

# FORUM

CALVIN SEMINARY

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COVER ESSAY

## CHRISTIAN & REFORMED



The names churches give themselves are changing. In the distant past Christian Reformed churches would clearly identify themselves as “Christian Reformed.” But more recently planted denominational churches either minimize or don’t include at all “Christian Reformed” in their name. Typically, these churches prefer to be called “community churches.” Is this emerging pattern worthy of note? Maybe not. It’s unwise to read too much into small things. But it’s equally foolish not to read the (church) signs of the times. This shift in the naming of churches is probably due to the assumption that naming a church “Christian Reformed” could confuse or put-off people who are not familiar with the denomination. Thus to include the denomination in a church’s name puts up an unnecessary barrier—and that, of course, is always a real mistake. Obviously a church should be barrier free.

I don’t have much interest in the specific issue whether



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using the name “Christian Reformed” is a barrier. Perhaps it is a small one. *I’m convinced that if a local church has wonderful preaching of the gospel, shows genuine (sometimes tough) love for each member, and reaches out in good works to those in the neighborhood, then whether it has a denominational name on its sign*

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VAN REKEN

*won't matter.* We must not think that what really makes a church vital is the name it chooses rather than the service it renders.

Let's grant that a church should remove all unnecessary barriers. What does that

Aren't many who hold Methodist or Baptist beliefs going to glory? Of course. So it would seem that exactly which variety of Christian doctrine you hold, so long as you get some fundamentals right, is not important. Thus it seems that it isn't necessary for someone to hold to the Reformed faith. The Reformed

*evangelical*, where the theology (such as it is) is non-confessional and highly individualistic. I seriously doubt that the reason most people leave churches which subscribe to the Reformed confessions is because they dislike the Reformed faith itself. Some probably don't know it well enough to dislike it. Others may know the faith better, even like it a bit, but it doesn't matter to them as much as some other things. Clearly for such people giving one's life for the Reformed faith is a mistake. So maybe we should think Guido died a fool.

It is true, of course, that people from many non-Reformed Christian denominations have a sufficient grasp of the fundamentals of the Christian faith so that we can be reasonably confident that they are saved. They have the measure of the faith necessary for salvation. Does that mean that the Reformed faith is unnecessary? That holding on to it—even to death—is a mistake?

Not at all. *When Paul planted churches he did not stop explaining the truth when people became believers. Indeed, his epistles are written not to seekers but to those who were found.* Through Paul, God was interested in explaining more than the four spiritual laws. The gospels also are full of rich doctrine, as are Hebrews, I Peter, Revelation—in fact every book of the New

Do we know more than God does about what is important? The great commission not only says that we must make disciples, but also that we must be teaching them to obey *everything* Jesus commanded.

*So here's the point. The Reformed faith includes the fundamental beliefs necessary for salvation, of course, but it also provides the most biblical and consistent view of what Christians ought to think and how they ought to live.* Non-Reformed assortments of belief in varying degrees affirm some of the truth revealed in the Bible. Each of them, however, is distorted or confused in some important way. Some misunderstand the importance of creation; others don't understand the seriousness of the fall into sin. Still others distort the history of redemption or wrongly view the person and work of Jesus Christ. Some don't know what the church is or what it should be; others are confused about the second coming of Christ. Many don't understand the relationship of the Old and New Testaments or the ongoing significance of the law.

The Lord is not satisfied when we know only the bare minimum about him and his way of salvation. If he did, he would not have provided us with such rich Scriptures. He rather wants us to grow in grace and knowledge. He does not want shallow believers or thinkers. He challenges each of us to love him with heart, soul, strength, and *mind*. We should not ignore, diminish or abandon the good deposit that has been entrusted to us. By leading us to the Reformed faith the Lord has given us true riches. We must be very careful not to sacrifice them on the altar of American evangelicalism. ■

