

# THE STANDARD BEARER

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# Those Born of God Do Not Sin

*We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.*

I John 5:18



Whoever commits sin is of the devil.

Whoever is born of God does not commit sin. In fact, he cannot sin; for God's seed remains in him.

What striking statements these are. Many may even question them, especially the notion that those who are born of God do not and cannot commit sin. Yet this is what the apostle John teaches by the inspiration of God earlier in this epistle (I John 3:8, 9).

Now, as John brings his epistle to a conclusion, he draws this to our attention once more. We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not. John brings this to the foreground once more to impress this truth indelibly on our minds, so that we may always live according to it.

*Rev. Slopsema is pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

Do you understand what John means here?

And are you living as those who are born of God?



Born of God!

John emphasizes in his epistles that the members of the church are born of God and as such are God's dear children.

We are not naturally the children of God. Naturally we are the children of the devil. This is the consequence of our original sin in Adam. As the devil's children we are evil, corrupt, depraved, and foul. In fact, we are his spiritual likeness, the devil's own image.

What a transformation takes place when we are born of God. The transformation is radical. It begins in the very center of our spiritual being, the heart. Earlier in this epistle John spoke of the seed of God that remains in the child of God (I John 3:9). This seed is the power of a new life that God implants in our hearts. Through the Word of God and the inner working of the Holy Spirit, this seed of new life influences and directs our thoughts, our words, our

actions, and our whole life so that they are conformed to the will of God. The result is that we reflect God. We become His image. We are His dear children.

Those who are born of God do not sin.

There are those who teach perfectionism. They maintain that the child of God is able to attain perfection in this life, or near perfection. Is this what the apostle John would teach us here? Obviously not. This very epistle was written against an early form of Gnosticism. This was a dangerous heresy that convinced its followers that they had superior knowledge of God, a knowledge that led them to a sinless life. The apostle attacked this latter notion earlier in his epistle. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (I John 1:8-10).

When the apostle speaks of not sinning, he is speaking of not continuing in sin or living in sin. The

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emphasis is on continuous, ongoing action.

There are those who live in sin. Having fallen into a particular sin, they continue in it. They give themselves over to it and even cultivate it.

This is always done in the context of self-deception. How easy it is to deceive ourselves. Some deceive themselves into thinking that they can sin with impunity, i.e., sin and get away with it. God will not see. Or if He sees, He will do nothing about it. Still others deceive themselves by justifying their sin. Their circumstances, they say, are unique. There are extenuating circumstances that make their behavior acceptable. Certainly God will understand. Still others deceive themselves by minimizing the seriousness of their sin. They refuse to see the monstrous character of their sin. There is some self-deception involved in every instance of one who continues in a sin.

Those who are born of God do not continue in sin in this fashion.

Certainly the born again child of God does sin. Sometimes he sins horribly. This is due to the fact that the spiritual transformation that takes place through the new birth is not complete. For the present time the works of God's grace are only begun. And so the child of God struggles with many sins. The Bible is full of examples. But because the child of God is born of God, he does not continue in sin. Rather he repents. He has a change of heart about his sin. With a grieving heart he confesses his sin to God and to all whom he has hurt in his sin. And he seeks forgiveness in the blood of Jesus Christ.

Are there exceptions? We all know of David, who fell into sin with Bathsheba and through self-deception continued in that sin for some time. We also know of Solomon, who on account of his many heathen wives continued in the sin of idolatry for many years. These, however, are exceptions. And because of the seed of God

that remained in them, they too turned from that sin in godly repentance.

Let no one who continues in his sin say that he is born of God. Let none who deceives himself about the character of sin call himself a child of God.

Whosoever is born of God does not continue in sin.



He that is born of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.

The wicked one does not touch those born of God. But he tries. The wicked one is Satan. He is extremely wicked, and in his wickedness he seeks to touch the children of God. This means that he would lay his hands on them and snatch them away from Christ, our Savior. He would accomplish this by leading them into a life of sin. If the devil could lead us into a life of sin without repentance, he would have us. We would lose all that we have in Jesus Christ. And the devil is a master at presenting us with temptations to live such a life. Small wonder that he is called the wicked one.

But whosoever is born of God keeps himself so that the wicked one touches him not.

The meaning is that he who is born of God keeps himself in safety. The wicked one seeks to lay his hands upon the child of God, but because he is born of God he keeps himself in safety.

The born again Christian keeps himself safely from the clutches of the devil by fleeing daily to the cross. Certainly he cannot keep himself safe in his own power. Nor is there any other who can keep him safe from the wicked one, except Jesus Christ. In the cross there is safety. At the cross is to be found forgiveness for all and every sin into which we may fall. In the cross is the power to turn from sin in godly repentance and live a new life that is pleasing to the Lord. The born again Christian

keeps himself in safety by fleeing to the cross and living under its protection. In Bible times one kept himself safe from the enemy by fleeing to a refuge. That refuge could be a cave in which to hide or a high tower in which one could defend himself. Similarly, the born again Christian keeps himself safe by taking refuge in the cross.

And how does one flee to the cross? He does so by seeking the Word, which proclaims the cross. He does so by partaking of the sacraments, which picture the cross. He does this by turning to the Lord in earnest prayer. And, yes, he does this by seeking the fellowship and communion of the saints. The power of the cross is found in the encouragement, instruction, and help of our fellow saints.

He that is born of God keeps himself from the clutches of the wicked one. And he does so because of the new life that has been implanted in his heart. The seed of God given at the new birth brings the child of God always and again to the cross.

This is how God preserves His beloved children from the devil.

What a glorious truth. God preserves His beloved people in safety. Try as he might, the wicked one will fail in his attempts to lay his hands on the children of God. Not one will be snatched away. God preserves each one of His children. But He does so by leading them to the cross to seek its safety.



John has set before us a glorious truth.

He has done so in order that we may reflect this truth in our daily lives.

Repeatedly the Scriptures set before us some glorious truth of salvation and then call us to live in harmony with that truth.

So also here!

We know that whosoever is born of God does not continue in sin. Implied is the obvious calling that we not live in sin but daily



turn from our sin in true repentance to serve the living God.

We know that whosoever is born of God keeps himself safely in Christ from the clutches of the wicked one. The calling we have is to flee to the cross daily that we might be safe.

This is a good time for each one to pause and examine himself.

