articles on issues on which differing positions are taken by officers in good standing in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. *Ordained Servant* does not intend to take a partisan stand, but welcomes articles from various viewpoints in harmony with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Published for the Christian Education Committee of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church  
under direction of  
Dr. James Gidley, Mr. David Winslow, Rev. Larry Wilson and Rev. Jack Peterson  
by PLEROMA PRESS, Box 242, Carson N.D. 58529

Address correspondence to the editor: G. I. Williamson, 119 Normal College Ave., Sheldon IA 51201

Subscription price is \$12 per year. *Ordained Servant* will be published from 2 to 4 times per year in the present format. Do *not* send subscriptions to the editor but to *PLEROMA PRESS*.  
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## EDITORIAL

Among the issues raised in the discussions which have taken place between representatives of the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church is that of the terms for communicant church membership. On the one hand it is said that the OPC 'only' requires people to make a credible profession of faith. It does not, in other words, require that every communicant member

directly affirm adherence to the Westminster Standards. The Canadian Reformed Churches, on the other hand, include within their first membership vow a direct reference to the Reformed confessions.<sup>1</sup> Because of my involvement in some of these

<sup>1</sup> "...do you wholeheartedly believe the doctrine of the Word of God, summarized in the confessions..."

ecumenical discussions I was very much impressed, when I heard the lecture by Professor Kamphuis, with its relevance to this matter. It is my conviction, after hearing what he had to say, that there is very little difference between us. Anyone who answers the four membership vows of the OPC in the affirmative is bound to receive and adhere to the doctrine of the Bible. And the doctrine of the Bible *is* the doctrine summarized in our confessions. It has never been my understanding, therefore, that we can receive people into membership in the OPC who are in fundamental and conscious opposition to the doctrine of our Confession. But what about Mrs. Mordecai? She became a member of one of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand in the late years of her life and sometimes showed a lack of clear and consistent understanding of the Reformed system of doctrine. She wasn't consciously *against* it—far from it. But it is a fact that she did not attain to an understanding of it in the same way that she would have had she been catechized from her youth in these doctrines. I believe that it would have been wrong to deny her membership in the church even though it would have been stretching the truth to say that she could say (with sufficient understanding) "I subscribe to the Westminster Standards." I therefore do not believe that it would be wise to ask more than we do in the four questions that we presently use in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in receiving people as communicant church members.

But that is not all. In discussing this matter with some of the pastors and elders of the Canadian Reformed Churches I get the distinct impression that there is hardly any difference at all *when it comes to actual practice*. They too are able to find a way of allowing even mentally handicapped people to become communicant members of their churches. I am sure that they would manage to find room for someone like Mrs. Mordecai. It is my understanding that they will also labor—sometimes for many years—with a brother or a sister (who is already a communicant member) who just can't see that infant baptism is required in the Bible. They tolerate, in other words—at least for a time—a degree of deviation from strict adherence to the confessions on the part of communicant church members in very much the same pastoral way that we do. And it is right here that I found Professor Kamphuis' paper so helpful, because he too draws the line of distinction that I believe we both need to clarify and adhere to. More is required of the ministers, elders and deacons of the church than is required of the other members. And one of the primary differences is found in the sphere of subscription. What is tolerable with

respect to the one is not with respect to the other. It is my hope that Professor Kamphuis' paper will help in this important discussion.

\* \* \*

In this issue of *Ordained Servant* we are pleased to respond to a request from the organizers of an International Theological Conference by including information about a forthcoming event. While this Theological Conference is not being sponsored by the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC)—to which the Orthodox Presbyterian Church now belongs—it does have a close affinity with it. It is our hope that this Conference will have the support of the growing body of churches that belong to the ICRC and that it will also attract the attention of others who want to be Reformed. The address to write to for more information is included in the article.

\* \* \*

From time to time in this journal we have invited your 'feedback' and, as this issue demonstrates, this has not been in vain. In this issue we present a cogently reasoned response to an earlier article on the subject of discipline. Perhaps there is something that *you* ought to say for the benefit of your fellow pastors, elders or deacons. If you do send a contribution it is helpful if we receive it in clear printed form.

**We goofed!**

**In the previous issue of *Ordained Servant* we included a stimulating article by Mr. R. Dean Anderson, a New Zealander who is presently studying at the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) in Kampen. We regret that the citation appearing on page 76 (which read: *Wij geloven...dat er ook Opzieners en Diakenen (molten) Zion, om met de herders to Zion awls even road (Lat. quasi senates) der Kirk*) was quite inaccurate. It should have read "*Wij geloven...dat er ook Opzieners en Diakenen (moeten) zijn, om met de herders te zijn als een raad der Kerk.*" We apologize for treating the Dutch language so badly.**

# Pointers for Elders and Deacons

## Part 3

### From DIENST

#### **3. THE DEACON ON VISIT:**

##### **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.**

##### **3.1 Listening and questioning.**

When a deacon visits someone he should remember that most people don't like to flaunt their troubles, and find it difficult to ask for help. It is also true that someone doesn't readily own up to his own shortcomings in serving others. For that reason the deacon should not try to remain superficial in his discussion, for then his visits will be rather unfruitful. Instead, he must make every effort to penetrate below the surface. In that connection the deacon should learn to listen and to ask questions. That is not the easiest thing to do. In the first place proper listening is difficult. In doing so the deacon must not only listen to what is said but also to what is not said. He must never assume too quickly that he has understood the other person's difficulty. For that reason, too, it is necessary for him to ask questions. If he really wants to know what is going on in a family, he must come with more daring questions than is normally the case on social visits. He is after all a deacon and he comes not to satisfy his own curiosity but to give a tangible form to Christ's mercy. Needless to say he must overcome his diffidence. All this, of course, should be done with tact.

That is why he will have to take care that he does not ask the questions mentioned in 2 in a formal or literal way. In so doing he would come on too strong and the result will be that the people become close-mouthed. With probing questions the deacon must show, that he is aware of the fact that he is becoming very personal. He should also give the other person the chance to answer the questions or not. That, however, does not take away from the fact that only through penetrating questions will the deacon receive answers that will help him to do his work. Only when he has diagnosed the problem correctly, can he offer the appropriate help, be it money or advice.

##### **3.2 Two kinds of visits**

The deacon is installed as an office bearer. For practical reasons only part of the congregation is assigned to him. That being the case he should not shirk his responsibility for that part. It is the custom among us that elders do this by means of two kinds of visits.

– The official, yearly family visit brought by two office bearers to all members of the congregation.

– The unscheduled visits mostly brought by one office bearer. There is often a particular reason for these visits and they are paid to those who need them most.

In my opinion it is sensible and practical to maintain a similar distinction for the visits of the deacons. I will go into more detail about the deacon visits in what follows.

#### **4. THE OFFICIAL FAMILY VISIT**

##### **4.1 Direction, frequency and length.**

In view of its official character it is best done by two deacons. Together they hear more. They can also support and complement each other during the discussion.

Naturally, one of them, preferably the district deacon, (if there is one, see 6) leads the discussion. The leader opens the discussion and gives it a proper direction. It is also up to him to ask the probing questions. The leader also brings the discussion to a conclusion. After that his fellow-office bearer can close with prayer.

It is difficult to say how often a family visit ought to be made. Generally there are fewer deacons than elders, therefore, a yearly visit to all members is a heavy work load for the deacon. Probably a visit once every two or three years would be manageable. Even if there were more deacons than elders, it would still not be advisable, for the subjects of discussion for deacons is limited. The elders by virtue of their office must oversee all aspects of family and congregational life and, therefore, they have plenty of material

for discussion. That is different with the deacons. Their duty is to pay attention to the mutual service of the congregation. On each visit they have to talk about that. If they would do so each year their visits would become rather meaningless and repetitive. Such would be far less the case if there are two or three years between visits.

To be sure, the subject of mutual service is a comprehensive one, and half an evening is probably not enough to discuss all of it. However, dividing the subject material over two visits is not recommended. It is far better to spend one whole evening on it.

#### **4. 2 Informing the Congregation.**

It is a generally known fact, that the deacons themselves, as well as the congregation, are confused about the task of the deacons. That is how we began this article. People would be rather startled if all of a sudden they would receive a family visit from two deacons. That is why it makes sense that the deacons publish something about the content and purpose of deaconal family visits in the local church bulletin on a yearly basis.

For that matter it would be instructive if the deacons informed the congregation about further work done by them. It should be made clear that even in a time of affluence the deacons have plenty of work to do. Serving one another, in which the deacons set the example, is not in the first place a question of handing out money.

#### **4.2 Opening and Closing.**

It is abundantly clear that each visit should be closed with prayer. If possible in the prayer reference should be made to the matters discussed. Problems which came to light during the discussion should be presented to God. In any case we should pray to God to make us faithful in serving one another.

The question of how to begin a visit is more difficult. There are those who argue: "Don't begin with prayer and Bible reading for in that way you imitate the elders in their visiting." In my opinion, such an argument does not hold any water. A more sensible argument would be that such an opening at the beginning of a discussion is some what artificial.

Still, it is equally forced, if the visiting dea-

con without much further ado comes to the point. That is why it seems fitting to begin with prayer and reading (in that order). In the first place, this benefits the visiting deacons, for thereby they are forced to end the small talk, no matter how interesting it may be, and to go on to a more meaningful discussion. Such a start is also instructive for the church members who are visited, for it reveals to them the true character of the visit. By praying and reading the leader indicates: "We have not come as acquaintances, nor for the conviviality, but as deacons to speak together from a Scriptural perspective and in the presence of God about the serving task of the congregation."