**// We must not think that what really makes a church vital is the name it chooses rather than the service it renders. //**

mean? What things are unnecessary? Presumably being *called* "Christian Reformed" is an unnecessary barrier, so how about *being* Christian Reformed? Is this denominational affiliation itself an unnecessary barrier as well? Just consider, aren't there many Christians who are members of other churches—Methodist, Baptist, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, independent, etc.? And if one can be a Christian and not be Christian Reformed, then being Christian Reformed cannot be necessary to being a Christian. Why then do we think it is necessary to plant *Christian Reformed* churches? Why shouldn't we rather simply lend our support to other existing local churches? *After all, one cannot consistently say both that being Christian Reformed is unnecessary and that it is necessary to have Christian Reformed churches.*

We can take this a step further. Consider whether it is necessary to hold to the Reformed faith itself. Is this really necessary? Isn't it possible that it is a barrier to seekers? Aren't many premillennial dispensationalists saved?

faith itself appears to be an unnecessary barrier and, like the name, maybe it should be ignored or abandoned by churches just like any other barrier.

*What's going on here? Can it be true that holding to the Reformed faith is unnecessary? In earlier generations people like Guido de Bres gave their lives for the Reformed faith. Are we willing to conclude that they died in vain?*

I don't know whether anyone is actually willing to say that dying for the Reformed faith is dying in vain. There are, however, plenty of people who seem to think so. Even with no threat of persecution people in many communities are leaving churches of the Reformed faith

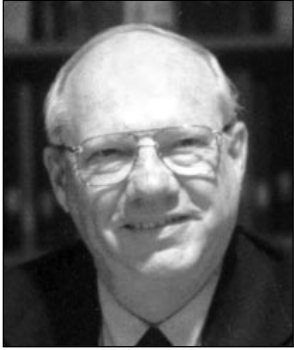
**// The Lord is not satisfied when we know only a bare minimum about Him and his way of salvation. //**

to join other churches. Often the churches they join are what we might call *American*

(and Old) Testament. Who wants to claim that such rich doctrine isn't necessary?

Henry Zwaanstra, Editor

# BEING REFORMED



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This issue of Forum is devoted to a general discussion of the distinctiveness of the Reformed faith and its particular conception of life and the world.

Being Reformed does not demand that one choose between Christianity itself and a particular expression of it. No one would be so foolish as to argue that it is more important to be Reformed than to be Christian. Christianity comes in many forms, all more or less comprehensively rooted in the apostolic faith and tradition. Mere Christianity or Christianity in general, as a simple matter of historical fact, does not exist. All authentic expressions of Christianity contain, as the articles in this issue make clear, fundamental, catholic statements of faith. This issue of Forum without embarrassment recommends distinctively Reformed Christianity.

To be or not to be distinctively Reformed is an inevitable and perennial question for any Reformed church, also for the Christian Reformed Church. This is so because the church

**“ Being reformed does not demand that one choose between Christianity itself and one particular form of it. ”**

lives within a particular culture and in the context of a variety of church groups, each with its own set of beliefs, form of church government, and patterns of worship. *The Christian Reformed Church in maintaining its distinctively Reformed character has always had to contend with the cultural forces operating in American culture and the dominant patterns of church life present in American Protestantism.*

In 1897, Reformed Christians of Dutch ancestry launched a periodical called *The Reformed American (De Gereformeerde Amerikaan)*. Under the able leadership of Foppe M. Ten Hoor, at the time a minister in the Christian Reformed Church and later a professor of Systematic Theology

American society and church life were uncongenial, even hostile, to Reformed Christianity.

The purpose of *The Reformed American* was to preserve and maintain a distinctively and self-consciously Reformed church, not one that was Reformed only in tradition and in its written confessions. Ten Hoor believed that Reformed Christianity in its essential features was international, applicable to all nations and cultures and also to America. He thought that some American cultural values and the typical practices of American churches were compatible with Reformed faith and practice. Others were incompatible. The former the Christian Reformed Church should embrace and appropriate; the latter the church should repudiate and reject. According to Ten Hoor, the church should