Are you living in a particular sin?


In that connection, are there sins that you cherish and are cultivating? Are there sins that you are minimizing or justifying? God forbid! Our calling is to repent and turn from sin to the living God, as one who is born of God.

Also in that connection, are you keeping yourself safe in Jesus Christ? Do you eagerly seek the Word? Do you regularly partake

of the sacraments? Do you spend time in prayer? And what of the fellowship of the saints? Do you live in close communion with those who are living uprightly? This is our calling before God, that we may keep ourselves in Jesus Christ.

Do not continue in sin, any sin.

Keep yourselves from the wicked one.

As those born of God. 

## Editorial

# “He Shines in All That’s Fair” (and Curses All That’s Foul) (5)

**W**e come now to the real reasons why Dr. Richard Mouw embraces the theory of a common grace of God upon and in unregenerated humans. These reasons are evident in Mouw’s book, *He Shines in All That’s Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Eerdmans, 2001). The reasons are not the clear, abundant, powerful testimony of Holy Scripture, much less the teaching of the Reformed confessions. But the reasons are that Dr. Mouw sees decent unbelievers performing deeds of justice, kindness, and mercy; that Dr. Mouw finds in himself a feeling of delight at the splendid skills and a feeling of sorrow at the dire distress of ungodly persons; and that Dr. Mouw is convinced that he and other Christians are duty-bound to cooperate with non-Christians on behalf of a good, even God-glorifying, culture.

Although most defenders of common grace are not as candid as Richard Mouw, these are the real reasons for the advocacy of common grace by all its defenders.

We must not underestimate the power of these reasons, or grounds, of the theory of common grace. What we see with our own eyes,

our own feelings especially of sympathy with the suffering, and our natural impulse to improve the world, regardless that we must cooperate with those who deny Christ, have a way of setting aside the confessions and blinding us to the testimony of Scripture.

In full awareness of the power and appeal of Dr. Mouw’s real reasons for holding common grace, let us examine these reasons.

### The Seeming Good of the Ungodly

First, there is the goodness that Dr. Mouw supposes he sees in many unregenerated men and women.

As A Calvinist, I accept the fundamental classification of humankind into two categories, the elect and the non-elect, and I believe that while we are all totally depraved, God enables his redeemed people to perform acts of righteousness that would not be possible apart from divine grace. But I also witness—regularly, I must emphasize—acts of kindness on the part of the unredeemed that clearly seem to be in conformity to revealed standards of righteousness. Nor am I inclined sim-

ply to dismiss these acts as nothing more than well-disguised deeds of unrighteousness. There is, for example, a large moral difference between the acts of the courageous, unbelieving white people who risked and even lost their lives in the American civil rights struggle of the 1960s and the acts of those unbelievers who willfully carried out Hitler’s orders in exterminating the Jews (*He Shines*, p. 38).

It is not only the case that these deeds seem good to Dr. Mouw. But Mouw affirms that these works are good in the judgment of God. They are not good as are the works that the regenerated perform in the power of the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, but they are truly good. These deeds of the unregenerated please God. “God also gives positive *moral* appraisals to non-elect persons” (*He Shines*, p. 37).

The error of this evaluation of the seeming goodness of natural men and women is not necessarily that it overlooks base motives in every case. Not every unbelieving husband loves his wife only for his own selfish ends. Not every ungodly soldier who throws himself on a hand grenade to save his bud-

dies does so for posthumous fame. There is a natural love that moves the mother to sacrifice herself for her child and the soldier to give his life for his comrades. There is a natural zeal for earthly liberty that motivates the patriot to deny himself for his country. There is even a natural affection for the human race that drives some to spend their lives and fortunes for the good of mankind.

### The Ignored Goodness of God

The error of the evaluation of the deeds of many unregenerated as good is not so much that it esteems the seeming good of the ungodly too high. Rather, the error is that it esteems God too low. Indeed, it esteems God not at all. For the evaluation of the seemingly good works of the ungodly as truly good, that is, good in the appraisal of God Himself, leaves out that these works *are not done to the glory of God*. The sinner does not do them in the service of God. The one who performs these deeds is not motivated by thankfulness to God for His gracious salvation in Jesus Christ.

But such is the Godhead of the triune, one, true God revealed in Jesus Christ, such is His weightiness, His worth, and His goodness with regard to us human creatures and our works, that whatever work does not take Him into account, does not aim at and end in Him, and does not manifest and promote His glory — that work is sin. It is gross sin. Comparatively, it is far worse — *infinitely* worse — than a sin that merely fails to work for the welfare of, and thus injures, one's fellowman.

No matter that a work is full of the natural love of a mother for her child, or even that an entire life of works is unselfishly devoted to the human race and its welfare (as though the welfare of the human race were possible apart from God in Jesus Christ!), the work and the life are base and evil. They represent man seeking man, man serv-

ing man, man worshiping man, man glorifying man.

"Rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen" (Rom. 1:25).

The fundamental truth about good works is that it is the goodness of the goal, or end, of a work — God Himself, who alone is good (Matt. 19:17) — that makes a work good. No more than a rifle-shot can be good that misses the target, misses the target because the rifleman deliberately and foolishly aimed elsewhere, regardless that the shot in other respects shows some remarkable features, for example, that the eye of the rifleman was accurate, the aim was steady, and the bullet hit the target that was sighted, can a work be good that ignores God. Of course, if a work ignores God, it insults and opposes Him.

The fundamental truth about good works is God. God and His glory as the end, or aim, or goal of a work constitute the goodness of a work. For God to appraise a work as good that is not directed to God and His glory would be for God to deny Himself.

### Evaluation of Works in the Reformed Tradition

This God-centered estimation of all the works of men is prominent in the Reformed tradition. In his book on the very subject of the total depravity of the natural man, that is, man apart from the regenerating grace of God in Jesus Christ, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will* (Baker, 1996), John Calvin wrote: "The worth of good works depends not on the act itself but on perfect love for God so that a work will not be right and pure unless it proceeds from a perfect love for God" (p. 27). Jonathan Edwards was of the same mind: "And therefore certainly, unless we will be atheists, we must allow that true virtue does primarily and most essentially consist in a supreme love to God; and that where this is wanting, there can be no true virtue." Edwards continued:

Nothing is of the nature of true virtue, in which God is not the *first* and the *last*; or which, with regard to their exercises in general have not their first foundation and source in apprehension of God's supreme dignity and glory, and in answerable esteem and love of him, and have not respect to God as the supreme end ("*The Nature of True Virtue*," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1, Banner of Truth, 1974, pp. 126, 127).

