

EDITORIAL

Once more we embark on a new Volume of our magazine. As the years flow along in predictable sequence we all continue in our vocations. The body of our Saviour consists of many and various parts, each having its own important task to fulfill and each being challenged and rewarded according to the pleasure and purpose of its Creator. It is with this truth in mind that we take up our 'pens' again and proceed with our work in the vineyard of our Lord as we commence publication.

We are thankful and comforted that we do not go forward in our own strength, but are directed by His Spirit and Word. Over the past four years we have seen positive developments in the publication of Reformed Polemics. At the beginning we sent our 'magazine' (it looked more like a newsletter) to only 30 addresses. By word of mouth this was multiplied ten fold. Upon encouragement of others we bravely sent four issues to every Canadian Reformed address last spring. At the same time very helpful and encouraging work was undertaken in Australia. As a result of these efforts we will print one thousand copies of the first issue of Volume 5.

Because of the expanded readership we face the challenge of providing even more, good, reformed content. In order to do so we continue to strive for an increase in written contributions. One method of focusing writers, and at the same time helping our readers deal with a particular subject, would be to provide thematic issues. While this method of publishing also has drawbacks (some readers might not like the chosen subject, authors might duplicate material, etc.) we have decided to give every second issue in the coming year a theme. Hopefully some of you will let us know your responses. We are also interested in knowing which subjects you might wish us to address.

Once again we thank you all for showing your interest in our magazine. We also heartily thank all those who work with us in producing it and who have already committed of their time and effort for the coming year. Most of all we thank those who contribute by way of writing. It is not an easy task to ensure that what is written is scriptural instruction. But we do know that it is appreciated by the readership. We do know that the truth is a most valuable instrument in guiding God's people as they travel along the pathway of life. We have the light of the gospel, we have the assurance of faith, we have the promise of redemption and we have a sure and glorious future.

PdB

TO BE OR NOT TO BE

On Being Reformed Today

Three rather straight-forward questions form the first paragraph of a very timely article on "Being Reformed Today." (a) The author, Rev. J. Visscher, begins his contribution on this subject by asking: "Do you know what the word 'reformed' means? Are you happy that you are a member of a Canadian Reformed Church? Do you go out of your way to convince others of the richness of the Reformed faith?" The author then notes that he asks these questions "because I sense that among us there are those who, if they were asked, would answer 'No!' to all three questions."

In mentioning those "among us," Rev. Visscher is, of course, referring to some members of the Can. Ref. Churches in the Fraser Valley area who no longer seem to know, understand, or appreciate what it means to be Reformed. To be or not to be Reformed is for them no longer a

crucial or relevant question. They simply don't know what it means, or, if they still do know, they don't really care. They no longer want to be Reformed. Rev. Visscher is certainly not the first minister to have observed the arrival of this stage of decline in the life of a church or church federation, nor is he the only minister who has, as the consequence of the manifestation of such decline, felt the need to ask some pertinent questions.

The late Dr. P. Eldersveld, in his address to college graduates (Calvin College, 1954), also recounts how some people simply "didn't want to be distinctively Reformed." In this context he described the "three stages of decline," the three steps "on the road to Liberalism," as experienced by an elderly retired colleague from an other church federation: "First they didn't know anymore what to believe, then they didn't really care what they believed, and finally the didn't want to believe anymore." In the closing sentences of his address Dr. Eldersveld asked the college graduates and other member of the Christian Reformed community this one simple question: "Do you think that this could happen to our churches too?" (b)

The question which Dr. Eldersveld posed to the members of the Christian Reformed community in the 11ian Reformed Churches, in spite of their beautiful name, are now no longer Christian, definitely not Reformed, and it is doubtful whether the word "church" is still a fitting description of what is left of this federation.

It would be naive to assume that deformation or decline cannot or will not occur in the Canadian Ref. Churches. The fact that the article, "Being Reformed Today," was written in response to some disconcerting developments that are taking place in our local churches, is in itself an indication that the possibility of such deformation or decline is indeed very real. And that, in a sense, should not really surprise us. Rather, we should be surprised if such deformation or decline did not occur. Those who know their Bible, and have studied their church history, can readily affirm that deformation or decline invariably follows reformation or renewal.