The two opening elements should thus be prayer and Scripture reading. In the prayer God is asked for strength and wisdom, and that He, through His Spirit, will lead the discussion so that it may be open and edifying. The Bible passage should, as a matter of fact, deal with the task of serving one another in Christ. Starting from the passage one can change over to the first subject of discussion for the evening: the form for ordination (see below).

#### **4.4 Subjects for discussion.**

After the opening with prayer and reading four subjects should be discussed on a deaconal family visit.

**4.4.1 The form for ordination.** In the first place it is good to talk briefly about the content of the form. If at all possible the deacons should try not to dominate the discussion, but should attempt to have a mutual discussion about what the Bible says about service in general.

Seeing what has been stated in 1, it should be clear that both the task of the congregation and that of the deacons are to be discussed. To help the discussion along the deacons begin with pointing out that because of our unity in Christ, the congregation should be a community of people who serve and support each other in particular when there are difficulties. After that attention is paid to the fact that deacons are to stimulate such service, as well as serving others.

By way of conclusion, the deacons should point out that because of their task and that of the congregation they have come to talk about whether or not they can help and about how the members can/should be of service.

**4.4.2 Possible needs.** By listening and asking

questions (see 3.1) the deacons should try to find out if the family visited has one or more problems (summary 2.2–2.10). If that is the case the discussion can center on the nature of the problem and about the kind of help that is needed (odd jobs, transportation, money etc.). In doing so the deacons should watch out for two things. In their enthusiasm they could, on the one hand, be too quick and too generous in their assistance, particularly when it concerns odd jobs and money. The result of this can be that the recipient becomes needlessly dependent. It is, therefore, necessary to give the recipient the opportunity to solve his problems independently. If that does not happen, the deacons can come to their aid. After that, however, the deacons should withdraw as soon as possible.

In their diffidence, on the other hand, they could be too quickly put off by a refusal to accept help. They ought to realize full well that such a refusal is often the result of false pride and a wrong perspective on the congregation. Therefore, it is often necessary for the deacons to instruct the member(s) about the nature of ecclesiastical aid, particularly where it concerns money. It has to be learned that it is incorrect to experience such assistance as humiliating, as a shame, for in fact the recipient receives Christ's gifts of love. In the proffered help one experiences how Christ's mercy becomes visible in the work of the deacons. In other words, in the gifts given the community established by Christ through His Spirit, becomes tangible. In light of that there are no reasons whatsoever for church members to refuse the offered help.

**4.4.3 Serving each other.** Next, the deacons through listening and asking questions inquire whether or not the person(s) visited are making enough effort to serve others in the congregation. (See first part of 2.1) If there is a lack of some kind, the deacons should urge them not to neglect their serving function. At certain visits they could also point out how someone through definite activities or by his presence alone can be of help to others.

**4.4.4. Money Management.** Finally, the deacons should put the question to the person(s) visited whether or not they act as faithful stewards of God's possessions (See under 2.1). As always the deacons should pursue this matter with tact. They would be going too far if they inquired about amounts and percentages. What they can do is to point out the scriptural norms for such giving. In this connection it can be meaning-

ful to talk about the different causes for which collections are held during the worship services. It probably will show that such knowledge is often minimal. A discussion of the purposes of various collections would certainly increase awareness. In addition it would be useful if the deacons pointed out a number of organizations within the Reformed community which are in need of our prayer and money. In my opinion other organizations not necessarily Christian, could also be pointed out. To keep the discussion orderly it is recommended that the deacons prepare a fact sheet before hand.

#### 4.5 The "Finishing Touch."

As deacon you cannot afford to stop the discussion abruptly and leave it for what it is. Each visit ought to be carefully rounded-off. That means a number of activities.

– In the first place, the leading deacon should summarize matters at the end of the visit for the sake of clarity. For example the subjects discussed and the promises made by one or other party.

– It is to be recommended that after the visit the deacons briefly review the discussion to ascertain whether or not mistakes were made and why, whether or not something was left undone and if so whether one or both of them should pursue the matter further. If agreements were reached or promises made, the deacons should make sure that their part is kept.

– Not only in connection with the above, but also for other reasons a deacon should make notes of the visits. He should in the first place write down the date of the visit, further what was read and what in particular came to the fore in the discussion. In that way the deacons can easily refer back to it on subsequent visits and some continuity is established. It goes without saying that when a deacon retires, he will destroy such notes.

– Finally the visits must be reported to the consistory. Because of the confidentiality of the visits the deacons should be reticent in the giving of information. They only have to relate what should be already known to their fellow office bearers (for instance that the person visited left a good impression or why he gave reason for concern) and information with which both elders and deacons have to deal (complaints which could not be settled, suggestions made concerning local church life etc.).

If at all possible these reports should be made at a council meeting. It makes sense, that the elders are informed about what the deacons have experienced. If it is not possible to make a full report because of the size of the consistory, only information about worrisome developments in a certain household, complaints and suggestions with which the deacons have to deal ought to be given. The complete report, including confidential, financial information, should be brought on a deacons' meeting.

## 5. UNSCHEDULED VISITS.

### 5.1. Significance.

It is the task of the deacon to involve himself with every member of the congregation. Not only with people in a certain category (e.g. the elderly or those who have financial difficulties), but with all the members entrusted to him. If he is to do justice to that concept, he will have to visit more often.

Because of the limited time available to him he will, of course, have to make a choice. In particular he will have to visit those members who are experiencing social, material, or physical difficulties. The others in his care, however, should not be neglected. That is why he should take the trouble to visit them once in awhile. Through personal association with his people he forges a bond of trust. It should not be his fault, when needy members of the congregation pass him over in favor of secular authorities. It should also not be his fault when the needs in the congregation are unknown and he is unable to translate his desire to help into deeds.

### 5.2. Method

The deacon for the most part visits those people whom he knows to be, or assumes to be, in difficulty. In addition he visits those people who are prepared to help. Each visit, therefore, has its own character. I will mention a few examples.

- The deacon visits in order to do something himself (e.g. doing odd jobs, to hand over money, or just to show his interest).
- The deacon visits to ascertain whether or not the information he has received concerning needs in the congregation, is indeed correct.
- The deacon visits people in order to convince them to lend their help in certain cases.

- The deacon visits simply because too much time has passed since the last visit (see 4.5 about notes).

From the above, it becomes clear that certain aspects of the official family visit occur at unscheduled visits as well. You could say that on official visits the whole spectrum of Christian service is discussed, while on unscheduled visits certain elements are high-lighted.

Because of the limited purpose of unscheduled visits, they don't have to last long. Often 30 to 45 minutes will suffice. In certain cases just dropping in for a few minutes is enough. Sometimes, however, it may be wiser to stay a whole evening or half of it. It may also be wise for the deacon to take his wife along and that she, on his behalf, pays a visit. There are no set rules for this kind of visiting.

The purpose of the visit should be clear to the deacon. That is why he should determine for himself whether he intends to follow up on a certain matter. If that is the case he should take time to think about how he is going to do that. It is also useful if the deacon makes the purpose of his visit known as soon as possible, otherwise people keep asking themselves why has the deacon really come. To prevent that from happening, he should explain almost right away why he has come (e.g. because he has heard about sickness in the family, because a member is unemployed, because the person has difficulty getting about, because the deacon seeks the member's help, or because he only wants to see how things are going).

In the view of the character of unscheduled visits they are best brought by one deacon. If a serious matter has to be discussed he can bring a fellow deacon along. Also, because of the character of these visits, they are never to be opened with prayer and Bible reading. Whether or not they are to be closed that way depends totally on the situation. If, for instance, a serious matter has been discussed it is almost self-evident that at the end a prayer is said. Sometimes an appropriate Bible passage will suit the occasion well. In short for the closing of unscheduled visits there is only one general rule, one prays if the situation demands it. Often we Reformed people, office bearers as well, are somewhat shy about praying and reading with others. We will have to overcome that. When it naturally follows from the

discussion, we should not omit to listen together to God's Word and to present the matter discussed to Him. It is always wise to end visits to the sick and elderly with prayer and reading.

### 5.3 The "Finishing Touch"

Much of what is said in 4.4 about summaries, review, note taking, and reporting applies to unscheduled visits as well. As far as the reporting of such visits is concerned, little of that is done. To judge by what Art. 73 of the C.O. says about the mutual exhortation and admonishing of deacons "with regard to the execution of their office", I think it is incorrect not to report such visits. To stimulate himself and his colleagues it is useful for a deacon to relate something about his unscheduled visits. Often the mere mention of the fact that a visit has been made will be sufficient. To make the giving of that simple information a requirement can have a beneficial effect on the activity of office-bearers.

## 6. CLOSING REMARKS.

### 6.1 District Division.

In a very small congregation there may not be any district division. Each deacon is involved with the whole congregation. On the whole that is an undesirable situation, for then it remains unclear both to the congregation and to the deacons themselves which office bearer is responsible for what member. As a result the contact with various members can easily be lost.

Therefore, I advocate that each deacon has his own district. Then the office bearer knows precisely for which part of the congregation he is personally responsible. When only a limited number of people are entrusted to him, it would be difficult for him to shirk his duties over against them. He can forge closer ties with them than when together with another deacon he has to take care of double the number of people. Conversely, the church members know to which deacon they can turn for help.

