

## Distinctives of the Reformed Faith

*(Ed. Note: This is the second in a three part series. The first article dealt with "Piety.")*

### 2. The church

Second, the Reformed faith likewise expresses itself in a distinctive congregational or church life. Presbyterian polity is involved here, to be sure; but I do not have reference in the first instance to presbyteries, synods, and general assemblies. Rather, this distinctive quality of our faith has to do most basically with the way in which the local church lives and worships and conducts itself.

Fundamental to our position is the preaching of the Word of God. This must be carefully understood. Preaching is not a brief essay by a minister on some religious topic. That, no matter how orthodox or faithful to the broad teaching of scripture, is never preaching. Preaching, properly understood in the Reformed conception, is the exposition and application of the Word of God. Because we have always regarded this as so significant and important, we have insisted at the same time upon an adequately trained ministry, schooled in the original languages of the Bible, able to examine, trace, define, and interpret the teaching of the Word of God, and then apply it to the congregation. One does not begin with some topic of current interest, or with the needs of the people. That is to put the cart before the horse. One begins with the Scriptures, and moves from what God regards as interesting and necessary to its relevance in the lives of those who hear. For this reason, too, preaching occupies so central and so large a place in our public worship. It is God's means of communicating the gospel to sinners and calling them to himself. There can be no question but that this is in accordance with what Scripture tells us about the nature of preaching and the place it should have in the Christian church. Hence, there can be no compromise with modern replacements and alternatives to the Word of God preached. It cannot be supplanted with films, dialogues, discussions, testimonies, concerts, song services, or anything else. A congregation that dislikes preaching, or seeks to confine it to the briefest possible period of time, by virtue of that fact has shown itself to be something less than Reformed. Similarly, a congregation that tolerates what goes by the name of preaching, but is not preaching at all — is rather a topical, story-ridden discussion of religion, politics, literature, sociology, or whatever—thereby indicates its great removal from the standard set by the Word of God and the heritage of the Reformation.

Again, the whole worship of a Reformed congregation is distinctive. It is not a program with the end in view of engaging the attention by beautiful music, impressive liturgy, elegant or moving rhetoric, but the people of the Lord coming before him, struck by his glory, filled with awe by his majesty, humbled by his grace, joyful with his mercy: the people of the Lord joining together in the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, hearing his Word read and preached, casting itself upon him in supplication and thanksgiving.

Further, a Reformed congregation will be an instructed people, instructed in sound preaching, instructed also in the doctrines of the faith. For that reason do we have our catechisms. These are sadly neglected now, and most of us have little or no acquaintance with the regular, systematic instruction of children and young people in the teachings of Scripture; but as we purpose anew to be Reformed, we shall begin again to see that this demands our attention, and that Sunday School classes, as usually conducted with a Bible story and some moral lessons drawn from it, are by no means and in no sense an adequate implementation of such a program of instruction.

Then, too, a Reformed congregation will be one in which the eldership has its rightful place and exercises its God-given responsibilities. Among these are the regular visitation of the families of the church (not for money, in the every-member canvass, but to inquire into the spiritual well-being and growth of the people), the solemn guarding of the Lord's table against the unfaithful and careless of life, and the administration of church discipline. While most of us give lip-service to this last matter, yet I fear that it is seldom taken seriously in our churches. We wish to avoid giving the impression that we think ourselves to be holier than others, and thus do nothing at all about seeking out and rebuking those members who live in open sin, or have ceased coming to the public worship of the congregation, or refuse to see to the instruction of their children, and then proceeding by means of the steps of discipline to deal with such cases. Discipline is remedial and medicinal, intended to restore offenders and produce a sound, healthy church life. But it can also be punitive and surgical: the honor of God and of the church is at stake. There can be no such thing as a Reformed and biblical congregation without the harmonious interrelationship and the reciprocal acting upon each other of the pure preaching of the Word of God, the right administration of the sacraments, and the faithful exercise of discipline.

— Rev. John Richard DeWitt

## On the Election of Moderators

"Hello, Z? This is Y. As you know, I have been endorsed as a candidate for Moderator of the General Assembly this year. I just wanted to be assured that I can count on your vote . . . After all, we have served in presbyteries together . . . I'm sure that in these critical times I can count on you . . ."

Such brazen vote-gathering by telephone has been a rather common occurrence in recent years, as the post of Moderator of the PCUS General Assembly has become increasingly the object of political power plays.

But, this is not as far as the muscle-maneuvering goes.