We read in the Word of God that Joshua charged the people of Israel to "fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and faithfulness.... Then the people answered, 'far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods.... for it is the Lord our God... who did those great signs in our sight... therefore we will serve the Lord, for he is our God'" (Josh. 24:14-18). In Judges, chapter 2, we read: "And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen the great work which the Lord has done for Israel (verse 7) ... and there arose another generation after them, who did not know the Lord or the work which he has done in Israel" (verse 10). Then there follows the familiar and often repeated refrain: "And the people did what was evil in the sight of the Lord... They forsook the Lord... Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them... And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord..."

In the history of the Christian church we continually encounter the recurring cycle of renewal and decline; of reformation and deformation. Those people "who had seen the great work which the Lord had done" served the Lord all their days. But, the next generation which "did not know the Lord or the work which he had done" forsook the Lord. We should therefore not simply assume that things will be radically different today. In fact, it should not at all surprise us that in our Reformed churches there are currently members who would answer "No!" to all three of Rev.

Visscher's questions. What should perhaps surprise us is that it has taken this long for us to formally acknowledge and publicly address this sad and distressing development in the life of our churches. We shall do well to ask a few questions of our own: Is it possible that also our inability to readily recognize the clear and observable signs of deformation and decline in our Reformed community could itself be evidence of the fact that we have already taken the first steps "on the road to Liberalism?" Could it be that, paraphrasing Dr. Elderveld, "we simply don't know anymore what to believe?" Is it conceivable that, restating Rev. Visscher's question, we aren't sure anymore what the word "reformed" means? And, if we really don't know anymore what to believe, and we aren't sure anymore what the word "reformed" means, should it then surprise us that being Reformed is for many church members no longer a crucial and relevant question?

A number of members have recently withdrawn from our churches. We have witnessed the "faithless desertion of office" of one of the ministers in our Canadian Reformed Churches because, among other things, he can no longer maintain his signature under the Subscription Form, and he cannot live with the fact that adherence to all of the Reformed confessions is required. He is convinced that "confessional membership" is both unbiblical and unrealistic. And so he withdrew. These recent "withdrawals" are certainly not the first church members to leave our churches and church federation. The late 1980's and the early 1990's also saw a fair number of members withdraw their membership in the local Can. Ref. Churches. (d) The fact that some became members in other churches and church federations, also federations which lay claim to being Reformed and churches with which we currently seek unity, gives us ample reason to openly and publicly discuss what it really means to be Reformed today. The peace among church members and among churches is promoted when that which divides them is kept from advancing because it is discussed in public.

We are therefore truly thankful that Rev. Visscher has in fact taken the initiative to publicly and openly discuss what it means to be a reformed believer today. We can wholeheartedly agree with his conviction that the reformed believer is "awestruck," - such a believer's life "centers on God and His great deeds." Such a believer is "Biblical," - such a person "listens carefully, interacts constantly and adheres faithfully to the will of God as revealed in the Bible." A reformed believer is "humble," - "It is Christ who gives us a new status, a new life, a new future... God still re-creates us today through the power of His Spirit... A healthy dose of humility should clothe us all and a daily reliance on Christ should be our abiding strength." Furthermore, Rev. Visscher writes that reformed believers are "confessional," - "The church has always had to steer a steady course between the two dangers of 'confessionalism' and 'anti-confessionalism.'" The confessions function in the church "not as inspired writings and not as useless documents, but as faithful and necessary guides." Reformed believers are also "constructive," - "They want to build up the church and to promote the kingdom of God." Finally, they are "aggressive," - they must "spread the word with zeal."