The Reformed creeds have made this right judgment of all human works binding upon all Reformed churches and Christians. The Westminster Confession of Faith judges all works done by unregenerate persons to be sinful. Specifically, Westminster judges those very deeds of unregenerated persons that Dr. Mouw and all other defenders of common grace esteem as good to be, in fact, sinful, and only sinful. The Confession judges these deeds to be sinful *because they are not done "to a right end, the glory of God."*

Works done by unregenerate men, although, for the matter of them, they may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others; yet, because they proceed not from an heart purified by faith; nor are done in a right manner, according to the word; nor to a right end, the glory of God; they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God. And yet their neglect of them is more sinful, and displeasing unto God (WCF, 16.7)

There is, indeed, a distinction between two kinds of works performed by unbelievers. But it is not a distinction between works that are good and works that are sinful, works that please God and works that displease God. Rather, it is the distinction between works that are sinful and works that are more sinful, works that displease Him and works that displease Him more.

Because God is glorified only by works that conform to His law, which is the command “Love Jehovah your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength,” only those human works that are done in obedience to the law please God. No work that is completely lacking in love for God can be good. Because the only source of goodness for fallen man is the crucified and risen Jesus Christ by His Spirit, only those works that proceed from a true faith in Christ are good. Even these works must be purified by the blood of Jesus to be pleasing to God.

Question 91 of the Heidelberg Catechism also passes judgment upon all the works of all unconverted men and women, that they are evil. The Catechism adds the warning, that we not allow our imagination to decide the goodness of works.

### God's Evaluation of Works in His Word

Scripture's judgment of the works of the unregenerated is radically different from that of Dr. Mouw and all defenders of common grace. The fundamental wickedness of the unregenerated Gentiles is that “when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful” (Rom. 1:21). Dr. Mouw and the other defenders of common grace certainly must acknowledge that, whatever else one might want to say about certain works of the unregenerated, they are not performed in order to glorify God, or out of thankfulness to God. But Scripture declares that for this reason alone, because unregenerated people do not glorify God and because they are not thankful, such people and all their works are foul. Upon them falls the wrath of God (Rom. 1:18).

Scripture passes the same judgment upon all the works of unbelievers when it says that “whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23). Granted, the reference is primarily to the works of believers which in spite of the faith of the

believers do not arise from their faith. For this very reason, the argument against the works of the unbeliever is a strong one. First, the Word of God clearly makes an all-comprehensive judgment concerning human works: “Whatsoever is not of [Greek: ‘out of’] faith is sin.” Did the civil rights activists in the 1960s conduct their campaign “out of faith”? If not, their deeds were sin. (If the civil rights activists engaged in revolution against the authority of the state — civil disobedience — it is certain that they did not act from faith.) Does the decent family man next door love his wife and children out of faith in Christ? If not, his natural affection is sin, although his failing to be faithful would be greater sin. As the article in the Westminster Confession quoted above shrewdly adds, works done by unregenerated men are sinful even though these works may be “of good use both to themselves and others.”

Second, the force of Romans 14:23 is this: If even the works of regenerated believers that do not proceed from faith are sin, how much more the works of those who have no faith.

This settles the question whether God takes delight in the prowess of the unbelieving athlete. Mouw mentions the putting ability of Tiger Woods. My first reaction was regret that Dr. Mouw had not made a stronger case for his position by referring to real athletic ability, for example, hitting the ninety-mile an hour fastball or sinking the fifteen-foot hook shot. But the answer will be the same. The athletic skills of the ungodly as they are actually put to use, God detests. They are the skills of one who is ungodly in all his abilities and activities. They are of no use to God or man. They desecrate His Sabbath. They are part of the insane worship of the sports-hero that holds millions in thrall. Honing these skills is the waste, not only of time but of an entire life. God takes no pleasure in the legs

of a man (Ps. 147:10). The plowing of the wicked, much more the putting, is sin (Prov. 21:4).

### Judging as God Judges

Dr. Mouw has never seen an unbeliever who is good. He sees many who are decent, law-abiding, considerate, and friendly. But none glorifies God or is thankful to God. None, therefore, is fair, shining with the beauty of the holy God. All are foul. Upon them all is the curse of God, if they do not repent of all their sins, the seemingly good as well as the obviously vile. With the gospel of Scripture, Dr. Mouw must make this judgment upon all unbelievers, as must we all.

Neither has Dr. Mouw ever seen one good work performed by an unregenerated person. He sees many works that are outwardly impressive. Some even glitter. But none originates in the risen Jesus Christ by a living faith in Him; none is in accordance with the will of God that a man love Him from the heart; and none aims higher than the earth and the human race. Not one work of the unregenerated man or woman, therefore, is fair. God's own beauty does not shine in any of the works of the ungodly. All the works of unbelievers are foul with the depravity of seeking man rather than God. Upon these works falls the wrath of God, now and in the final judgment. Dr. Mouw is called to make this searing, humbling judgment of the gospel upon all the works of man apart from Christ his own, as are we all.

God shines in all that's fair. What is fair is that in nature which still shows the power and divinity of its Creator and that in the human race which now displays the lovely beginning of the new creation in Jesus Christ by His Spirit.

Foul is all that which does not glorify the God and Father of Jesus Christ. In and upon it all is the curse.

We will see this, if we look at man and the world in the light of God.

— DJE 



## ■ Keeping a Standard High

**T**hank you for your informative and encouraging magazine. We are grateful for the one-year gift subscription we received from a friend and are glad to become regular subscribers.

Living in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan sometimes means remoteness, but your magazine finds us here and has been such an encouragement to us. We read many articles aloud as a family and have interesting discussions with our children.

Thank you for keeping a standard high in our fallen world.

(Mrs.) Kame Moore  
Engadine, MI

## ■ Doing Theology on Monroe and Division

**I**n your editorial reflecting on Dr. Mouw's support of common grace ("He Shines in All That's Fair," *Standard Bearer*, April 1, 2002) you write, "In basing the theory of common grace upon his own seeing, feeling, and thinking, rather than upon the Word of God, Dr. Mouw is not unique." How true!