Of course, regular visits (family visits and certain unscheduled visits) should be made by the two deacons. It seems more practical to me that there are set pairs of deacons each season. The consistory or a deacons' meeting can decide at the beginning of the season which deacons should work together this time around. The advantage of that system is that for a year at least you work

together with a regular partner. It is far easier to consult with someone who is also acquainted with your district. It is advisable that a more experienced deacon is paired with one who has less experience.

It is further important that the district of a deacon is not larger than the district(s) of two elders. That means at the same time, that the number of deacons is at least half of that of the elders. For those who see it there is plenty of work. Justice can only be done to the work if the number of families under one deacon's care remains as small as possible.

### 6.2. Transfer of the District.

When a deacon retires it is not enough for him to give his successor only a list of names, addresses and birth dates. He has to transfer his district in more detail. I don't mean that he should extensively inform his successor about the personality and Christian character of all the members in his district. A newly elected deacon should have the opportunity to meet the members entrusted to him without any prejudices. Conversely church members should receive the chance to begin with a clean slate.

What the new deacon has to be told are the external circumstances, such as family relationship, the children living outside the congregation (their church ties included), the dates of death of the marriage partner or children, church attendance; membership of study societies, occupation (or former occupation); school education etc.

That kind of information can greatly help a deacon in his orientation. Much of that he will also get to know, when he informally visits the members in his district. It should be a matter of course that he does so. In doing so he gives himself a head start

### 6.3 Organization

In serving one another one sometimes comes across recurrent activities or activities that go on for some time. I think here of visiting the elderly and the sick, help with the house-keeping, the doing of odd jobs, baby-sitting, the welcoming of new church members, etc.. Such instances of mutual service require some organization. The arrangement of these activities is pre-eminently the work of the deacons. They can, for example,

enlist the help of the women societies or form separate committees to do certain tasks.

They will, however, have to take care that such arrangements soon begin to function independently and that their work becomes supervisory in nature only.

### 6.4 Deaconal Meetings.

Even in places where the deacons are part of the consistory, it is recommended that they still meet together as deacons. At such meetings all sorts of matters can be dealt with (e.g. reports of visits made, discussion of financial aid given, discussion of certain difficulties, and the making of certain arrangements See 6.3).

In all this the deacons should be aware that according to the Church Order they are responsible to the consistory. Deaconal policy and management needs the approval of the consistory. Worrisome developments within the congregation are to be discussed with the consistory or, at least, with the district elder. Conversely, the elders should not take drastic measures in cases which also involves the deacons without their knowing about it.

Steps should be taken to prevent elders and deacons from working independently on a case or even working against each other. Together they should work on the edification of the congregation.

### 6.5 Praying

Up until now we have concerned ourselves for the most part with the work of the deacon in the congregation. That activity, however, can only be fruitful if it is supported by his personal

prayer at home. The deacon should on a regular basis pray for the congregation, in particular for his own district.

He cannot do this in general terms only. He must concretely place the names and the concerns of the people in his care before God.

The deacon should also pray for himself. He must fully realize that he is responsible for the members entrusted to him (See Heb. 13:17). I do not mention this to scare any one but to show the necessity of his asking God for wisdom and strength in order that he may execute his task well. It is also essential to ask God for forgiveness for wrong doings and to ask Him to curtail the damages resulting from them.

If the deacon makes his work in the congregation part of his prayer he can do it in the correct frame of mind. If he only pays attention to the work load and its troubles and pains, particularly in relation to the limited scope of his activities both in quantity and quality, it would only discourage him, if not lead him to despair. But since he has entrusted the congregation and himself to God, he can be at peace. In the final analysis he does not have to keep the people on the right track; Christ does that. As the Head of the Church He does the actual work by His Spirit (Cf. I Cor. 3:5-7). Even if the office bearer fails, Christ completes his plans. That knowledge can give an office bearer courage, in spite of the disappointments caused by himself or others.

Certain members can indeed bother him greatly. However, ruled by the prayer for the congregation and himself, an office bearer should not let himself be swept along by feelings of either superiority or antipathy. He realizes that he, as much as other believers, must depend on Christ's atoning blood.

#### The task of the Deacons is:

1. to diligently collect alms (gifts for the poor) and other contributions of charity;
2. to faithfully and diligently distribute the same to the poor as their needs may require, after mutual counsel;
3. to visit and comfort the distressed;
4. to encourage the congregation to show christian mercy to those in need at home and abroad;
5. to render an account to the Session.

— from the Church Order of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand

# Remarks on Church and Tolerance

by

Prof. J. Kamphuis

Professor Emeritus at the Kampen University of Theology

## 1. Introduction

The subject that we are now dealing with at this conference has been announced as Tolerance. From the nature of this meeting as delegates and observers of churches it is more or less a matter of course that we confine ourselves to tolerance as an ecclesiastical issue.

But the subject also has a broader meaning. We cannot confine ourselves to a strictly ecclesiastical field. That will be proved again and again in the remainder of these remarks. Tolerance becomes a topic as soon as we are confronted with various convictions in society. Thus there is also the fascinating and important issue of tolerance in political life with its central question about the limits of what is permissible for a government that rules a mixed population. In the Netherlands the Dutch Reformed dogmatician of the theological faculty of the Utrecht University, A.A. van Ruler, aired provocative views that give insight. On this, compare the two essays from respectively 1956 and 1966 about *Theocratie en Tolerantie* (Theocracy and Tolerance), in his *Theologisch Werk* I and III. Compare also for the history of tolerance in the Netherlands in church and state the large work written by R.B. Evenhuis, *Ook Dat was Amsterdam*, VII, 1974, 237-279. Evenhuis approvingly refers to the views of A.A. van Ruler. Although I have learned a lot from Van Ruler's studies, I concluded that I had to draw different lines and seek more alliance with the Reformed of the seventeenth century. I wrote about this in *Lux Mundi*, Vol. II no. 4 of December 1992, page 3-9 in an article entitled, *An Appraisal of Tolerance*. May I refer to that article here and I will return to it under point four.

We have no time to deal with the issue of tolerance to a satisfying conclusion of the argument and that is why we only give a number of remarks.

### 1.1.

Tolerance (*verdraagzaamheid* in Dutch, forbearance in English) functions as a key word, as a central idea in present-day (Western) society and culture and has gradually acquired the meaning of: the willingness to respect the complete freedom of any conviction and of the attitude to life that originates from it and is connected to it, no matter how deviating this practical attitude to life may be from traditional convictions and moral maxims as they may still be found among the majority of the people.

### 1.2.

Thus the idea of tolerance became much broader compared to the term that was most current until recently. In spite of all the difference the central point of tolerance always meant tolerating all deviant conviction and behavior.

This tolerance was always limited and bound to certain conditions e.g. in view of publicly propagating it. This tolerance had its starting point in an authority that decided because of reasons moving him or her to tolerate what in itself could not receive positive approval. Compare the survey article that gives insight written by W. F. Adeney in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* XII, 1921, 360 e.v. (Unfortunately, the article is not fully accurate in some historical details). We quote the extensive description of tolerance given by Adeney on page 360:

*"The word toleration in its legal, ecclesiastical, and doctrinal application has a peculiar limited signification. It connotes a refraining from prohibition and persecution. Nevertheless, it suggests a latent disapproval and it usually refers to a condition in which the freedom which it permits is both limited and conditional. Toleration is not equivalent to*

*religious liberty, and it falls far short of religious equality. It assumes the existence of an authority which might have been coercive, but which for reasons of its own is not pushed to extremes. It implies a voluntary inaction, a politic leniency. The motives that induces a policy of toleration are various, such as mere weakness and inability to enforce prohibitory measures, lazy indifference, the desire to secure conciliation by concessions, the wisdom to perceive that force is not remedy, the intellectual breadth and humility that shrink from a claim to infallibility, the charity that endures the objectionable, respect for the right of private judgment."*

But at the end of his article Adeney points out (and he did so at the beginning of our century!) the great change that takes place in our time:

The champions of liberty now resent the use of the term as representing a gracious concession on the part of the privileged, and claim to go far beyond it in their demand for the abolition of all theological and ecclesiastical privileges and the establishment of absolute religious equality.

You might say that the present use of this term has been bent towards this equality!

1.3.

The present-day idea of tolerance and the use of words that agree with it means a definite breakthrough of the basic convictions of the sixteenth-century humanism, that saw the measure of all things in man.

Together with the Reformation of the sixteenth century this humanism opposed the claims of authority of the hierarchical Roman Catholic church. Humanism, however, was in favor of human autonomy and that's why it opposed the reformation, which looked for the deliverance of life by obedience to the word of God.

It is important to bear in mind that the Reformation also took its stand against humanism, being often connected with numerous Christian convictions at that time, the so-called Christianity of biblical humanism that had a spokesman in Desiderius Erasmus, elder contemporary of Luther (1469-1536). Erasmus opposes Luther at the point of man's free will. In spite of all the criticism on all kinds of evils, he sided with Rome here. From the dispute between Luther and Erasmus it becomes clear that they

also go different ways at the point of certainty as to the doctrine that God had revealed in his Word. Erasmus thinks that little can be said with certainty at the points that were in discussion between Luther and Rome. Luther on the contrary vigorously maintains the clearness of God's revelation (the Holy Spirit is not a sceptic!). On the basis of this the believer and the church can confess with certainty.