We are appreciative of and gladdened by Rev. Visscher's affirmation of what it means to be Reformed; what the qualities are that best describe a reformed person; what a "reformed, biblically based believer is." This kind of "constructive" discussion will hopefully create a renewed awareness and appreciation of the richness of the Reformed faith; of how rich we are as reformed believers. We are indeed thankful and grateful for this "constructive" and timely contribution to

the discussion at hand. Yet, if the purpose of our polemics, our public and open discussion, is to bring about and promote peace among church members, then we must focus especially on those specific issues which divide us; those particular points which prompted some of our church members to withdraw themselves from our churches. In that context Rev. Visscher's comments made on the point of the reformed believer being "confessional" and "constructive" could be the impetus for some further comment and continued public and open discussion.*

In conclusion, the Lord in His Word clearly reveals to us that deformation or decline is generally only a generation away. The tragic developments in the Christian Reformed Church should constitute a valuable church history lesson for us. This knowledge should serve to warn a new generation of Canadian Reformed believers against complicity and complacency; against the thought that the struggle for the unity and sanctity of the church and its growth is now behind us. To be Reformed means to be Biblical. To be or not to be Reformed must therefore remain an extremely crucial and relevant question, especially today! Being Reformed is not a matter of preference, but it is a matter of the truth of God's Word, and of His honour and glory, for to Him belong all honour and glory for ever and ever.

RD

* That we will do, the Lord willing, in one of our next issues.

(a) Being Reformed Today, Rev. J. Visscher, Information, June 27/98.

(b) A Familiar Story?, Dr. P. Eldersveld (Ron Dykstra), Information, Feb26/94.

(c) Church Order, Article 72. See Letter to the Editor, John Bareman, Reformed Polemics, June 20/98, and Letters to the Editor, M Bareman, Clarion, July 10/98.

(d) Church News, Dec.25/88, Sept. 28/91, Feb 2/94, Feb 13/94, etc.

Some Consequences of Sex before Marriage

It is clear from Scripture that God has forbidden sex before marriage. God expects all of us to marry in a state of virginity (Cf. Deut. 22:13-21). Still, no matter how sad, people do fall into this sin. How should we view such situations? What are the consequences of this sin? It is to these questions that we wish to address ourselves in this article.

The first matter that many seem to raise is whether this sin is as serious as people sometimes make it out to be - "Isn't swearing a sin too?" Why is such an emphasis placed on this sin? It is important to understand that the seriousness of this sin and the emphasis placed upon it comes directly from the Bible. In 1 Cor. 6:18 the apostle Paul admonishes us: 1 Cor. 6:18 Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body.

But is sex before marriage immorality? Paul uses a word (*porneia*) that alludes to all forms of forbidden sexual activity, including sex before marriage as well as adultery after marriage. Paul singles out sexual sin from among all others. Special emphasis is placed on this sin. Why is that? It is because with this sin one sins against his own body. This matter is further explained in the

following verses: 1 Cor. 6:19-20 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

It is not only that with participation in forbidden sexual activity we sin in our bodies, but by it the Holy Spirit is also grieved (Cf. Eph. 4:30). If we are believers the Holy Spirit dwells within our hearts. In this way our bodies become temples of the Holy Spirit. By means of sexual sin this temple becomes defiled. The holiness of God is affected. That's why the apostle Paul admonishes - "Shun immorality" (literally "flee sexual sin"). It is not merely a matter of forbidding, but also a command to run away from this sin. We must be careful not even to come near such sins. Paul is aware how easily and strongly our sinful desires are become inflamed!

The seriousness of this sin is also explained in Scripture by its consequences. Sex before marriage is not a sin that can be solved with a simple prayer for forgiveness. God has attached important consequences to it. These are clearly described in His law: Exodus 22:16-17. "If a man seduces a virgin who is not betrothed, and lies with her, he shall give the marriage present for her, and make her his wife. If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equivalent to the marriage present for virgins."

Deut. 22:28-29. "If a man meets a virgin who is not betrothed, and seizes her and lies with her, and they are found, then the man who lay with her shall give to the father of the young woman fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife, because he has violated her; he may not put her away all his days."

Both of these laws speak about consenting sex before marriage. They show us that pre-marital indulgence in these privileges, reserved by our Lord for the bond of marriage, involves the obligation to marry. A boy and a girl who have become physically one must marry; regardless of whether the girl has become pregnant (see below for an exception). God has restricted physical unity to marriage. That is also why, in the Old Testament, the Lord commanded a fine to be paid to the father of the girl, namely 50 shekels of silver. This fine is called "the marriage present" in Exodus 22, but the translation can be confusing for it might appear that a dowry is meant. That is not the case.