During the summer of 1973 my family and I spent a month in the northeastern part of Philadelphia preaching for a group of interested people there, as did several other of our ministers. We became acquainted with several students from Westminster Seminary, two of whom arranged a meeting for us with Dr. Cornelius VanTil. He was semi-retired at the time, and mentioned the great respect he had for Herman Hoeksema. In the olden days he visited First Church to hear Hoeksema preach every opportunity he had, and at the present time he was reading *Behold, He Cometh* to his invalid wife. Naturally, Dr. VanTil also spoke of the differences

he had with Hoeksema and the Protestant Reformed Churches on the nature of God's grace. After discussing this a bit, I asked the professor, "Dr. VanTil, isn't it true that every time the Scriptures use the word *grace* they do so in the redemptive sense?" I expected him to respond in the negative, and perhaps trot out a supposed example of common grace from the Bible. But his answer to the question was "Yes, but we have so much more than the Bible. We have history and what we see round about us." Doing theology on the corner of Monroe and Division, indeed!

May our churches continue to maintain, always, the Reformational principle that Scripture is the only rule for faith and life. And we encourage you to continue to instruct the readers of the *Standard Bearer* in the truth of particular grace and the absolute, spiritual antithesis between the church and the world.

(Rev.) D.H. Kuiper  
Southeast

Protestant Reformed Church  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

## ■ Heart and Head

**I** refer to Rev. Key's article "Saving Faith — a Certain Knowledge" (*Standard Bearer*, April 1, 2002) wherein he falls into an error which is, sadly, common even in the PRC. The error of contrasting "heart" knowledge with "intellectual," or "head" knowledge.

The late Dr. Gordon H. Clark (whose works should be required reading for PR pastors) has shown, irrefutably, that the contrast is not a scriptural one. When the term "heart" is used in Scripture it refers, in the majority (at least 70%) of cases, to the "mind," the "thoughts," the "understanding," etc. That is, most references to "heart" have strong intellectual

connotations. Contrasting heart and intellect can only bring confusion.

Scripture does contrast "heart" and "lips" — uttering what one does not believe — hypocrisy in speech.

There is, of course, a difference between being able to quote Scriptures and actually believing them and endeavoring to live by them. But the problem lies not with the type of knowledge or where it is (heart or head) but in the presence of sin and the absence or weakness of faith. "For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it" (Heb. 4:2).

Robert Kane  
New Zealand

## Response:

**T**he article "Saving Faith — a Certain Knowledge" did not mark a contrast between the intellectual and spiritual (or heart) knowledge when it comes to saving faith. The two elements are inseparably one. There is no true faith without mind and heart functioning together. Nevertheless, the distinction I made, and which Reformed theologians have made historically, is one that must be maintained. It must also be emphasized. It must be emphasized in preaching. It must be emphasized in catechism teaching. To know *about* God is not to be identified with knowing *Him* with the knowledge of faith. That the devils know and believe that there is only one God (James 2:19) is not the same knowledge confessed by the apostle in II Timothy 1:12. God grant that we know Him with the knowledge of true faith!

(Rev.) Steven R. Key



## ■ Depraved Dating

I'm glad Rev. Dick dared risk upsetting some on the dating issue. For he said needed things, well and bravely and yet conciliatingly. He did not say dating was a show of materialistic finery and worldly prowess, which he could have done. Someday his detractors may realize he was more moderate than they knew. Still, he did his part to arrest creeping worldliness of our era.

Dating is gambling, gambling that a few hours serving Satan won't hurt. It's done in the devil's territory, by his rules or non-rules, with rewards to whoever most charmingly poses, crudely or with class. Dating may be one of the stronger evidences of human de-

pravity. It presents Satan fine opportunities to shipwreck souls for life. Too many daters have stars in their eyes, fire in their clothes, or desperation in their hearts. Fine cars or clothes are usually brought, with faith and teachings left at home.

Couldn't someone suggest a safer, wiser, godlier program for mate selection? Couldn't the worldliness and hypocrisy requirements for mate candidacy be scrapped? Must godly homes go on being based on witty talk, well-set hair, and gaities?

I'm with Rev. Dick that dating is worldly and must stop trumping Christian valiance.

Lewis Price  
Batesville, AR

## ■ Appreciation

Just a short note to let you know how much I appreciate your magazine. I may not always agree with everything in it, but I find so much of value.

I have found the articles of Rev. Douglas Kuiper on the qualifications of deacons to be very relevant, especially in this day and age.

I would like to pay a tribute to Mr. B. VanHerk, who has faithfully sent me my copy of the *Standard Bearer* for more years than I care to remember!

Thank you again for your faithful ministry through your excellent magazine.

Tony Green  
Levin, New Zealand

Ministering to the Saints

Rev. Doug Kuiper

# The Election and Installation of Deacons (1) Biblical Principles

**W**e have answered the question of *who* may hold the office of deacon, by examining God's requirements for deacons in Acts 6 and I Timothy 3. The next question which needs answering is, *how* are such men to be chosen for and put into office?

The practice which Reformed churches often follow in choosing deacons is that the council presents a nomination of several men to the congregation, from which the congregation elects half of those nominated. In this connection, we wonder: why this procedure? Are there

other acceptable procedures? How must men be nominated to office? What role, if any, does the nominee play in his nomination? When may he decline nomination to office? What role does the church as a whole play in this nomination?

Regarding their installation into office, we ask, what is the significance of installation? What does it mean that God *calls* a man to office? How can the deacon know with certainty that God has called him?

Other related questions arise: Why do Reformed churches permit deacons to serve a definite term of office, rather than requiring them to serve for life? What is an optimum length of a term? Under what circumstances may a deacon (or elder, by implication) be imme-

diately reappointed to office, and how should that happen? When may a deacon's term be lengthened or shortened, and what procedure must be followed? What constitutes proper grounds for resigning office early, or for being suspended or deposed from office?

These questions are important. A church must not follow certain practices without a good reason. She must "let all things be done decently and in order" (I Cor. 14:40).



The fact is that God's Word does not give specific answers to these questions. Nowhere in Scripture do we find an explicit list of rules and procedures to be followed. We do, however, have one

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clear example to follow: Acts 6:3-6 records the narrative of the selection and installation of the first deacons in the New Testament church. Although it is rather brief, this passage in Acts is very helpful for us, for it sets forth three principles which must govern us in our answer to the questions posed above.