Erasmus's biblical humanism has had great influence on the people's minds, especially in the Netherlands. To a great extent his views make up the background of the Remonstrants in the Reformed churches, who both in a dogmatic respect pleaded in favor of man's free will and in ecclesiastical practise wanted to see a broad tolerance observed. In the time that follows humanism remained a real threat for the church, although, together with the help of foreign Reformed churches Remonstrantism was condemned at the Dordrecht Synod 1618-1619, many foreign delegates being present as members of the meeting, who were entitled to vote. In the course of the eighteenth century humanism more and more rejected the biblical elements, which were still present with Erasmus. In the so-called Enlightenment (Aufklärung in German) this humanism more and more sets its stamp on society. Already John Locke in England (1632-1704) and later Voltaire in France (1694-1778) vigorously pleaded in favor of tolerance, which got a broader and broader sense. Voltaire, in his turn, had a great influence on King Frederick the Great of Prussia (1740-1786), who by his unscrupulous policies, made his country into a great power.

*The Christelijke Encyclopedie* writes about him: "He belongs to the enlightened dictators, who, with maintenance of royal absolutism in government and administration applied the ideas of the Aufklärung. As a rationalist he was indifferent towards Christianity. Denying the Protestant tradition of the house of Hohenzollern and of Prussia his policies aimed at the principle of the secularization of the state. One of his first measures of government was the tolerance edict of 1740, the elaboration of his famous statement: 'Hier muss jeder nach seiner Fassung selig werden' (everybody has to be saved here in his own way.)" Here tolerance and absolutism go together! Here is one of the historical backgrounds of the totalitarian national-socialism of our age. Compare Ben Knapen, *Het duitse onbehagen, Een land op zoek naar identiteit* (The German discomfort, A country in search of identity), 1983, 105. A

plain indication that the term toleration has real significance that only becomes clear from the context!

### 1.4.

During the nineteenth century humanism developed into an aggressive atheism with the German philosopher Fr. Nietzsche (1844-1900). In our time his influence is very strong in France and in the whole western world and in the Netherlands in particular. Many who have broken with the Christian faith, have been marked by his nihilism and atheism. Compare my *Nietzsche in Nederland* 1987. Apart from direct influence by one certain philosopher the influence of humanism is becoming stronger and broader in all cultural and public life. The acceptance of the autonomy of man (connected with a strong individualism) makes present-day society really atheistic. Especially in ethical questions autonomy strongly throws its weight around (the right of self-determination in case of termination of life, the legalization of induced abortion, the acceptance of homosexual practice are strongly appealing examples). In all these things an appeal is always made to tolerance being the comprehensive fundamental human attitude, which has to be protected, propagated and established by the state. The equality of all people is sought in the greatest possible freedom to organize life according to one's own will and insight and to give public evidence of it.

### 1.5.

For the church which wants to live in obedience to the Word of the living God and which also wants to preach this Word, in principle there is no place left for her in this society, although freedom of religion will still be reserved for the churches by the state.

But when the church preaches the salvation and the will of God outside its walls she is felt to be an illegal nuisance. According to the feeling of many people who form public opinion (in particular, by means of modern mass media) the church is considered to be the centre of intolerance. This applies to both the Roman Catholic church when her spokesmen wish to adhere to the official Roman Catholic ideas regarding the great ethical questions of our time and also to the orthodox Protestant and Reformed churches. Whereas freedom of religion applies to the strictly ecclesiastical field the modern thought of tolerance clearer and

clearer turns out to be at odds with this freedom of religion. If no restraining factors come into action the present, absolute tolerance will more and more turn out to be intolerant towards confessing Christians and towards the church that only wants to live according to the Word of God in everything. Then tolerance will change into intolerance! This shows a remarkable similarity with the experience of the church at the beginning of our era in the Roman empire. Great tolerance towards many religions prevailed here. But when young Christianity openly confessed the name of the only God, the Father of Jesus Christ, and when the church opposed customs which were condemned by the Gospel, and refused to join in the cult of the emperor, there was no tolerance left for that church.

### 2.1.

Present-day tolerance easily infects the climate in the church. In many respects the history of the church of the past centuries has been dominated by the struggle against penetrating humanism. People often try, especially in theology, to achieve a synthesis with philosophical ideas which dominate minds. Then the confession of the church is resisted. The confession of the church of the reformation especially becomes the target of criticism. The accusation of intolerance often goes hand in hand with the accusation of fossilized confessionalism. It was said to be an obstacle to a sound development of theology and of ecclesiastical life and to make it impossible for a church to become really up to date. In the sixteenth and at the beginning of the seventeenth century Christian humanism often addressed the complaint of intolerance and confessionalism to the Reformed. This complaint was raised by the Remonstrants in their struggle against the Reformed confession although they emphatically claimed the name Reformed and a place in the church for themselves.

This was also the case in the eighteenth century when the Enlightenment penetrated the church. This led to separations in the nineteenth century (in Scotland and the Netherlands). The modernism of the nineteenth century found its strongest resistance in the churches of the Separation, but the reproach of confessional intolerance was continuously addressed to these churches.

In our century we see the spirit of modernism becoming victorious in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands which rejected the

Liberation. An unlimited tolerance has conquered these churches. Professor K. Runia of the theological university of these churches recently wrote (in *Centraal Weekblad* 9 July 1993), "If the members of these churches are asked to choose between discipline and tolerance the great majority will undoubtedly choose tolerance even if they personally do not agree with the concepts defended." The 'concepts' here refer to the theologians Dr. H. Wiersinga in his *Geloven bij Daglicht* (Faith by Daylight), in which he radically breaks with the entire Reformed inheritance, and especially to Prof. Dr. H. M. Kuitert with his notorious book *Het Algemeen Betwijfeld Christelijk Geloof* (The Catholic Doubted Christian Faith, translated into English by the characteristic title *I Doubt*.) Kuitert breaks with the traditional doctrine of inspiration of the Scriptures vigorously exclaiming: away with it and he breaks with the whole substance of Christian and Reformed belief. But tolerance remains the key word even in the case of these denials! A line can be drawn from the doubt, uttered by Erasmus, towards speaking from the certainty of Christian belief by Luther to this scepticism, with which Christian belief had developed into no more than a design for a search for God.

2.2.

How the humanist idea of tolerance gives a completely different course to ecclesiastical life, appears very clearly from the fact that names and ideas which have always been used are put aside as being aged and having too intolerant a sound. Thus there is more and more objection against the contents and also the name of mission being the preaching by and from the church of Christ to the heathens, and to the followers of Islam as well. For a long time now the preaching of the Gospel among the Jews has had to make room for discussion with Israel in which openness and tolerance are the key words. And the rest of mission changes into a dialogue with the world religions. There is no room left for preaching the invitation to salvation, revealed in Christ, with the authority of the gospel. That would discredit tolerance, belonging to a society in an ideological pluralism.

3.

It appears to be self-evident, that we have to opt for intolerance if we reject the humanist idea of tolerance! And we need not avoid these words, intolerance and inforbearance, although

we do have to choose our words with carefulness and wisdom, because they may have a different shade of meaning especially for English speaking people.

3.1.

In the first place, we need not avoid the word: intolerance. It cannot be helped that the contrasts are sharp, since the light shines in the darkness. Here we give the floor to the Scriptures themselves.

3.1.1.

The LORD calls himself the one God (Deut 6:4, also compare Zech. 9:14). he is supposed to be confessed and lauded as the only *living* God as opposed to all *dead* idols (compare Ps. 115). Idolatry warrants intolerance! A radical choice is also required without compromise. If the Lord is God, follow him, but if the Baal is God, follow him (1 Kings 18:21). The New Testament is equally antithetical and without compromise, and if you like, intolerant. The triune God is preached as the only, true, living One: "For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth as indeed there are many gods and many lords yet for us there is but one God, the Father from whom all things came and for whom we live, and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and from whom we live" (1 Corinthians 8:5,6). This is also relevant for a God-fearing life: "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other; you cannot serve both God and Money" (Matthew 6:24).

3.1.2.

As there is in the confession of the living God not any tolerance for the denial of his name, thus it is also the case in the confession of Jesus Christ, his Son who has come in the flesh: God appeared in the flesh. John draws intolerant lines: Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ! Such a man is the antichrist; he denies the Father and the Son, (1 John 2:22). And John learned this from the Master himself: Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I also will disown him before my Father, in heaven (Matthew 10:32,33). That is

why the disciple also summarizes the gospel of his Lord and his God in the powerful message as to Jesus of Nazareth: he is the true God and eternal life (1 John 5:20). And again there is the sharpest antithesis possible with all idolatry: Dear children, keep yourselves from idols (verse 21).