At this point I should clear up any misunderstanding. It certainly was, and is, an Eastern custom for a dowry to be paid when a daughter is given away in marriage. We learn from the Bible that this was also the practice in Israel. But, and this is particularly noteworthy, Gods law says nothing about this practice at all. You will not find rules for dowries anywhere in the Bible. The only thing we read in this regard is that when there has been sexual intercourse before marriage a fine of 50 shekels of silver must be paid to the father of the girl.

When we consider that the average annual salary for a laborer in Moses' time was ten silver shekels, we may conclude that such a fine was roughly equivalent to five years wages! If such an amount could not be raised the only solution would be debt-slavery. In this way we can see that this sin was not small in God's eyes. Stealing the gifts of marriage in advance has clear consequences.

Along with the demand to marry in these circumstances God has also given a safety rule. This demand is not etched in stone. The father of the girl (as head of the family) has the right to refuse

permission for such a marriage. This may be done to protect the girl. When such a sin occurs, it is often the case that the boy and girl are deeply in love. But love can be blind. It is possible that the boy is not at all suited for the girl. This is something that the father of the girl should ascertain. Sex before marriage does not automatically lead to a forced marriage. However, we must remember that the participants have stolen in advance what rightly belongs only to marriage.

The Bible speaks from the position that a father gives his daughter away to her husband (e.g., 1 Cor. 7:36-38). It is important that the father (thus the parents, with father as head) grant permission for his daughter to marry. That is also why we still have the practice of a young man asking permission from the father of his fiancée to take her hand in marriage. This is not just a nice, laudable practice, but a tradition with a Biblical foundation.

Sometimes the question is raised whether it is necessary to seek the parents' permission if the girl has already done profession of her faith. This exposes an apparent misunderstanding about the nature of public profession of faith. A child that professes his (her) faith does, indeed, publicly say that he wants to live in faithfulness to his Lord and accept all the responsibilities of full membership in Christ's church. That includes admission to the Lord's Supper table. But it does not mean that before doing profession of his faith he had no personal responsibility for his faith. Indeed, if a baptized member falls into sin the consistory has the right (even the duty) to deal with this matter, and may even put him under discipline. (That's also why we have a Form for the Excommunication of Non-Communicant Members.) Neither does profession of one's faith undo previous authority-relationships. A person who has done profession of faith must still obey his boss at work. The same goes for obedience to parents (when he/she lives at home). They remain his parents. Of course the relationship between parents and children in regards to responsibilities must change as children become older, but public profession of faith does not eliminate such a relationship. When Paul, in 1 Cor. 7:37-38, gives advice to fathers concerning the marrying off of their daughters, he does not add the clause "unless your daughters have done public profession of their faith." Nor do we find such a clause in Exodus 22:17. It is not necessarily wrong for a boy and a girl to get to know one another before they marry, but the permission to marry given by the parents of the girl remains a Biblical requirement. The Bible clearly speaks (with reference to the father) of giving in marriage. Through the formation of a new marriage-bond the authority of the parents comes to a definitive end (Gen. 2:24). If a woman were to marry for second time she would do so independently (1 Cor. 7:39).

Circumstances can become complicated if parents irresponsibly refuse permission to marry. In such cases it may be possible to appeal to the consistory who should judge whether the parents are sinning in their refusal (for example, if they want their daughter only to marry into money).

All of this shows that when sex has occurred before marriage, the boy has certain responsibilities over against the father of the girl. It is the father's duty to give his daughter away in marriage, regardless of her age (see 1 Cor. 7:36-38). The sin must also be humbly confessed to the father. A Christian boy will also be the more humbled when he realizes that in the Old Testament an amount of five times his annual salary would have been paid to the father. The girl, whose virginity has been eternally lost, becomes his responsibility and under his care. And the father must be reminded that in such a case the Lord has demanded marriage, unless the father refuses permission (with

good grounds). If the father notices that both the boy and his daughter show genuine repentance for their sin and also a desire to bring it before the Lord - and if there are no other serious reasons to prevent it - the marriage ceremony, in obedience to the Word of God, should be arranged as soon as possible.

Yet one more consequence follows for the newly married couple. Where sexual intercourse has occurred before marriage, the Lord ordains that the couple may never divorce. Such a marriage may never be annulled. Herein a certain protection is again afforded to the girl. She may never be abandoned. Her husband will always be responsible for her well-being, even if they should come upon difficult times in which it is necessary to separate. He will, as long as he lives, be responsible for her protection and support.