The first principle is that the church as a whole, not only her rulers, ought to be involved to some degree in the process of selecting her officebearers. This principle is taught in Acts 6:3: "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business." Clearly, the apostles delegated to the church the task of finding seven men to hold the office of deacon. This principle does justice to the reality of the office of all believers in the New Testament church. In Jesus Christ, every believer is a prophet, priest, and king. This fact does not make the special offices of the church unnecessary; Acts 6 contains demonstration of the need for the special office of deacon. But the fact that every believer is a prophet, priest, and king means that it is proper for the men of the church to play a role in selecting ministers, elders, and deacons to function in the church on behalf of the whole body.

May God grant us grace to appreciate this principle, and may He grant each of us a readiness to take seriously our role in this process. Suggest names of men, when you are given opportunity to do so — and be sure these men are qualified! And by all means, male confessing members, exercise your privilege and calling to vote!

The second principle is that those who are in office must supervise the calling and installation process. Acts 6:3 teaches this clearly. While leaving to the church the work of finding out seven men, the apostles made two things clear: first, the apostles

themselves would appoint these men to office ("whom we may appoint over this business"); and second, these seven should be a certain kind of men, implying that if the apostles judged any man to be unfit for office, they would not appoint him. Because the church took seriously her role in the selection process and followed the instruction of the apostles, the apostles did not have to refuse to appoint any of the seven men whom the church selected.

At least two other New Testament passages support this second principle by showing that currently serving officebearers ordained new officebearers. Acts 14:23 states that Paul and Barnabas, at the end of Paul's first missionary journey, revisited the churches which they had established and "ordained them elders in every church." And Titus 1:5 contains Paul's instruction to Titus to "ordain elders in every city." We remember that also in Old Testament Israel, which was the church at that time, the priests and kings were anointed, and therefore appointed, by a currently serving priest or prophet.

This second principle does justice to the fact that the church is not a democracy. Rather, it is the manifestation on earth of the spiritual kingdom of God, in which Christ rules, through the existing officebearers of the church. As rulers under God, the officebearers must superintend the process of appointing new officebearers. Such supervision is always needed to prevent disorder. Furthermore, the existing officebearers must make a judgment, in good conscience and before God, that the men chosen to serve in office are qualified in accordance with God's Word.

May God grant us grace to honor the work of the council in nominating men! May He keep us from undue criticism of their work! And if we believe that the council has done its work in error, or presented men for nomination who are

not qualified, may He grant us grace *humbly* and in the *right way* to bring this to their attention.

The third principle is that deacons should be installed in a solemn ceremony in the presence of the church. Acts 6:6 records the installation ceremony of the new deacons: "And when they (the apostles, DJK) had prayed, they laid their hands on them." The same ceremony was used in setting apart Paul and Barnabas for the work of missions (Acts 13:3). Paul reminds Timothy that at his ordination to the office of pastor the hands of the elders and of Paul himself were laid on Timothy (I Tim. 4:14; II Tim. 1:6). Furthermore, in Old Testament Israel, no man could hold the office of priest or king who had not been anointed with oil.

Of the significance of all of this we will speak in a future article, D.V. But for the moment, we see that there is a ceremony that ought to be followed in installing deacons.



The procedure which Reformed churches follow in selecting and installing deacons is set forth in the Church Order of Dordrecht, drawn up in 1618-1619, as well as the Form of Ordination and the Belgic Confession. As we survey pertinent parts of these three documents, we will notice that they honor the principles set forth in Scripture.

All three principles are honored by the Church Order, Article 22. Although this article speaks to the election of elders, Article 24 makes clear that the same procedure is to be followed in the case of deacons: "The deacons shall be chosen, approved, and installed in the same manner as was stated concerning the elders." Article 22 reads:

The elders shall be chosen by the judgment of the consistory and the deacons according to the regula-

tions for that purpose established by the consistory. In pursuance of these regulations, every church shall be at liberty, according to its circumstances, to give the members an opportunity to direct attention to suitable persons, in order that the consistory may thereupon either present to the congregation for election as many elders as are needed, that they may, after they are approved by it, unless any obstacle arise, be installed with public prayers and stipulations; or present a double number to the congregation and thereupon install the one-half chosen by it, in the aforesaid manner, agreeably to the form for this purpose.

The first principle is honored by permitting members of the congregation the "opportunity to direct attention to suitable persons," and by giving the congregation the role either of electing half of the men nominated by the consistory, or of approving the men nominated by the consistory. The second principle is honored in that explicit mention is made of "the judgment of the consistory and the deacons" in the choosing of officebearers, and in that the consistory and deacons are responsible for drawing up a list of qualified nominees for either office. The third principle is honored in that the article requires installation "with public prayers and stipulations," which must be done "agreeably to the form for this purpose."

"The form for this purpose" is a reference to the Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons, also adopted by the Synod of Dordt 1618-1619. This Form consists of several parts. First, it explains the institution of the offices of elder and deacon and of the duties of those offices. Then it lists three questions which must be put to the new officebearers, regarding whether they feel lawfully called of God, through His church, to their office; whether they believe the Reformed faith on the basis of the Word of God; and whether they will faithfully carry out their work

as it was described. After answering these questions, the men are blessed by the minister. The Form continues with an exhortation to the officebearers to be diligent in their work, and to the congregation to receive these men as God's servants, submitting to their rule and enabling them to carry out their duties. The Form concludes with a prayer.

The ceremony of installation consists of the reading of this Form with its prayer, and of the reading and signing of the Formula of Subscription by the new officebearers. This ceremony must be carried out in a public worship service, in which a sermon appropriate for the occasion is preached.

By using this Form, Reformed churches honor the third principle, namely, that the officebearers be installed in a solemn ceremony in the presence of the church. Inasmuch as the Form is used in a worship service, it is evident that the officebearers have the oversight of the installation of new elders and deacons. Furthermore, the Form explicitly honors the first two principles set forth above when it states at the very beginning: "Beloved Christians, you know that we have several times published unto you the names of our brethren here present who are chosen to the office of elders and deacons in this church, to the end that we might know whether any person had aught to allege why they should not be ordained in their respective offices...." The congregation was given voice in the process — specifically, the voice of objecting to a man's nomination with scriptural reasons, if such objections existed. And the presently serving officebearers are the "we" who drew up and published the names.