**“ To be or not to be Reformed... is a perennial question for any reformed church... ”**

at Calvin Seminary, the periodical appeared monthly from 1897-1918. Ten Hoor and his coterie of assistants were determined to counteract the commonly held opinion in the Christian Reformed Church that the Reformed faith with its Calvinistic conception of life and the world was a plant that could not flourish in America because

avoid American cultural enemies such as materialism, subjectivism, and pragmatism. American church life, in his view, was dominated by Methodism. While appreciating its spiritual warmth and vitality, Ten Hoor considered Methodism a most superficial form of Christianity. It was doctrinally indifferent and preoccupied with success. Both

American culture and Methodist Christianity were threats to the Reformed faith and church life. *The Reformed American* did much to deepen and enrich the Christian Reformed Church's distinctive Reformed identity and self-consciousness.

In 1926, R.B. Kuiper, at the time pastor of the LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church wrote *As To Being Reformed*. Two things, Kuiper said, motivated him to write: The imminent peril of American Calvinists losing their precious Reformed heritage, and the supreme importance of holding it fast. Thirty-three years later, Kuiper authored *To Be Or Not To Be Reformed: Whither The Christian Reformed Church*. Kuiper wrote this book also because he believed the church was at that time threatened by specific perils and because he wished to issue both a warning and an encouragement.

For Kuiper, Modernism was the most menacing danger facing the Christian Reformed Church. In the earlier book he speculated that during the last two decades the number who deserted the Christian Reformed Church for the “Modernist Camp” was surprisingly large. Kuiper also saw fundamentalism and worldliness threatening the church from without and orthodoxy, confessionalism, and perhaps legalism threatening it from within.

*The Christian Reformed Church always has been a confessional and evangelical church. It has consistently and successfully resisted the inroads of American Protestant liberalism. I believe that today confessionally indifferent American evangelicalism poses a greater threat to the church's Reformed confessional identity than Protestant liberalism. ■*



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# WHAT MAKES REFORMED THEOLOGY DISTINCTIVE?

a constellation of unique or characteristic emphases.

## The Catholicity of Reformed Theology

Reformed theology's distinctiveness must be seen against the background of its catholicity. Reformed theology is catholic Christianity. More specifically, it is Augustinian Christianity. During the sixteenth century, Reformers and Roman Catholics argued over which side was faithful to the theology of the early church. They were particularly concerned to find support in Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354-430), whose thought had been taken as authoritative throughout the Middle Ages. Both Lutheran and Reformed theologians worked hard to defend their own positions by showing that their views were based not just in Scripture, but also in the theology of the early church, especially Augustine's

argues that "a Reformed person is *trinitarian* in theology and *catholic* in vision" (p. 20). After citing Abraham Kuyper's view that Calvinism is rooted in the thought of Augustine, the apostle Paul, the prophets, and the Old Testament patriarchs, Bolt says, "The Reformed tradition ... is orthodox trinitarian Christianity at its best" (pp. 21-22). Similarly, in *On Being Reformed: Distinctive Characteristics and Common Misunderstandings* (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1983), I. John Hesselink argues that Reformed Christians are part of the one, holy, catholic church and thus make no special claims regarding the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith (p. 93).

Each time they recite the Apostles' or Nicene Creed, Reformed Christians affirm the truth identified by both Bolt and Hesselink. *Reformed Christians join with all who heed God's Word in*

**"...Reformed theology affirms the central doctrines of the Christian faith and therefore is part of catholic Christianity."**

theology. As a result, the central teachings of Reformed Christianity appear in other Christian traditions (particularly in traditions, such as Lutheranism, that borrow heavily from Augustine). So nothing central to Reformed theology is distinctive.

Two recent studies that address the distinctiveness of Reformed theology clearly affirm its catholicity. In *Christian and Reformed Today* (Jordan Station, ON: Paideia, 1984), John Bolt

*affirming the sovereignty and love of God, the goodness of the creation and God's providential care over it, and human culpability and solidarity in sin. They unite with all who confess Jesus Christ's substitutionary death for sinful humanity, his victorious resurrection that crushed the power of Satan, his lordship over all creation, and his promised return in glory.* Likewise, they agree with all who recognize the Holy

**"...Reformed Christians are Catholic Christians..."**

Spirit's work in moving and inspiring the authors of Scripture and in breathing life into those who were dead in sin. They believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Far from being sectarians who think that their "brand" of Christianity is the only true one, Reformed Christians are ecumenical.