### 3.1.3.

That is why the congregation of the living God and especially the office-bearers in the congregation are called to follow the pattern of the sound words as opposed to all errors (2 Tim. 1:13, 4:3; Tit. 1:9, 13; 2:1) and that in view of the times of stress that will come in the last days (2 Tim. 3:1 compare 1 John 2:18 and following). Thus the apostle Paul warns the elders of Ephesus—with the congregation of God in view—of savage wolves, who will not spare the flock (Acts 20:29) and he calls to the congregation of Rome: watch out for those, who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned (Rom 16:17). Therefore doctrine and life are under the discipline of God's holiness (Deut. 19:19, 1 Cor. 5:7). That is why the congregation is praised if she (in spite of a lot of shortcomings that are found in her) cannot tolerate wicked men, (Rev. 2:2). 'Not tolerate'—with as many words intolerance is mentioned here which was approved by Christ himself! He even speaks about hating the works of the heretics (Nicolaitans). He hates those works himself and the congregation is with him, her Lord, in agreement! (Rev. 2:6). And how radically do the apostle Peter in his second letter and Jude contrast the doctrine of truth and the life from it with the destructive heresies of false teachers, who have their fore-runners in the false prophets of the Old Covenant (2 Peter 2:1 and following, Jude 3 and following). There is the penetrating admonition to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints, (Jude 3). No doubt is permitted here, as if there might be place for it in the church. Even if so-called reformed theologians publish books with the challenging title *Het Algemeen Betwijfeld Christelijk Geloof* (The Catholic Doubted Christian Faith), the Christian church continues to say this received faith is without a doubt and undoubted among us, no matter how much it may be challenged and doubted in our time. And in doing so the church has not become narrow minded, limited, careless or ignorant as to the realities of all those challenges, but through faith speaks the firm

language of 'we know,' making it sound as the refrain (1 John 5:18, 19, 20) with which John concludes his first letter.

### 3.2.

However obvious it seems to be to opt for intolerance as a term that might represent the struggle of Christ's church very well, as opposed to a humanist concept of tolerance, yet great caution is required here! I mention some reasons for it, which mutually correlate.

#### 3.2.1.

We must always take care not to live from reaction, having the other, the opponent, label us. If we are blamed for being intolerant we need not avoid that term out of fear, but we must not have ourselves labelled either. For our opponents do this being inspired by their own background and convictions which we fundamentally reject, (do we not?). That is why it is a good thing to realize that in contrast with the humanist concept of tolerance it is not a matter of tolerance opposed to intolerance, but of true tolerance opposed to false tolerance, of Reformed, scriptural tolerance opposed to humanist tolerance.

#### 3.2.2.

Add to this that we have to be as understanding as possible both inside and outside the church. There is indeed an intolerance that originates from narrow-mindedness and ecclesiastical insularity. In the Netherlands we know how truly Reformed people were suspended from the exercise of their offices by a synod which wanted to oblige everybody to subscribe to a private (and always controversial view) of the covenant of grace, namely that of Dr. A. Kuyper. The Liberation of 1944 and following years became necessary because of that! Only in this way could we keep the room that is really characteristic of Reformed churches!

We find essentially the same problem with The Reformed Congregations in the Netherlands and in North America with their Doctrinal decision of 1931 and also with the Protestant Reformed Churches in the USA with their Declaration of Principles of 1951. (Compare W. W. J. Van Oene, *Inheritance Preserved: The Canadian Reformed Churches in Historical Perspective*, 1975, pp. 64-67). It is notable that in these cases we are confronted with a theological opinion, namely, the identification basically of

the eternal election with the covenant of grace. This seems to be a logical solution of a theological difficulty. The logical system probably has a great attraction in theology and the church. Nevertheless, there are decisive arguments from the Holy Scripture against this solution, especially against the thesis that the promise of the Gospel is unconditional only for the elect. This runs up against important Biblical and pastoral objections. But in all these cases the logical system is imposed on the church as if it is Scriptural truth. And then the really catholic room in the church disappears.

### 3.2.3.

Narrow-mindedness does not suit the church of God, does it? The Lord himself is not like that: as a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him. For he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust, (Ps. 103:13, 14). Neither is the Savior narrow-minded: he had compassion with the hosts in Israel, who were like sheep without a shepherd. Then he patiently took his time to teach them many things (Mark 6:34). And the apostles did not lead us in such a way either: According to his own testimony Paul had a wide heart for the difficult congregation of Corinth (2 Cor. 6:11) and that is why the congregation and the strong within the congregation are also urged by him to be tolerant and to bear each other's failings in the community of saints (Rom. 15:1, Gal. 6:2) to fulfil the law of Christ in this way. That is something different from making quick work of each other!

### 3.2.4.

Now we must ask ourselves: what might be the cause of the fact that the God who takes such an intolerant position towards idols and all idolatry, and also teaches his people to do so, is at the same time full of patience and steadfast love and teaches us regarding our attitude in the community of saints: bearing with one another in love (Eph. 4:2 compare Col. 3:15)? There is only one answer here. Our God is the God of history. In the history of salvation he goes a way with his people. How full is the Bible of it! God's way is perfect (Ps. 18:30) in saving holiness for his people (Ps. 77:14). In the New Testament the Savior calls himself the way and the truth and the life, (John 14:6). Therefore the congregation is called the meeting of men

and women, who belong to the way, (Acts 9:2). God came to a world which had sinned: Adam, where are you? he has given his promises and has gone the way of the fulfillment of those promises. he is still going that way! At the beginning of his dealing with us he did not proclaim a philosophical world view, a religious system, but revealed himself as the Living God and the God who works salvation. If he had been the God of a system, then he would have been as intolerant as everybody who builds a philosophical and world view system and then asks submission to it. But he makes himself known in the way of grace and justice. On that way he shows quite a lot of patience and lenience in enduring the conduct of a troublesome and obstinate people (Acts 13:18), although he undoubtedly maintains himself also in the way of his judgments of them who take counsel against him and his anointed (Psalm 2). he is the truth in the fullness of his virtues and of his actions. he is so in his Son, the Beloved. And on the way of salvation he has made his name known to Moses: the LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generation (Ex. 34:6,7). That name reverberates throughout the history of the Covenant (compare Num. 14:18, 2 Chron. 30:9, Neh. 9:17, 31, Jonah 4:2, Joel 2:13, Nahum 1:3). In the course of the times Israel praises this name on his way with this God (Ps. 86:15, 103: 8, 145: 8).

Early and late in the history of the Old Covenant the Lord sent prophets and taught the people in his ways. This is not patience because of weakness or indifference! For there is a limit! History knows his just judgments and it knows the exile of his people; for 70 years. And from heaven the glorified Christ threatens congregations which leave his service and his way with the revenge of the Covenant. he made known to the congregations of Sardis and Laodicea, setting an example to us, that we may not despise the richness of the kindness of God's tolerance and patience (compare Rom. 2:4). On the way that he goes with his people of the Covenant in the Old and in the New Testament he makes himself more and more known. The history of salvation is at the same time the history of revelation. The name of the LORD has opened gloriously for us in the name of the

triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, into which the congregation is baptized. Thus the doctrine of the truth has been made known to us, not as an abstract and timeless system, but as the revealed mystery of godliness, (1 Tim. 3:16). That is why there is an inseparable coherence between doctrine and life in the congregation, a deep unity. That is why in view of the reconciliation by Christ in the fullness of times in the preceding centuries God was slow to anger both with his people and with the heathen, who were then not called yet.

For the sake of hardness of hearts he admitted practices of marriage in the Old Covenant as it had not been from the beginning, and therefore our Savior does not teach his disciples in this way (Matthew 19:3 and following) and he passed over the sins done in his forbearance, because the bloodshed of Calvary and the revelation of his righteousness still had to come (Rom 3:25). That is why in his preaching at the Areopagus, in Athens, Paul says that God overlooked the times of ignorance but now commands all people to repent and receive forgiveness of sins (Acts 17:30). Since God is the God of history in the lives of his people and of his children he weighs sins in equity and one is blamed heavier because of ignorance than the other. We are judged according to the light we receive. We are not examined in theology by him at a certain moment, or alternatively in philosophy with a positive or a negative result, but he asks us to know him and to live God-fearing before him according to the old rule which he impresses already on Abraham in the Covenant and in the way of the Covenant: walk before me and be blameless (Gen. 17:1).

#### 4.

From the above it may become clear to us now what Christian and Reformed tolerance means. It is essential for the church! But it is also essentially distinguished from humanist tolerance! It is opposed to it! The humanist thought of tolerance aims at a free margin for man, for his ideas and behavior. Consequently, the doctrine of the Scriptures confessed by the church is in fact always a heavy yoke. But the starting-point of Reformed tolerance is the fact that Christian doctrine is not a yoke of compulsion, limiting human freedom, but it is the condition for human freedom!

True tolerance does not aim at making human margins as wide as possible, but it aims at the good progress of the Word of God and of

Christian doctrine, both in life of the church as a community and in the life of the individual believers. And here is the blessed work of the Holy Spirit. Christian tolerance is only possible through confidence in the progress of this work!

In a fair study about The doctrinal discipline in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands between 1570 and 1620, published at the beginning of this century (by H. Schokking, as a theological dissertation at the University of Amsterdam) it is made clear that the Reformed church of that time also took a firm stand against the humanist idea of tolerance, which the Remonstrants wanted to see practised, but that at the same time Reformed tolerance was not forgotten! At that time tolerance among the Reformed meant the possibility that in good faith and by lack of insight and temporary prejudice, objections were felt against dogmas which were, as a matter of fact, generally recognized in the church; they accurately described these cases (H. Schokking, 253).

That is why practising tolerance was never timeless or an abstract problem. Whether they dealt with just a member of the congregation or with a pastor, was a very important question. What could be tolerated by one, could not be permitted by the other. This is rather obvious: with the pastor the question of the good progress of truth is at stake! The pastor has to lead the flock in the right ways of the Lord and is not permitted to pervert them (compare Acts 13:10 and Hos. 14:10). It also depends on the circumstances, whether—and if so, how far—tolerance can be practised: it is not permitted to cause confusion in the congregation, and neither may the way of God be evil spoken of (Acts 19:9). There has to be an openness for the Word of God in the life of him with whom tolerance is exercised; he must be willing to be taught and not be eager to propagate his private problem as a doctrine in the congregation. Then the limit has been reached for this tolerance; it lies in the Word of God and in the sound doctrine.