Especially the first principle is honored in Article 31 of the Belgic Confession: "We believe that the ministers of God's Word, and the elders and deacons, ought to be chosen to their respective offices by a lawful election by the church,

with calling upon the name of the Lord, and in that order which the Word of God teacheth. Therefore every one must take heed not to intrude himself by indecent means, but is bound to wait till it shall please God to call him, that he may have testimony of his calling and be certain and assured that it is of the Lord." The church elects.



In following these scriptural principles, Reformed Churches show that they are not arbitrary in their method of choosing and installing officebearers. We do not say that churches which follow another procedure are necessarily in error; scriptural principles may have different applications, or ways of application. However, we are convinced that, inasmuch as our procedure is based on these scriptural principles, God is glorified in the way in which we choose and install officebearers.

Furthermore, although there might be other ways to apply these principles to the choosing and installing of elders and deacons, individual Reformed congregations which subscribe to the Church Order of Dordt are not free to use another procedure. Our Church Order, insofar as it sets forth scriptural principles, binds us. We submit to its binding character, for the sake of good order in the churches, and to guard against an unbiblical method of choosing and installing elders and deacons. To ensure this unity of practice, consistories of Protestant Reformed Churches are asked every year at church visitation: "Are consistory members chosen in agreement with the rules of the Church Order?" (Question 6, page 110, The Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches, also known affectionately as the "Green Book.")

May God be glorified each time we choose and install elders and deacons, for it is His church, and the officebearers must function on His behalf. 



## ■ Persecution of the Church

One associates persecution today with heathen, Muslim lands where Christians can be imprisoned or even put to death because of their faith. We express thanks for the freedom we have still to worship God as we believe He requires it of us. But ... is the time coming for us also?

There are obvious signs that there is a growing threat of persecution. One cannot help but note the "progress" made by the "gay" movement. These insist that no one may limit them in any way simply because of their homosexuality. There is the strong insistence of the "women's rights" movement. None ought to limit what they are able to do despite the claim that Scripture teaches certain limitations on women — especially in connection with the "women in church office." When the church and its members condemn the murder which is abortion, there are loud outcries about "women's rights" and "freedom of choice."

But what is increasingly heard is the charge that the church becomes guilty of "hate crimes" when it condemns these things which are violations of Scripture. Though the church does not, and may not, advocate the murder of abortionists and homosexuals, nevertheless the very fact that it condemns these things is equated with a "hate crime." And for "hate crimes" there must be a penalty. It may be a fine, it could be imprisonment, or some other way the government can devise to punish the church.

Nor is that all. If women are not given their "equal rights" in the church, allowed to serve in any office, then churches might well face the penalties imposed by the government.

The magazine *Reformed Perspective*, January 2002, has an article titled "Christian Persecution in Canada," which has some sobering reminders of how quickly persecution can arise. In part, the article states:

Some of the cases of Christian persecution involve civil magistrates, with people attempting to justify their hostility to Christianity as a desire for equality and tolerance. An example of this would be the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) penalizing London, Ontario mayor Diana Haskett for refusing to declare a "Gay Pride" weekend for her city. Other cases involve private citizens or entities (e.g., Trinity Western University) or public citizens' private lives. Perhaps the most well known incident in this category now is the attack on then-Canadian Alliance leader Stockwell Day during the last federal election campaign over his Christian beliefs.

Many people across Canada were shocked at the mockery expressed against Mr. Day over some of his Christian beliefs during that campaign. Some of the attacks were leveled against predictable views such as his opposition to abortion and homosexuality. But the political leader was also blindsided by an attack for his belief in 6-day creation. Christian *Edmonton Journal* columnist Lorne Gunter placed the blame for the attack squarely on the federal Liberals and called it the "most vicious character assassination campaign in Canadian political history." Canada's anti-Christian mainstream media was glad to pick up the story and run with it. The media and Liberal derision of Mr. Day was so disturbing that even the well-known Christian persecution watchdog *Voice of the Martyrs* wrote up the incident as an example of Christian persecution.

peatedly comes up. Several examples were mentioned in the article:

Delwin Vriend was a teacher at King's College, a Christian institution in Edmonton, Alberta. In 1991 he revealed that he was a homosexual, and was summarily fired. Mr. Vriend didn't like that so he hauled the institution before Alberta's human rights commission. The commission refused to hear his case because at the time, the province's human rights legislation, the Individual's Rights Protection Act, didn't include protection for homosexuals against "discrimination."

Mr. Vriend then dragged the Alberta government before the Supreme Court of Canada, arguing that it should order the province to add sexual orientation protection to their human rights law. He won when the court ruled in his favor on April 2, 1998, and the provincial government agreed to comply with the decision.

...In 2000, Dagmar and Arnost Cepica, owners of a Bed & Breakfast in Prince Edward Island, refused to allow two Montreal homosexuals to rent a single bed room from them because homosexual coupling violates their Christian ethics. In August of that year, the homosexuals issued a complaint with the province's human rights commission, which penalized them with a \$1,000 fine and wanted them to take a sensitivity (or brainwashing) course about homosexuality.

Instead of fighting the matter, the couple decided to simply close down their Bed & Breakfast. It's hard to believe that in Canada, a respected entrepreneurial couple would have to shut down their small business and source of income in order to preserve their Christian integrity. The island's tourism Minister Greg Deighan showed little sympathy: "He's in the business to serve tourists. You can't discriminate," he told the *Charlottetown Guardian*.

The issue of homosexuality re-

Then there is the deliberate attempt to eliminate any reference publicly to the name of Christ and any reference to New Testament Scriptures. People can be comforted in their sorrow, and the distraught may be supported by "grief counselors" — but without mention of Christ's name.

This is one of the few examples of Christian persecution that doesn't have anything to do with homosexuality. In 1998, a Swissair Flight 111 crashed just off the coast of Nova Scotia near Peggy's Cove killing 229 people. The Federal government organized a memorial service on September 9. Instead of being a positive and healing experience, the service generated an uproar. A barrage of condemnation was launched at the federal Liberals, one in which opposition Members of Parliament took part.