Even on theological issues over which various Christian groups disagree, Reformed Christians rarely, if ever, stand alone. In many areas, Reformed Christians join with others as heirs to the broad tradition of Christian orthodoxy—on issues such as the relation between Scripture and tradition, the baptism of infant children of believers, the unity of the covenant of grace in the Old and New Testaments, and the importance of combining doctrinal training with deep piety. In some areas, Reformed Christians have developed or modified Christian doctrines that other traditions have subsequently borrowed. This can be seen in such teachings as the unity between the written Word of God and the work of the Spirit, the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, and the proper form of church government. And Reformed Christianity's emphasis on the lordship of Christ in every

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**WHAT MAKES...** . . . cont.  
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sphere of life has produced insights into the value and limits of civil government and into the Christian calling to transform culture—insights that have benefited Christians of various traditions.

Reformed theology also parallels other Christian traditions in that it is *confessional*. Unlike some groups (Unitarians and some Baptists come to mind) that unite around a single principle such as the freedom to interpret Scripture without ecclesiastical interference, *most Christians since the time of the apostles have found it helpful and even necessary to express in creeds and confessions their common understanding of what Scripture teaches*. When they affirm the Apostles' and Nicene creeds and unite around communal statements of faith such as the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort, Reformed Christians follow a pattern etched deeply into the annals of the Christian church. In sum, Reformed Christians are *catholic* Christians who share the essentials of the Christian faith with all members of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, and who share many beliefs and practices with Christians of other traditions.

**Distinctive Emphases in Reformed Theology**

Yet Reformed Christians know that there is *something* distinctive about Reformed theology (just as Roman Catholics and Lutherans know that there is something distinctive about their theological traditions). Like other Christian traditions, Reformed Christianity contains both a distinctive set of beliefs and a unique perspective on the Christian faith. *First, Reformed theology contains a unique or distinctive constellation of*

*views and practices—a unique set of beliefs. Although no single doctrine distinguishes Reformed theology from that of other orthodox Christian traditions, there is a set of beliefs that jointly distinguishes Reformed theology from other forms of Christian theology.* Thus, in addition to believing what can be found in the Apostles' and Nicene creeds, Reformed Christians believe that there is one covenant of grace that stretches from the Old Testament to the New and that the children of believers are members of this covenant and ought to be baptized. They also confess that, although all have sinned, God has in Jesus Christ mercifully chosen some for salvation without regard to their faith or works and that the Holy Spirit leads the church and moves people to faith by means of the Word of God. And they affirm that Jesus Christ's lordship over all creation implies that citizens of his heavenly kingdom should be involved in politics, business, the arts and sciences,



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education, and every other dimension of created reality. These beliefs are summarized in the classic Reformed confessions

**// Reformed Christians know that there is something distinctive about Reformed theology... //**

and in contemporary statements such as *Our World Belongs to God*.

*The second reason for Reformed theology's distinctiveness is its unique perspective on the Christian faith, which leads to distinctive doctrinal emphases.* Although Reformed theology recognizes and affirms all that is central to the Christian faith, it also highlights or emphasizes certain aspects of Christian teaching—aspects that some other traditions leave in the background or minimize. For example, all orthodox Christians affirm—but Reformed theology stresses—the sovereignty of God and salvation by grace. Countering the human tendency to treat God as a bookkeeper who rewards good people and punishes sinners, Reformed theology emphasizes that salvation comes by grace alone, not because of our own efforts. Again, Reformed theology underscores, more than other traditions do, the pervasiveness and persistence of sin in the human race. Finally, Reformed theology highlights the authority of Scripture as confirmed by the witness of the Holy Spirit. In short, Reformed theology provides a perspective on the Christian faith that highlights God's sovereignty and grace and emphasizes humanity's dependence and need for forgiveness.