Neither is this tolerance left to one's own discretion. It is the church that has to decide here, in obedience to the Word of God, being the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Tim. 3:14). The office-bearers and the ecclesiastical meetings have a responsibility of their own here. That is why the Reformed churches in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century were both intolerant and tolerant in a scriptural sense when, with the help of the foreign churches, they definitely resisted the errors of Remonstrantism, and did not want to accept

any compromise. But at the same time they were prepared to exercise patience with simple people who had been thrown into confusion and who were willing to be instructed. This intolerance and tolerance is set aglow with the respect for the Word of God and the love for the church of God. So far the reformed churches have desired to continue this way, even today when they have been obliged to resist errors which occur in the congregation and for which room of propaganda was asked and made both in book and magazine. I mean the schisms of 1926 (Dr. J. G. Geelkerken) and of 1967 and the following years (the Netherlands Reformed Churches).

For that matter we witness with sadness in our hearts, how the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Synodical) as a confessing community sank into autonomous tolerance, and how this—also on world scale, on the level of the REC—destroyed the fraternity of believers and continues to destroy it! So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! (1 Corinthians 10:12 can also be applied here).

5.

Practicing true tolerance and contending to one's utmost for the belief that was once delivered to the saints, (Jude 3) are not opposed to each other. But the first is the consequence of the second and inseparably coheres with it. Within the context of the ICRC we as Christian churches can help and support and encourage each other in a rich sense, urging each other always to look for the good progress of the Word of grace. Contact with each other as churches from all over the world is of great importance in this! Although we are moving a little bit from our subject that deals with tolerance in a strict sense, yet there is a clear link. When we see that the Lord God goes a way with his people in the world—the way of his Word and Spirit—then we may also see that in all unity there is and there may be distinction as well. There is unity. For there is one God and one Lord Jesus Christ. There is one belief and there is one baptism (compare Eph. 4:4). We can speak about the one way of the Word in the world. We meet each other on that way.

At the same time we may see that God leads his church in every country on a way of her own. Rome knows a world-church with one centre on earth and one and the same confession of faith. We, Reformed people, have our centre in heaven, where Christ is at the right hand of his Father. Scattered all over the world we are united in the

same Spirit of faith.

Reformed churches have in the past not been diligent to possess one communal confession, that would have to replace the existing confessions. The *Harmonia Confessionum Evangelicarum* of 1581 also was not a new communal confession but was only a demonstration of the harmony of the existing confessions. That the Lord goes different ways with his people has always been respected in the fact of pluralism of confessions within the unity of belief. Error has always been resisted unanimously. Again I think of the help received by the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands at the Dordrecht Synod of 1618-1619 from the sister churches abroad. The community was not broken because one confession was formulated different from the other. We are not always confronted with the same problems. Then we often choose our formulations according to the problems we are confronted with and also within the possibilities of the language we have at our disposal. That is why within a young community of churches, such as the ICRC, the question of critical importance for each of the participating churches is: how do we meet each other? How do we associate? In an atmosphere of mistrust—because we do not have the same confessions, and have a different historical background, and sometimes speak a somewhat different language than we are used to in our own environment? Or in gladness—because, in spite of all the variety of ways, we do see that God goes the one way of his pleasure and his grace? Then we can also learn the determination and the patience of belief from each other, and encourage and urge each other to Scriptural tolerance in not bearing error. For decisiveness in belief and decisiveness towards error go hand in hand with tolerance within the one community of belief—a patience that we want to exercise mutually in a spirit of gentleness.

Now that we see in our time so much belief destroyed and secularization making such quick progress, the ICRC can be a priceless means, a good instrument, a striking symbol of the community of saints, which does not bear error, but within which there is a communal life from Christ's peace, that peace which passes all understanding and which can keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. If one word of the Savior can direct our community of churches, it is what Christ said to his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount:

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God.

# International Theological Conference

June 20-24, 1994

Noordwijkerhout, The Netherlands

**Theology in the tradition of the Reformation  
Not abandoned, but alive and kicking!**

In our day, a theology that seeks to remain faithful to the authority of Scripture appears to be relegated to the fringes of society. Whoever does not share the assumptions of "higher criticism" runs the risk of being dismissed as irrelevant by those doing theology in "main-line" theological circles.

This is highly regrettable. God has given us the biblical message so that mankind, including 20th century man, may receive the wisdom that leads to salvation (see 2 Tim. 3:15). Moreover, theological study of this biblical message today can play an important part in giving support to the body of believers in the world, and the office bearers in their midst.

Thankfully this manner of theological practice still exists in numerous lands. But the institutions where this occurs are mostly small. Consequently the mutual contacts between them on an international level are limited. Thereby the opportunity is missed to support and stimulate each other; in fact it is frequently the case that work done in one place is not even known to others.

Nevertheless confessional theology is a communal task. It is therefore in every way worth the effort to attempt to bring theological scholars who stand in the tradition of the Reformation from all over the world together. For these reasons three scholarly institutions in the Netherlands have taken the initiative to organize an international theological congress to be held d.v. from the 20th to the 24th of June 1994 in Leeuwenhorst, Noordwijkerhout (near Leiden). Speakers from the four corners of the earth will there lecture on subjects related to the theme: the vitality of Reformed theology. There will also be opportunity to exchange experiences from different societies and cultures.

"Reformed" is meant here as a description of a conscious and genuine alignment with Calvin and other reformers in the 16th century and the confessional statements developed in their path.

The speakers will be as follows:

*Prof. Richard B. Gaffin* from Philadelphia (USA) concerning the vitality of Reformed dogmatics - with *prof. J. W. Maris* from Apeldoorn (Netherlands) as respondent;

*Prof. Jakob van Bruggen* from Kampen (Netherlands) concerning the authority of Scripture as a prerequisite for Reformed theology - with *prof. Paul Wells* from Aix-en-Provence (France) as respondent;

*Prof. Willem D. Jonker* from Stellenbosch (South Africa) concerning Reformed theology and the identity of the Christian congregation - with *prof. Clement Graham* from Edinburgh (Scotland) as respondent; and

*Prof. Son Bong-Ho* from Seoul (Korea) concerning the place of the Christian church in modern society - with *Christopher T. Rabali* from Sibasa (Venda, South Africa) as respondent.

The initiators hope that this congress will lead to an international reflection upon its results and that it will stimulate the development of Reformed theology with an eye to the questions of our time. It should also function as an encouragement for Christians from various nationalities who work in rather isolated areas.

The congress concerns theology. But the subjects are such that also non-theologians interested in theology (at an academic level) may participate. This fact is of importance for reflection upon the service that theology can render to the Christian community. Certainly this congress forms an opportunity that ministers of the Word and students of theology cannot afford to miss. Given that this is an international congress, the common language used will be English.

The three institutions responsible for the organization of the congress are: The Theological University of the Reformed Churches (Lib.) in Kampen; The Theological University of the Christian Reformed Churches in Apeldoorn; The Reformed Scholarly Society (an association of Liberated Reformed people with an academic education for the purpose of Christian reflection upon scholarship). The address of the organizing committee is: Committee IThC 1994, P.O. Box 5026, 8260 GA Kampen, The Netherlands. Applications for registration may be addressed here. Further information is available upon request.

On behalf of the organizing committee, J. P. de Vries.

# TAKING HEED TO THE FLOCK

A Study of the Principles and Practice  
of Family Visitation

by  
P. Y. de Jong, Ph. D

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE VALUE OF FAMILY VISITATION

“We look in upon the Christian family, where everything is on a footing of religion, and we see them around their own quiet hearth and table, away from the great public world and its strifes, with a priest of their own to lead them. They are knit together in ties of love that make them one; even as they are fed and clothed out of the same fund, interested in the same possessions, partakers in the same successes and losses, suffering together in the same sorrows, animated each by hopes that respect the future benefit of all. Into such a circle and scene it is that religion comes, each day, to obtain a grace of well-doing for the day...It leads in the day, as dawn leads in the morning. It blends a heavenly gratitude with the joys of the table; it breathes a cheerful sense of God into all the works and tempers of the house; it softens the pillow for rest when the day is done. And so the religion of the house is life itself, the life of life; and having always been observed, it becomes an integral part even of existence, leaving no feeling that, in a proper family it could ever have been otherwise.”

— HORACE BUSHNELL: CHRISTIAN NURTURE

In spite of all the objections which have been raised against the practice of family visitation as we have come to know and love it in our churches, so much spiritual value inheres in the work if conducted properly that we greatly impoverish ourselves by either carrying it on carelessly or neglecting it altogether.

Spiritual blessings, we are convinced, will accrue not only to the members of the church but quite as much to the consistory which zealously seeks to perform this part of its calling.

#### **For the Eldership**

(1) The first benefit for the elders which ought to be mentioned is that diligent pursuance of this practice will enable them to know the spiritual condition of the flock over which the Lord has placed them.