United Church minister Rev. Carolyn Nicholson said that the Liberal government's protocol office told her "that no references to Christ or no New Testament (Christian Scripture) readings were permitted." A Roman Catholic priest who took part said he was given the same warning. Rev. Nicholson said that she protested, but was told that "the decision was made and I either had to submit to the decision or refuse to take part."

According to the *Halifax Herald* (Jan. 22, 1999) Prime Minister Jean Chretien eventually wrote a letter of qualified apology to Rev. Nicholson. "I personally regret that a service that was clearly meant to provide comfort and closure in dealing with a horrible tragedy has itself become a focus of controversy," he wrote. But: "I wish to assure you that no government official would ever be instructed to, or permitted to, censor or prohibit religious content in a memorial service."

There are other examples of growing religious persecution in "Christian" Western nations. One can expect more of this in the days to come. Couple this with a "glo-

bal economy," rapid development in the realm of the sciences, the predominance of one world power (the United States), and one cannot help but conclude that the coming of the Lord is at hand.

## ■ The U.S. has a sex problem

So: what's new? Many within the churches have pointed this out for years. Obviously the standards of the nation are in no way the standard set by the Ten Commandments and the Word of God. What appears to be new is that there are some *in the secular press* who are pointing out that there is a problem — not because these sense that there is violation of God's law, but because the awful consequences of sexual sins are increasingly evident. The sleazy affair of a former president, the reports of transgressions of deviant Roman Catholic priests, the reports of rape and often murder — all these represent some of the consequences of the "sex problem." That is the conclusion of Michelle Malkin, a syndicated columnist writing in the *Grand Rapids Press* of April 3, 2002. In a column titled: "You needn't look far to see that U.S. has a sex problem," she writes:

Forgive me. Oral sex, pornography, child molestation and murder are the last things you want to read about in this season of Easter and Passover. But we have a problem.

The problem is not confined to homosexual Catholic priest-predators and their institutional enablers who have so vilely betrayed children, parishioners and God. The problem is our sexual revolution run amok *everywhere* — sex on parade, sex outside marriage, sex as a tool, sex for sale, sex without love, and sex without boundaries.

The article continues by reporting briefly of a number of the scandals which have been mentioned in the press recently. The list is a

nauseating summary. Then the writer points out:

The left's cultural liberators blame "1950s" mores for these 21<sup>st</sup> century sexual pathologies. Chastity, monogamy and celibacy are repressive, antiquated and abnormal notions, they argue. Those who advocate sexual restraint need to get with the times.

Well, that is exactly what the Catholic Church did in the 1960s with its Vatican II "reforms." Harry Crocker, author of "Triumph: The Power and the Glory of the Catholic Church, a 2,000-Year History," notes: "Pope John XXIII did indeed throw open the Church — just when the Western World plunged itself into the sex-drugs-and the rock 'n' roll era. The results were an immediate collapse in the seminaries, in religious orders, (and) in the priesthood." It is liberalism that got the church in trouble, Crocker says, not the opposite. Homosexual predators in the clergy are "the spoiled fruit of the sexual revolution."

Add to this overflowing basket of rotten fruit the condom-wielders in the classroom; the child pornographers sitting at their computers, indulging the unrestrained appetites of "nice men"; and the successive generations of young people who have grown up in a culture that normalizes abortion, illegitimacy, adultery, and public displays of sexual perversion from the Oval Office on down.

This is the true epidemic of modernity. Isn't it time, for the children's sake, to turn back the clock?

That last line sounds nice, but, of course, it will not happen — the situation has deteriorated too much and man has become too steeped in this corruption to change. The Word of God is being fulfilled, "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves" (Rom. 1:24).

But, some say, the government is cracking down on sex offenses. Rapists are put in prison for many



years. Those who murder after a rape are often sentenced to death. Even a very young school boy was suspended from classes for a time because he kissed a little girl on the school ground. Are we not gaining control of this epidemic?


One need not to be a "Scrooge" to respond: "Humbug!" Under the guise of "freedom of speech," the movies, TV dramatizations, the internet, videos, songs present the most despicable, corrupting portrayals of sex of every sort. Anyone who has e-mail knows that repeatedly unsolicited invitations to one of the multitudes of porno-

graphic sites come. Yet when many imitate these corruptions in real life, they must be punished.

One is reminded of a pigpen filled with wet, dirty mud and slop. If a farmer puts a clean pig in such a pen, and then insists that if the pig gets dirty, it will be butchered, the consequence would be obvious.

Of course, the "pigpen" of filth is not ultimately the corrupt media and "freedom of speech" claims, but it is the unregenerated heart of man. Unless there is a change of that heart by rebirth and true conversion, there will ulti-

mately be no change. There must be confession of these terrible sins and the acknowledgment that only through Christ's cross can there be deliverance. All of the court trials, all of the fines, all of the emphasis of a need of improvement, without true conversion, will finally fail. And it surely appears that our nation has reached a state of no return. God has given men over to uncleanness.

God grant that His people may show that they are completely different, ready to suffer the consequences in maintaining the law and Word of God. 

Marking the Bulwarks of Zion

Prof. Herman Hanko

# Johann Agricola and Antinomianism (1)

## Introduction

**W**hen God provides men of great ability for the church in times of crisis, He gives to these men a breadth of understanding of His Word which it is not always easy for others to comprehend fully. Great men are able to hold all the nuances of the truth of Scripture in a proper and biblical balance so that their theology remains consistently biblical. But some followers of these men, unable to see the scope of their leaders' theology, latch on to one aspect of it and make only that one aspect the be-all and end-all of orthodoxy.

An example of this is to be found in the work of some who find common grace and the well-meant offer of the gospel in John

Calvin. One must admit that there are passages in Calvin's writings which would lead one to suspect that Calvin may have believed in these wrong doctrines. But one who understands the breadth of Calvin's thought will understand soon enough that Calvin never intended by these passages what theologians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries make of them.

It is easy also to find examples in more recent history. Some, claiming to be ardent followers of Herman Hoeksema in years gone by, but failing to grasp the breadth of his thinking, latched on to one aspect of the truth, carried it to extremes, and insisted that their narrow view of what Hoeksema taught is the full truth.

Presumably this happens with every great man of God whom God uses to bring the faith of the ages to fuller development. It happened to Luther even during his own lifetime.