Why do Reformed Christians hold to the set of beliefs they do? Why do they, in addition, place certain doctrines in bold relief? First, and most importantly, Reformed theology contains the teachings and emphases that it does because it patterns itself after Scripture. In fact, the only good reason to

adhere to the Reformed faith is that it is faithful to Scripture. Of course, Christians of every stripe learn from Scripture and therefore it should not be surprising that Reformed believers agree with other Christians on many Christian teachings. Still, Reformed Christians hold to their particular set of beliefs and emphasize certain doctrines because they consider these beliefs and emphases to be more faithful to Scripture than any other system of Christian doctrine. A second reason for the teachings and emphases of Reformed theology arises from historical circumstances. For example, in the sixteenth century, the Roman church's failure to teach salvation by grace and the assurance it provides made it necessary for the Reformers to emphasize these points. Similarly, the enslavement and oppression of people of African descent in North America and South Africa has led Reformed Christians to see clearly and to emphasize the equality of members of all races before God and in society. Historical circumstances can lead the church to see what it had previously missed in Scripture or to emphasize teachings that were otherwise obscure.

What makes Reformed theology distinctive? Reformed theology offers a distinctive perspective on the Christian faith that allows it both to affirm those doctrines central to Christianity and to highlight important biblical teachings that are easily obscured or ignored. In doing so, Reformed theology faithfully interprets and hands on the teaching of Scripture, leading its adherents into a fulfilling and challenging walk with God. ■

# TRUTH WITHIN FOUR WALLS?



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There was a time when Christians knew instinctively that difficult issues required resolution at the broadest assemblies. That is why Acts 15 records a gathering of representatives of the entire church, eclipsing the possibility that either Antioch or Jerusalem might decide the issue of circumcision of Gentiles on its own. That is why all major heresies threatening the early church were addressed in councils — not local councils, but assemblies broadly representative of the entire body of Christ. And that is also why the Reformers in their teaching came as close to universal or catholic synods as they could. *The very confession that the church is catholic means that the whole truth is never determined within the four walls of one local council room alone.* But the trend in our circles seems to be headed in the opposite direction.

## The Schism Train

Still more congregations have left the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Their leaders persuaded the

members — at least a majority of them — that this denomination has left the path of obedience. It's not merely that it now permits the ordination of women to the offices of minister and elder. *The claim is, apparently, that this is but a symptom of a more serious disease: the denomination has officially adopted a "faulty hermeneutic." And this will lead to further errors in the future. Hence the decisions to depart.*

What's amazing is that these decisions are made within the four walls of one council room. It doesn't seem to matter to these leaders that synod, a governing assembly representing all Christian Reformed people in the U.S. and Canada, has made the judgment that this is a matter of different exegesis or interpretation of biblical texts, not faulty hermeneutics. Those within the four walls decide to disagree. And it doesn't seem to matter to them that synod is not insisting that every congregation nominate women elders, thus forcing the "error" upon all local churches — but that it is merely permitting the practice. They have decided within those four walls that just to be "tainted" by this denominational "corruption" is reason enough to leave. And when classical representatives humbly ask to address the members of the congregation — so they may hear "both sides" in the dispute and make a more informed decision — it is decided, again within those four walls, that this will not be allowed. Truth resides at home. So the schism train moves on.

*Amazingly, some of those leaders now departed insist, in writing, that the Christian Reformed Church is not a false church. It's just wrong, misguided. But, one must ask, are we not called to stay*

*within our fellowship for as long as it's not false? Isn't there something to be said for never squandering whatever*

absence" for a while — meaning, of course, permanently.

It so happens that this is illegal according to our current

**"...it is hard to resist the diagnosis that our churches are suffering from a severe case of localism."**

unity there is left in the organized church by the grace of God? How can the plane fly if the right wing decides to take off on its own? If the churches of the denomination no longer preach the pure Word of God or rightly administer the sacraments, fine, the creed would have us leave. But when leaders themselves acknowledge this is not the case, how can they justify their exit? Well, they say, we tried every available avenue to have everyone agree with us — appeals and protests all the way up the ladder. Enough is enough! But what is insisted upon, of course, is that everyone fall in line with the truth already determined within four walls.