Many experienced elders will cheerfully witness to the truth of that statement. Especially in our larger congregations where members come and go regularly there is a danger that only the pastor knows who belongs. And since he may be called to another field of labor at any time, it is essential to the well-being of the church that the elders are as thoroughly acquainted with the needs of the people as possible. They will in periods of vacancy be compelled to carry on many of the labors which otherwise devolve upon the minister of the gospel. How much easier it is to visit the sick and call on the delinquents, when the members of the consistory are acquainted with the conditions in the family beforehand. Many situations which else would be puzzling often present no problem at all, when one understands the background of the case. The more the elders know the spiritual level of the members, the better able they will be to give wise Christian counsel. And this will

contribute in no small way to help them present the challenge of their church intelligently to their next pastor.

(2) By conducting the work prayerfully and regularly the members of the consistory will also know whether or not the believers over whom they have been placed make spiritual progress by using the means of grace. Those who superintend the flock must not only know whether the members are diligent in church attendance but also whether they receive spiritual blessings.

Of course, this does not mean that minister and elders must make it their policy to cater to the tastes of the people. Such an attempt is beneath the spiritual dignity of the officers of Christ's church. Many people in Jesus' day also followed Him solely for the loaves and the fishes and forsook Him when His words seemed hard and mysterious. The rule may well be applied here that what people do not like is often just what they need.

Yet it must be a matter of deepest concern to consecrated office-bearers whether or not the Word of God challenges their lives and influences them for good. This knowledge which may best be gleaned at family visitation should be frankly and freely discussed in the spirit of Christian brotherliness and concern for the advancement of the gospel cause at the meetings of the consistory.

(3) These visits likewise give the elders a much-needed opportunity for engaging in preventative work, with the result that instances of glaring defection from the rule of gospel become more infrequent among the people of God. An ounce of prevention in spiritual work is worth a pound of cure any time. Family visitation affords an opportunity not to be despised, of pointing out the weakness of the flesh and of encouraging Christians to "put on the new man, that after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth" (Ephesians 4:24).

This is quite different from trying to frighten people into a life of godliness. Such an attempt would fail miserably. True growth

in grace is always the result of an internal compulsion worked in the heart by the Spirit of God. However, by means of words of wisdom and kindness such spiritual desires, which for a time may seem to lie quite dormant in the heart, may be fanned into a flame which will burn purely and brightly to God's glory and the good name of the church of Christ.

(4) We should not forget that such visits also stimulate the spiritual unity of believers.

How easy it is to forget in our days of rank individualism that we are members of the body of Christ, and though our callings differ, we are all given to each other for the purpose of mutual edification. Paul writes to the believers at Corinth, "So also ye, since ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may abound unto the edifying of the church" (1 Corinthians 14:12).'

Many minor difficulties and misunderstandings have been removed in congregations where the elders were faithful in the execution of their holy office. Long before such problems become ripe for consistorial action, they can be nipped in the bud and thus prevent much unpleasantness and rancor. So often when discipline must be applied, the case in hand defies a happy solution. When at the time of family visitation it becomes apparent that members live at odds with each other, the elders can point to the rule of Matthew 18 before the matter assumes serious proportions. At such a time the lofty ideal of living together as brethren and sisters of the spiritual family of God can be appropriately held up, and with the unfailing help of the Holy Spirit who alone applies the Word effectually stumbling blocks will be removed.

(5) Finally this custom enables the elders to demonstrate in a practical way the spirit of Christian love and helpfulness.

The rule which they bear has been given for the purpose of ministering to each other. Those called to the office should remember the example which our Saviour gave His disciples at the Last Supper, when after the foot-

washing He said, "Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me, Teacher, and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, A servant is not greater than his lord; neither one that is sent than he that sent him. If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them" (John 13:12-17) Striving to fulfill the law so clearly presented here will effectively banish from the minds and hearts of all elders any spirit of censoriousness and self-righteousness. In the discharge of their spiritual functions they will remember to mirror the office of the Savior who Himself was the Great Shepherd of the sheep.

### **For the Congregation**

Not only do the elders derive much benefit from this work, but the believing church also profits much. They will experience that by means of it they are built up in faith and increased in love.

(1) First of all, as members of the living church they will see more clearly the value of discussing matters pertaining to spiritual life.

In our age, in which leisure is at a premium and the things of the Spirit are constantly clouded over by earthly and material interests, it is so necessary to emphasize this. Many find it difficult to speak to each other about these matters of supreme importance. Not only is there great reluctance to discuss spiritual problems and difficulties which are quite common to all, but most members testify very little to the joy of salvation which should be their portion. We have apparently lost sight of the necessity of edifying one another. This duty we too often leave entirely to the minister when preaching the Word.

Even a cursory and superficial reading of the New Testament will prove that such is the duty of all the members. Perhaps one of the chief reasons why many have no well-defined conception of what truly constitutes Chris-

tian living as fellowship with the Lord and His own must be sought in their reluctance to speak about these matters. They complain that they find themselves incapable of expressing their convictions in words. Indeed all of us will find this hard at first. But the oftener a believer gives a reasonable account of the hope that is in him, the easier it will be to witness to the power of God's grace in His life from day to day. In order that the believer may be stimulated, those who conduct family visitation should guard very carefully against doing all the speaking. The visit should never become a one-sided discourse by minister or elder on the Christian life.

(2) Moreover, these visits will build up the confidence of the people in the leadership of the church.

The task of the elders is far from easy and pleasant. Many problems confront them, if they are zealous in keeping the church pure. Thus their decisions are often mercilessly criticized, and misunderstanding of consistorial action has robbed many a congregation of the blessing of living in the unity of the faith. Much of this can be obviated, if there is close contact between consistory and congregation.

Although the elders are always responsible first of all to the Head and King of the church for what they do, we ought not forget that they are elected by the congregation and therefore ought to be able to give a good account of their work to those who are entitled to that knowledge. If the members see the elders in their official capacity only at the time of public worship, the distance between the two parties will likely breed distrust and misunderstanding.

(3) The preventative work in which the elders engage at the time of family visitation will help the believers live more consistently Christian lives.

There are times when God's people stumble into grievous sins before they are fully aware of the net which Satan has spread for them. The longer any particular sin has dominion

over their lives, the more hardened their hearts will be, and the more difficult to break with that form of evil. Many will testify that the kindly words and fervent prayers of the elders have greatly aided them in escaping the snares of the devil and restoring them to the blessed fellowship of God.

(4) As a result, this work always presents a good opportunity for learning more about the Christian way of life.

It is at times difficult to see the implications of the gospel for daily life. Although words are wonderful vehicles for the communication of thought, we are still in an imperfect world. Therefore what may be clear to most of the members is by no means plain to all. These latter should be helped. Paul speaks to the elders at Miletus of his practice of going from house to house teaching publicly the things of the kingdom of God. Although the form will be different today, since we have regularly established churches, the church still needs shepherds who teach in the homes of the members.

(3) Finally, by contacting the families in this way, the elders can effectively point out the high ideal of living together as a Christian family from day to day. That our people need such repeated and personal reminders needs no proof.

No congregation is stronger than the families which constitute it. We have the beautiful New Testament picture of churches meeting in the several homes. Even though such an arrangement is quite impractical today and fraught with grave dangers, we may never forget that every Christian family is ideally speaking a miniature church. What greater

blessing can be enjoyed than that of seeing God's grace working in the generations, so that grandparents and parents and children alike bow to the same God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, rejoice in the same heavenly Savior and experience the gracious operation of the same Holy Spirit? How greatly Paul rejoiced, when he could write to Timothy that once and again he was "reminded of the unfeigned faith that is in thee; which dwelt

first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and, I am persuaded, in thee also." (2 Tim. 1:5)

We can hardly overestimate the significance of the Christian family for the life of the individual believer. Our first religious impressions were gleaned at the time of family worship. Our childish lips learned first to pray to God at our mothers' knees. There we heard first the stories of the holy gospel and the way of salva-

tion. In general the strongest and sweetest Christian lives are early molded in and by the most spiritual families. Our God is the God of the covenant, whose gracious promises to our children place us under solemn obligation to nurture them in the fear and admonition of the Lord. This is not only sound psychology but above all good Scripture doctrine.

Let the elders never weary of pointing out to children and parents alike their privileges and obligations. The whole Bible plainly teaches the significance of a truly godly home. And when our homes are permeated with the principles of the holy gospel, the future of the church is secure.

If family visitation did no more than keep alive in the minds and hearts of believers the ideal of a truly God-centered home, its value could never be overestimated.

**No congregation is stronger than the families which constitute it.**

# FEEDBACK

February 5, 1993

I am most appreciative of Geoffrey Smith's excellent article "Discipline Is Not A Dirty Word," in Vol. 2, No. 1 of *Ordained Servant*. I do, however, raise a question regarding a statement he makes on page 23.

"Consider the most extreme form of discipline: denying the Lord's Supper (i.e. excommunication) to an impenitent church member."

My question: Is the denial of the Lord's Supper the most extreme form of discipline the church administers? While it is true that non-participation in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a "non-communing" activity and to be barred from such activity by a judicial action of the local session is indeed grave, I think we need to be careful not to equate this censure as being the most extreme form of discipline.

In this area of church censures I have found Robert Shaw's "An Exposition on the Confession of Faith" (Christian Focus Publications, 1980) on The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter XXX "Of Church Censures," sections II, III, and IV to be most helpful. Section IV of the Confession states,

"For the better attaining of these ends, the officers of the church are to proceed by admonition, suspension from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper for a season, and by excommunication from the church, according to the nature of the crime, and demerit of the person."