May the Lord grant us the strength and power not to fall into this sin. By becoming aware of the weight and seriousness of this matter in the eyes of the Lord we will be motivated all the more to do everything we can to prevent it; and not only to prevent it, but to run away from it. Should one fall into such a sin, the way of reconciliation with our Lord is clear. Let us never try to cover up such sins. The consequences of doing that are eternal. Pray to God for the necessary strength and humility to follow His way in these matters.

Dr. R. D. Anderson

Translated, with permission, by PdB

June 21, 1998

Dear Editor,

Br. W. Bredenhof has an extremely valid statement which appears to solicit a response, "It is imperative that we reconsider De Cock's arguments nearly 165 years later"... Without a doubt, one must agree with this statement because it is more than obvious that such a thing exists; the gradual replacement of the Psalms with hymns as songs of worship during the services. Of course, there is nothing new under the sun as is pointed out. The church throughout history has always been reformed and is in constant need of reformation. When the church deforms, the hymns will show the deformation of the church by not being Scriptural. Church deformation and the mass invasion of hymns always go hand in hand, at the expense of the Psalms, as well as many other things that break down what Christ builds up.

Bredenhof made a beautiful statement in a previous article regarding the use of songs for worship, "God gives us songs which we may use to praise Him." It was concluded that no others are necessary. One may argue that the hymns in our Book of Praise are New Testament passages put to music, making these acceptable for songs of worship. Undeniably true.

There appears to be a misunderstanding by De Cock in his reference to Amos 5:23 as a defense for the exclusive use of the Psalms. What was the reason(s) for God's words in this passage, "Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments"? Was God merely focusing His attention on the introduction to "new" songs inspired by human composition? De Cock also refers to "Deut. 12: 8, 32 as a sharp command from God not

to worship Him according to our own devices”. Does this speak specifically of worship services on the Lord’s Day?

In the time of Amos, God’s people were doing exactly that; worshipping Him according to their own devices; not only on the Sabbath day but every other day of the week. Then on the day of rest they gathered together in worship and sang praises to Him as part of their regular worship services.

In the context of Amos 5, as well as the rest of the Book of Amos, God is telling Israel how terribly displeased He is in their walk of life as His people. Because of their unrepentant hearts, God is reprimanding His people. The Israelites’ service to God in their every-day-life was a stench in His nostrils. To top it off, they gathered customarily on the day of rest and conducted their worship services as if everything was fine. God was telling His people, “I hate the way you are living. I will not accept anything that you offer to Me because it’s not from the heart.” Therefore the statement, “Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments.” It may have very well been that the Israelites had introduced other songs to accompany the Psalms, although Scripture does not tell us so, but the Lord clearly indicates He will not accept the “noise” in their singing of the Psalms either because of their evil ways.

For De Cock to maintain that the use of hymns is not proper for worship on the Lord’s Day, or at any other time, leads to an inconsistent conclusion. There appears to be confusion when trying to explain the passages of Eph. 5 and Col. 3 in defense of the exclusive use of the Psalms. Paul would not have made the distinction between psalms and/or hymns if there were none. It is doubtful that any original Hebrew or Greek translations fail to mention the distinction between Psalms and/or hymns.

This raises another argument. After the Lord Jesus’ celebration of the last supper with His disciples; “And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives...” (Matt. 26:30), was this simply the New Testament word for a Psalm, as De Cock explains about Eph.5 and Col. 3?

Most will agree with De Cock that the use of Evangelical Hymns is not acceptable for worship. These hymns always stray from Scripture because of the tendency to give praise to man rather than to God, or by bringing Him down to our level and then attempting to praise Him. Without a doubt, God will repeat the same words in Amos to those who sing Psalms that glorify His name and at the same time sing hymns which glorify man; thus robbing God of His glory.

Our singing must always glorify God. If the contents of the songs are not for that purpose, then they are not acceptable. At the same time, songs sung to His praise and glory, using songs which He has given, with evil and unrepentant hearts are also not acceptable. The Lord will not hear the words or melodies as He clearly shows in Amos.