## Firing the Minister

Some of our ministers in the Christian Reformed Church have recently been "shown the exit door." It is not that they have been found guilty of doctrinal or moral error, or abuse of office, or anything else that warrants drastic disciplinary steps. They are informed that there is a difference in "vision" or "philosophy of ministry." They are told that interpersonal relationships are a bit strained lately, or that they have an "attitudinal problem" that hinders further service. So it's probably best they go on a "sabbatical" or "leave of

covenant called the Church Order. Congregations seem to be doing end-runs around constitutional protection of those called to bring God's prophetic word in our midst. Denominational pastor-church relations people, including regional pastors in every classis, are available to counsel and advise. They are not called in until it is too late. Classical church visitors are there to help solve disputes, to calm the waters, to be scrupulously fair in handling matters for the good of the congregations. They are ignored or merely called in to be passive witnesses to an event that is bound to occur. You see, the matter has already been decided within the four walls of the council room. Such dignitaries of the broader church are welcome to help mop up, but the die is cast. So adieu, pastor. And one is left to wonder: will they ever get another?

## Localism

Given these two examples among many, it is hard to resist the diagnosis that our churches are suffering from a severe case of localism. This is the opposite of unity and catholicity. And it appears to flourish in North America at the end of this twentieth century. Many Christians consider it their constitutional right to float like nomads or sovereign consumers from one

TRUTH... cont.

DE MOOR

congregation to another. Congregations become largely indifferent to ties that bind them to the broader fellowship of Christians. Commitment has become a dirty word. Denominations are judged burdensome relics of the past. Being there for the other is a luxury we can no longer afford. Accountability is but a nuisance to be ignored. Evangelical Christians have an ecclesiology that accounts for no more than their own congregation at First and Main.

Such localism is strange, given the fact that North American culture at large is busily relearning the truth that no man is an island. When lines of accountability inherent in communities fall away, individual Christians are urged to create them in small groups. How strange! Our economic life has gone global. We are totally interdependent. Hong Kong coughs and New York gets the flu. So we acknowledge these realities when planning our financial future both individually and as a nation. But the truth that the world is becoming a global village seems to be lost on many who serve in church office. They seriously believe they hold the reins in their hands. No questions asked. No accounting necessary. Of course, we shouldn't just learn from our culture, no matter what the current signals are. But it remains ironic. Perhaps our ministers, elders and deacons are in need of relearning the basics of our Christian confession.

**Catholicity**

The confession that the church is catholic (I do not mean Roman Catholic) is the exact opposite of localism. *Our creed acknowledges the marvelous fact that our God chose people from every cor-*

*ner of the world, from every language, tribe and nation.* None of them merit his favor, as we see so clearly in the stories of Abraham and Sarah, Israel's Judges, and Peter's experience with Cornelius. But the truth remains: our God will bless all the nations of the world through Abraham. The day of Pentecost demonstrates this beyond any doubt. People of diverse backgrounds speak their language but there is no longer a confusion of tongues — just a demonstration of God's unlimited power. And all of them wind up praising God before His throne, while the "glory and honor of the nations" are brought into the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:24). Christ's church is universal. Not just the so-called "invisible" church but also the "visible" church on earth. It is not without spot or blemish, and so there are always pockets of heresy and misguided thinking. But its catholicity is a check on such flaws when as broad a community of God's people as possible together in concert strives to understand clearly his will and his ways.

An analogy with the laws of physics may be helpful. The unity of Christ's church is like a centripetal force. Vastly diverse peoples, tribes and nations are drawn together into the center, into a whole, when they train their eyes on Christ, the pioneer and the perfecter of our faith, and when, prompted by the Holy Spirit, they become one in him. On the other hand, the catholicity of the church also moves us in an opposite direction. It acts like a centrifugal force. The church is propelled from the center of its being to grow increasingly diverse, always to expand outwardly, to submit its judgment to all who share in God's salvation, and to

be accountable to all who seek to discern the truth of his Word. Why is localism so dangerous? Because it effectively denies catholicity, a cardinal Christian truth, and makes light of the fact that our insights and judgments need to be constantly corrected by the Body of Christ at large.

