

**Celebrated Meeting Each Other In Doctrine, Liturgy, and Government:
The Bicentennial of the Celebration of the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America
by Daniel J. Meeter.
Win. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Mich. 1993. Softcover, 212pp.**

Rev. Dr. Daniel Meeter, former pastor of the Maranatha Reformed Church of Wainfleet, Ont., currently in Hoboken, New Jersey, wrote this volume in honour of the 200th anniversary of the publication of the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America (RCA). It is also meant to be a historical resource, to make available those parts of the original constitution which have been out of print for nearly a century. Its publication also marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Historical Series of the RCA. *Meeting Each Other* is the twenty-fourth volume.

The RCA, the oldest Protestant denomination in America, gradually left its Dutch heritage and became ethnically and culturally diverse. Meeter believes that the constitution is the glue that holds the RCA together. And the more pastors and elders understand it, "the more loyal they can be to each other and the more joyful will be their working together."

The RCA Constitution stands on three legs: the denomination's Doctrinal Standards, its Liturgy, and its Form of Government, which includes Disciplinary Procedures, and Formularies. These three sections make the constitution strong and steady. Meeter says that to weaken one is to weaken all three. He also gives a spirited defense of the need of a constitution./He points out interpretation and an application of the Bible.

It also helps the church put the Scriptures into practice, making use of the wisdom and experience of tradition.

The RCA calls itself a confessional church. Its constitution contains the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort. But these confessions don't function well in today's RCA churches. "It is the rare RCA pastor," writes Meeter, "who regularly preaches the Heidelberg Catechism, much less regularly studies the Belgic Confession for his or her own edification. Everyone knows that if the Canons of Dort were to be written today, they would never win the two-thirds vote necessary to be added to the constitution." Meeter points to one possible exception. Due to the use of the Christian Reformed Church's (CRC) Bible Way curriculum, the Heidelberg Catechism appears to have enjoyed a small revival in the RCA. Throughout his book Meeter provides helpful comparisons between the CRC and the RCA. He notes that the CRC does not have a document which serves as a formal constitution. It has an informal one. The General Synod of the RCA may not itself alter the Church Order, or any other part of the constitution, without the changes first receiving the endorsement of a majority of the several classes, and then receiving the approval of a second General Synod. The approval of two-thirds of the classes is needed for any amendment. In the CRC there is no such requirement, nor even that the classes have to be consulted. In the RCA the classis evolved as the most powerful assembly within its government structure. This development has given room for more diversity and doctrinal differences among the classes. Meeter comments that if, for example, a consistory in New Jersey

thinks that a preacher in California is preaching false doctrine, there is nothing it can do about it. Though the RCA has a strict constitution it has tolerated a wide latitude in practice. This explains why in the RCA you can have such a controversial leader as Dr. Robert Schuller of Crystal Cathedral fame, those influenced by American evangelicalism, as well as orthodox Calvinists.

In his comment on Article XXI of the Rules of Church Government established by the Synod of Dordrecht, Meeter states that the lack of RCA Christian day-school support is of recent date. And he notes that the article contradicts the CRC's "Kuyperian" doctrine of sphere sovereignty, which says that the Christian school should be independent of the institution of the church. Meeter's brief comment does injustice to the CRC's position on Christian schools. He should have given a clearer explanation why the CRC has a different view of Art. XXI; since not all CRC members are Kuyperians. (Those who wish to study the historical background of the CRC's stance should consult Martin Monsma's *The New Revised Church Order Commentary*, pp.272-277).

I hope that not only RCA church members will study this book, but also members of the CRC and the Alliance of Reformed Churches. It contains not simply a history of the past but also a good insight into the functioning of a denominational constitution in an anti-confessional and theologically pluralistic age.

Johan D. Tangelder
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