Getting back to Bredenhof’s statement; “it is of vital importance that we reconsider De Cock’s arguments nearly 165 years later...”, but not necessarily his call for the exclusion of hymns within Reformed churches. His (De Cock’s) position that Psalms must be used for worship must always be maintained. The reality is, as Bredenhof points out, these Psalms appear to many as out-dated, and ought to be replaced by more appealing songs with brighter melodies instead of the mundane tunes of the Genevan melodies.

Has anyone ever considered that when these melodies are attacked, the text also gets bruised?

In previous editions of the Book of Praise; those of the 60's (with the dark-red cover) with its supplement to this edition of that time, there were no more than 15 - 20 hymns, or possibly less; and the edition of the 70's (with the dark-blue cover) with the addition of hymns bringing the total to approximately 60 or so, and the current edition with its total of 65 hymns. Notice the gradual increase in number of the hymns with each edition.

As Bredenhof's article indicates, in the Liberated Churches in the Netherlands, our sister churches, a movement is underway to introduce 255 new hymns for worship in the church. If these hymns are acceptable as praising His name alone, why has it taken so long for these hymns to finally find their way into the church?

Put an ear to the ground and listen for the sound of the movement here in North America when the invasion of hymns seeks entrance into our churches at the expense of the Psalms.

If this happens, we can be assured that the Lord will again place His fingers in His ears, requesting that we stop the "noise of our songs".

He will accept only that which praises and glorifies His magnificent name; never that which compromises and praises someone else at the same time.

Bill Doekes, Rockway, ON

NEWS

Classis Michigan Approves Official Classis Newsletter

At its first organizational meeting on March 3, Classis Michigan of the United Reformed Churches voted to establish what will also be a "first in the denomination - an official classical newsletter to share news of local churches." The overture from Faith URC of Holland didn't pass without scrutiny, however, and classis also voted to ask the newsletter's new editor to develop publication guidelines for presentation to the next classis session seven months from now. United Reformed News Service

Orthodox Presbyterian Church Invites United Reformed to Enter Ecclesiastical Fellowship

Meeting from May 27 to June 2 at Reformed Bible College in Grand Rapids, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church voted to invite the United Reformed Churches in North America, the largest group of churches which have seceded from the Christian Reformed Church, "to enter into a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC." "This is a group of churches that have stood for the confessional standards and have had to make the break," said Rev. Jack Peterson, chairman of the OPC's Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations. "We haven't found in talking to them what I expected, 'death to the CRC.' We have found them to be a Reformed church that wants to bring its Reformed faith to the world."

United Reformed News Service

Two More Denominations Explore Closer Ties with United Reformed Churches in North America

At its June General Assembly, the Presbyterian Church in America voted to invite the United Reformed Churches “to take whatever steps are requisite to develop closer relations between the United Reformed Churches in North America and the Presbyterian Church in America.” During the same month, Classis Western Canada of the URC approved an overture from Trinity Reformed Church of Lethbridge, Alberta, to “take concrete steps toward full federative union with the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches by appointing a committee of our classis to begin discussions with them.” Classis Western Canada also adopted an overture from Emmanuel Reformed Church of Neerlandia, Alberta, to “extend an invitation to the OCRC’s Western Classis to enter into official ecumenical relations and to inform Synod 1999 of the URCNA of our actions.” The Orthodox Presbyterian Church voted earlier to invite the URC to enter fraternal relations.

The Presbyterian Church in America’s vote represents a marked change from the previous attitude of the denomination, which fought for years to keep the Christian Reformed Church in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council. After Synod 1995 voted to allow each classis to make its own decision on women’s ordination, the PCA broke fraternal relations with the CRC and initiated the motion to suspend the CRC from NAPARC membership.

United Reformed News Service

Inactive Membership Categories Approved for CRC

Deciding that the grounds of a Classis Atlantic Northeast overture drawing extensively from the procedures of the Reformed Church in America are “convincing” and that “the need for the new categories in the church membership is real,” the Christian Reformed synod voted to establish an “inactive membership” category. The new category will be used for professing members of local churches “who for one year have not made faithful use of the means of grace, especially the hearing of the Word and the Lord’s Supper” or who “have a relationship to the congregation which has ceased for one year.”