The Confession differentiates between suspension and excommunication. Shaw's commentary on this section is beneficial. The censures of the Church are spiritual in their nature and effects. They are appointed by Christ for the benefit of offenders, and have a tendency, as means, to promote their recovery, and not their destruction. As offences differ in degrees of guilt and circumstances of aggravation, the Church is to proceed according to the nature and degree of the offence committed. In some cases a simple admonition will suffice (Tit. 3:10). A greater degree of guilt will call for a rebuke, solemnly administered in the name of Jesus Christ (Tit. 1:13; 1 Tim. 5:20). Scandals of greater magnitude will require the suspension of the offender from the sacrament of the Lord's supper for a season (2 Thess. 3:14). This is called the lesser excommunication; and the highest censure which the Church has the power to inflict is called the greater excommunication (Matt. 18:17). We have an example in the case of the incestuous man, who was delivered "unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. 5:5). It does not, according to the Popish notion, consist in literally delivering up the offender to the devil, but in casting him out of the Church into the world, which is described in Scripture as Satan's kingdom.

Shaw speaks of a lesser and greater excommunication. The "lesser" being the suspension from or denial of the Lord's supper and the "greater" being the removal from membership in the visible church.

The "greater" excommunication is the removal of one from the care and discipline of the Church of Jesus Christ. The New Testament describes this action of the termination of one's membership in the visible church as "removal from the midst" (I Corinthians 5:2), "clean out the old leaven" (I Corinthians 5:7), "deliver such a one to Satan" (I Timothy 1:20), and "treat him as a heathen and a tax gatherer" (Matthew 18:17). This excommunication is the removal from the midst of the covenant community. It is to be "put out of the fellowship." One is no longer considered a member of the visible church of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, in conclusion, I think it will serve us well if we keep these distinctions in mind when we speak of church censures and recognize that this "greater" excommunication is the most extreme form of discipline.

Sincerely in Christ,

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**HELP IN**  
**Using the Original Languages In Preaching**  
by  
**Dr. Jay E. Adams**

“Why do I need to? After all, there was no time in the history of preaching when there were more good translations than now.”

The argument sounds good; but the objector misses the obvious fact that the more translation possibilities that he has to choose from, the more one needs to know (at least something about) the original languages; otherwise, when they differ (and they do), how does he know which is correct? From which should he preach? Which more faithfully represents the original text of the writers? This is a special problem today, when so many translators have determined to become interpretive in their renderings. The very wealth of modern options itself should (all the more) point up the need for an acquaintance with the original languages.

“Where can I get this knowledge?” Currently (see the past two issues of this journal),<sup>1</sup> we have been running a review of biblical Hebrew. Self-help books and typed languages courses in both Greek and Hebrew exist. But (easiest) many Bible colleges, all conservative seminaries and a number of other schools provide courses in the original languages. Any pastor who has never had Greek or Hebrew (even if he doesn't ever complete a seminary education) ought to take these courses.

“Why?” Well, not only to decide between translations, but:

1. To be able to “get the feel” of a passage. English translations tend to trowel off the original tone of the writers. Only by becoming acquainted with the original can one restore this. This “feel” is essential to good preaching.

2. To be able to use the best commentaries and read the better Bible helps (most of which refer to the original text. Without some knowledge of the languages, one cannot follow the reasoning behind the renderings suggested.

3. To be able to evaluate other books that (again, not using the original) may be far afield in their interpretations and/or uses of many passages.

4. Preaching that flows from the study of a passage in the original moves forward with a more sure-footed stride; other preaching often limps. A certain confidence derives from having

examined the text for one's self.

“But I'll never be a Greek or Hebrew scholar.” Right! That is true of most pastors. And right there lies the problem. Many good men who could have profited from a sensible use of the original languages were turned off by seminary teachers who taught them the study of languages as if their life occupation would be to teach Classics or Semitics in a university. They never recommended short cuts (e.g., like forgetting all about the rules for Greek accents—learning these is an almost totally unnecessary chore. One can get along well with learning only those distinguishing accents that count). They tried to build up a conscience against using analytical lexicons and interlinear translations (two very valuable helps that no one should feel guilty about using freely). They talk negatively about such books as Kubo's Reader's Lexicon and don't tell students about Spiros Zodhiates' crib for Machen's grammar. All such “purism” is sheer nonsense. Who cares if a pastor leans on some Bagster help? Who cares how a person learns to get the right answers to his exegetical questions concerning the original languages so long as he gets them? Of course one should use the Englishman's Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance if he finds it helpful. Why not?

With all that a busy pastor must do, it is only right for him to employ every available aid that he can afford, to keep his hand into the continued use of Hebrew and Greek. He would be a poor steward of time and energy if he did not. Many men have lost any language ability they once had because they believed (what they were told, or strongly led to think) that it was wrong to use anything but the naked text and the standard grammars and lexicons. Sheer, unadulterated nonsense! Pastor, if using an interlinear will help you get back to the Greek and Hebrew, use it—let me emancipate you from the chains of guilt forged in the shops of language teachers who never had to face the everyday problems of the pastorate. Use it! Use whatever is available. Indeed, every teacher of Hebrew and Greek in a theological seminary ought to take the time to compare and contrast these helps, giving his opinion about which is best (and why) and instructing pastors in the most effective and intelligent use of each.

Preach; preach from a study of the original text, and you will preach with confidence and joy.

<sup>1</sup> The article was one of a series that appeared in *The Journal of Pastoral Practice* Vol. 3, No. 3 and is used by permission.

## Book Reviews

COMMENTARY ON THE SHORTER CATECHISM by Thomas Boston (2 Vol.); and COMMENTARY ON THE LARGER CATECHISM by Thomas Ridgeley (2 Vol.); both reprinted by Still Waters Revival Books, 4710-37A Ave. Edmonton, AB Canada T6L 3T5, 1993. Available from Great Christian Books for \$35.95 and \$34.95 respectively. Reviewed by the Editor

When I was a student at Pittsburgh-Xenia in the early '50s I used to haunt the second-hand bookstores. It was there that I found A. A. Hodge's Commentary on the Confession of Faith and two or three other old volumes on the Shorter Catechism. But I never found anything like the volumes under consideration here. I mention this to try to underline the sense of gratitude that I have because better days have come.

I have not read either of these extensive works through, of course, but have been consulting them at various times in my own sermon preparation. Of the two works—each of which has about 1300 pages of material—I have found Boston's exposition the most useful. Of the writers of that era he has always come across to me as one of the clearest *and* most succinct. But this is not to minimize the value of the two volumes by Ridgeley. As we all know, there is important material in the Larger Catechism which is not covered to the same extent in the Shorter Catechism. And so, even though I usually turn to the volumes by Boston first, I also find that it is worth my time to then see what Ridgeley says also.

We of the American Presbyterian tradition are not known for "catechetical preaching," and it is my hope that we will continue to resist the kind of catechetical preaching wherein the sermon becomes an exposition of the text of the catechism. No catechism is the word of God, no matter how excellent it is (and the Westminster Shorter Catechism is in some respects unexcelled). It is therefore never to be treated as if it was equivalent to the Scripture itself. But to use the catechism as a guide to the selection of the Bible texts to be expounded, as Boston did, is a way of catechetical preaching that we heartily endorse. It is because Boston did this so well, and because Ridgeley supplements Boston with valuable added material, that we heartily recommend these volumes.

All in all these volumes are fine additions to the growing list of books published by Still Waters Revival Books as a part of its 'Classic Collectors Edition.'

THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION FOR THE CHURCH TODAY by Rowland S. Ward, published by the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, 1992 (248 pages). Available from the author (\$12 postpaid) 358 Mountain Highway, Wantirna, Victoria 3152, Australia. Reviewed by the Editor.

One of the papers presented at the 1993 meeting of the ICRC in Zwolle, Holland, was Rowland Ward's discussion of recent criticisms of the Westminster Confession. It was clear from that paper, as it is from this interesting book, that Rev. Ward has given careful attention to the work of the Westminster Assembly over many years.

The book begins with a brief introduction to the history of the Westminster Assembly. It then gives a summary outline and discussion of each chapter of the Confession. It is here that I find the greatest value. Rev. Ward has kept in close touch with all the literature on the Westminster Standards, and uses his knowledge to good effect. He briefly but effectively traces, for example, the history of the criticisms that Briggs made of the Princeton view of inerrancy, and then goes on to some of the modern criticisms by such scholars as J.B. Rogers and J.W. Montgomery. Another example of the usefulness of this book is found in his brief discussion of some of the revisions that have been made to the Confession, such as the deletion of the last sentence of Chapter XXIV, iv.

Another interesting feature of Ward's book is the inclusion of what he calls 'Thoughts from Other Minds.' These are generally well chosen comments by other writers from the past and present that Ward has found helpful in elucidating the various doctrines of the Confession.

The English spoken—and written—by the Westminster divines was the common language of that era. But it is not the language of today. Rev. Ward, recognizing this, has given his own modern English rendition of the Confession. Since this reviewer has worked for the last several years in helping to produce a Modern English Study Version of the Westminster Confession, it will hardly surprise anyone to learn that—here and there—we would not want to say it quite like he does. It goes a little too far in the direction of paraphrase in our humble opinion. But this in no way detracts from the value of this book. I very much appreciate the faithful work that Rev. Ward has done and commend it heartily to our readers.