We have it on good authority that one 1972 candidate's supporters spent over \$30,000.00 on his campaign!

Posters, ~~phone calls, fliers, letters of recommendation~~, stickers, banners, lapel buttons — all these deluge the commissioners in the months before an Assembly.

Is this the Presbyterian way? Whatever happened to the principle that commissioners are to vote their Spirit-taught conscience as informed by the debate and discussion on the floor of the court?

For our part, we suggest that, as in the past:

- 1) The candidates for Moderator announce their intention to seek the post;
- 2) The office of the General Assembly distribute to the commissioners a brief biographical sketch of each candidate, and
- 3) We then simply trust God to work through His people to elect the man of His choice.

After all, in these days of evangelistic and missionary urgency, couldn't \$30,000.00 be more profitably used elsewhere?

---

## Keeping Posted

• The West Hopewell (Virginia) Presbyterian Church has petitioned Hanover Presbytery to dismiss it with its property. The Rev. Ronnie Willis is pastor. (Hanover Presbytery recently dismissed the West End church of Hopewell, and is currently engaged in litigation with the Tabb St. congregation of Petersburg, which voted last summer to withdraw.)

• Judge Michael L. Carr of Brookhaven, Miss., was endorsed by the Synod of Mississippi for moderator of the 1973 General Assembly. Others who have been endorsed for the post are: the Rev. Charles Kraemer, Richmond, Dr. Evelyn Green, Atlanta, and Dr. Lawrence Bottoms, Atlanta.

• A North Miami congregation recently ordained an 18 year old college student to the office of Ruling Editor. Note: I Timothy 3:6; 5:22

• Dr. Francis Schaeffer, whose ministry to young intellectuals at L'abri, Switzerland, has captured the imagination of much of the Christian World, will bring three addresses to a February 15-

16 meeting of the National Presbyterian and Reformed Fellowship in Atlanta. For further information write the Rev. Donald Graham, 3038 Bryn Mawr Road, Montgomery, Ala.

• Eugene Carson Blake, former WCC head and co-ordinator of COCU, has agreed to run for moderator of the 1973 UPUSA General Assembly.

• Is COCU dead (as some allege)? The COCU draft Plan of Union was the instrument used to structure the merger of two Presbyterian and Methodist congregations in Pennsylvania. The new "parish" will be called the Church of Christ Uniting.

• If you want your Easter Offering to be part of a clear testimony to Christ you might consider giving it through the World Relief Commission, the overseas relief arm of the National Association of Evangelicals. For information write: World Relief Commission, P. O. Box 44, Valley Forge, Penna. 19481.

• An article in the December, 1972 **Presbyterian Survey** ("Cross a Boundary in Peace" by J. Thomas Leamon) suggested that the two-faced Roman god, Janus, might be "the clue for New Year's celebration in the family." The observance recommended includes a "lovely litany on the onset of menstruation" and "intercession for cats and turtles departed." We wonder if the Holy Spirit had such nonsensical janglings in mind when He inspired I Timothy 1: 3-4; Philippians 3: 13-14.

• The proposed New Confession is critically evaluated by Dr. Robert Strong in a new **Presbyterian Journal** reprint. Order them from the Journal, Weaverville, N. C.

• The Rev. John Evans, Executive Secretary of the Board of Christian Education (PCUS), has been elected Chief of Staff of the new General Executive Board.

• Reformed Youth Conferences will be held this summer in Sardis, Miss. (June 18-23), and Bristol, Tenn. (July 9-14). For information, write the Rev. Pete Hurst, Rt. 1, Box 197, Coeburn, Va. 24230.

• The Friendship Presbyterian Church, Black Mountain, N. C., has voted to leave the PCUS and to unite with Vanguard Presbytery. The Rev. Kemp Hobson is pastor. The church is asking Asheville Presbytery to dismiss it to the newly formed body.

• Two ministers, who recently left the denomination with their congregations, have been defrocked — The Rev. Linwood G. Wilkes, pastor of the Tabb Street Presbyterian Church, Petersburg, Va., and the Rev. J. B. Slicer of the Grace Covenant church, Hampton, Va. Another minister, now a member of Vanguard Presbytery, is undergoing severe trials due to his stand for the Faith of Jesus Christ. Pray for these brethren.

• Hanover Presbytery has denied the request by Dr. William E. Hill, Chairman of the Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship, to be dismissed to Vanguard Presbytery.

• Proposed Synod C-F (Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Kentucky), in its convention in Nashville, January 30, voted to put off changing presbytery boundaries until 1975.