*I do not believe that the church's councils, synods, and other assemblies are infallible.* But surely our local church-governing bodies would feel more comfortable if their judgments are checked against those of broader assemblies that have used all the resources avail-

able to them within the church of Christ to discern the will of God on any particular issue. And certainly the refusal of local councils and consistories even to consult with the broader community will only lead to further isolation and insulation from all who have been given the Spirit of the living God. May the Spirit lead all of us to rediscover a fitting humility — one that acknowledges without hesitation that truth discerned within four walls is never exactly the same as the truth of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord. ■

*" Some ministers in the CRC have recently been shown the exit door "*



**" ...that the church is catholic means that the truth is never determined within the four walls of one local council room alone. "**

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## CALVIN SEMINARY FORUM

# THE WORSHIP SERVICE

Rev. Jacob D. Eppinga



When the world moves on to a new century, the church cannot stagnate in the old. Changing times—changing challenges. The Christian Reformed Church of the '30s, unaltered, would be less relevant to the world of the '90s. It is good, then, that it has sought to keep pace, and that it has made progress in such matters as race, social concerns, and more. Meanwhile, it has continued preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ in a needy world, and, officially, maintained its three forms of unity.

Why, then, the exodus of a great number of its solid members? Their absence has had a seriously weakening effect. It is because they sense a Christian Reformed drift, away from its historic identity—the anchor in its distinctives loosening. Weakening Sabbath observance and church attendance. Neglect of prescribed catechism preaching. Questioning parts of the three forms of unity. Women in office. Hermeneutics (Genesis 1, e.g.). The persistent homosexual question. Lack of church dis-

cipline. These, and more, have had a cumulative and disquieting effect on a not inconsiderable number of its members. There is also the matter of liturgics. Some alterations in public worship have found acceptance by many. But by no means all.

Traditionally, Christian Reformed people were founded for decades in the idea that public worship is a meeting of God and his people, in which a covenant God addresses his people (*Acta Aparte Dei*) in special revelation, and his people respond (*Acta Aparte Populi*) under the influence of the Holy

agreed upon formularies for the sacraments, to the regular exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism, and to the observance of certain perimeters in the use of music. The Christian Reformed Synod of 1953 stated that the music of the church should be liturgical, serve the ministry of the Word, represent the full range of the revelation of God, be artistically defensible as good music, true to the inspired Word, in harmony with the whole counsel of God, not borrowed from the world of the dance, concert hall, or other music which suggests places and

**// ...an increasing number of Christian Reformed churches are...influenced by the music and mores of some popular TV services and macro churches... //**

Spirit. *Christian Reformed people have always believed that the purpose of public worship is the glorification of God, and the edification of the church, through the perfecting of the saints, and the conversion of sinners.* They have traditionally believed that the character of public worship is Christo—and not anthropocentric, conducted in spirit, in truth, in beauty, and in good order. They have covenanted with each other to the use of

occasions other than the church, and, withal, music expressive of our Reformed tradition, and, as far as possible, music that makes use of the Genevan Psalter tunes and other music of Calvinistic inspiration.

It has become evident to those who prize these distinctives, that an increasing number of Christian Reformed churches are more influenced by the music and mores of some popular TV services and macro

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churches than the spirit of 1953 which, in its day, found a whole-hearted reception among its members. In many churches today, the spiritual is secularized, and so, although it cannot be proved, many, craving the theatrical, go to church to be entertained.

Insofar as Christian Reformed churches buy into these new forms of worship and church music, lowering its distinctives, it will lose more members, and gain few. Indeed, the Christian Reformed church does well, in assessing the reasons for its losses, to add changes in liturgies to the list, and to urge all of its local worship committees to make a serious study, under the guidance of its leaders, of what Reformed worship really is. ■