Luther's central doctrine was the wonderful truth of justification by faith alone without the works of the law. During the later years of Luther's reformatory work, some latched on to Luther's insistence that the works of the law had nothing whatsoever to do with the believer's justification. But they carried it to ridiculous extremes and became what we call today antinomian. They turned their backs on the law altogether, cursed the law, and insisted that a justified man had nothing more to do with the law. They even went so far as to accuse Luther of abandoning his own theological position when Luther condemned them. They claimed to be true to the genius of the Lutheran position and charged Luther with going back to the error of Rome.

Luther never taught such a view, and he despised those who taught it. But Luther did, from time to time, make statements

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which, taken by themselves, could easily lead one to think that Luther threw the law out of the church window and refused to have anything to do with it. But when Luther made these statements he was speaking of the damnable error of Rome that such works of the law served in part as the basis for our justification. Luther could also preach and teach in most vigorous language the absolute necessity of the law and of the believer's obligation to keep the law. But narrow men took hold of just one aspect of Luther's thought and built a whole theological system out of it.

It is possible, of course, that those who perverted Luther's thought (and those who pervert the thought of other great theologians in Christ's church) do so not so much because they are unable to comprehend the breadth of their leader's ideas, but out of deliberate intent to pervert a man's thought. They have an axe to grind. They have a pet heresy to defend. They need the backing of a great man. They latch on to one aspect of his thought and inflate it to be the fulcrum of all theology. This is an evil greater than that of ignorance. But only God can judge the heart.

Luther's critic, Johann Agricola, was an antinomian.

### **A Survey of Agricola's life**

Johann Agricola is to most people an unknown figure. He seems to have dropped off the stage on which the drama of the Reformation was taking place; or, if not that, he seems to be such a bit player in the drama that few notice him. Yet, he played an important role and caused Luther no end of grief.

He was born in Eisleben in Prussian Saxony on April 20, 1494 under the name Johann Schneider. Eisleben was also the birthplace of Luther, although Luther was born eleven years earlier. Their paths did not cross in this village, how-

ever, for Luther's parents moved to Mansfeld when Luther was but six months old.

Agricola entered the University of Leipzig in the winter of 1509-1510 to study medicine. Somewhere he became acquainted with Luther's thinking even before Luther nailed his theses on the chapel door of the church of Wittenberg. This must have been sometime during his studies at Leipzig, for in the winter of 1515-1516 he went to Wittenberg to study theology under Luther.

We have some evidence here of the fact that Luther's theological breakthrough came several years earlier than the actual beginning of the Reformation in October, 1517. And Agricola's contact with Luther's theology demonstrates that Luther's views were being circulated before Luther publicly opposed indulgences and launched the Reformation proper.

At any rate, after studying under Luther in Wittenberg, Agricola became thoroughly Lutheran in his thinking and joined an ardent band of men who were captivated by Luther's thought. Agricola was held in highest esteem for his theological acumen and his loyalty to the cause of reformation. He was present when Luther nailed his 95 theses on the chapel door; he witnessed the Leipzig Disputation, where Luther, in debate with the powerful Roman Catholic apologist John Eck, committed himself wholly to the authority of sacred Scripture. He became Luther's private secretary and formed a close friendship with Melancthon. He was in the inner circle of Wittenberg's reformers and contributed his own understanding to the movement as it gained momentum under God's guidance and blessing and started to shake Europe to its foundations.

So respected was he that he was appointed to teach Latin classics and Latin grammar in the University of Wittenberg. Later he was appointed to teach dialectics and

rhetoric; and later still he was given the important chair of New Testament studies.

In August of 1525 Agricola was entrusted with the responsibility of the headship of a new Latin school in Eisleben, the city of his birth. The appointment demonstrated how much confidence the reformers had in him, and served as some measure of his ability. A list of his accomplishments is impressive. He wrote two catechetical books which were widely used. He gathered and edited three collections of German proverbs, giving explanations of them. This work became immensely popular and spread his fame throughout Germany. He translated Melancthon's commentaries from Latin into German. He became a preacher (although his ordination was always somewhat suspect) and was apparently one of the most powerful preachers of the Reformation, for he was appointed to preach the opening sermons at the Diets of Speyer in 1526 and 1528 in the presence of all the ruling princes and counts of Germany.

But Agricola developed one fatal flaw. Perhaps his success went to his head. He became proud of his own theological abilities and acquired a vanity which proved his downfall. In 1526 he applied for the position of theological professor in the University of Wittenberg. He did not receive the appointment, but Melancthon, his close friend, was given this now very prestigious post. Agricola was jealous of Melancthon and became bitterly antagonistic.

What the relationship is between Agricola's pride and his subsequent error is known only to God. This we may be sure of: throughout the history of the church, as often as not, a heretic introduces false doctrine in the life of the church not so much because he does not understand the issues involved, but because he has become a proud man. Pride frequently lies at the bottom of a




heretic's doctrinal aberrations. Dorothy Sayers, a late twentieth-century writer, said that the underlying sin of Judas Iscariot was the sin of intellectual pride. If so, he was followed by a legion of others, outstanding men in the church, who betrayed their Lord by sacrificing His truth for their own thirty pieces of silver — the acclaim of men.

When Agricola began to teach his wrong views, he attacked not

Luther first of all, but Melancthon. This attack, though a defense of antinomianism, was made in a jealous rage against a friend who acquired the position Agricola coveted.

But this did not mean that Agricola did not have Luther also in his theological sights. He was, in his pride, determined, it seemed, to take Luther's place. This was evident from the fact that Agricola left the headship of the Latin

School in Eisleben — even though the count who ruled the province forbade him to leave. He went to Wittenberg and, in 1537, simply took over Luther's work in the church and university when Luther went to Smalcald on important Reformation business.

But this growing opposition is the subject of our next article, and we must wait till then to trace Agricola's career further. 

*Go Ye Into All the World*

## Protestant Reformed Missions in Ghana and the Philippines

*Rev. Richard Smit*

**I**t is that time of year once again to present to you an informational report of some of the work being done on the foreign mission fields of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

The work is overseen on behalf of the denomination by the Foreign Mission Committee, whose eight members come from the Protestant Reformed Churches of Doon, Iowa; Edgerton, Minnesota; and Hull, Iowa. The members are Mr. Allen Brummel, Rev. Daniel Kleyn, Mr. Jim Regnerus, Rev. Richard Smit, Mr. Peter VanDenTop, Rev. Steven Key, Mr. Alvin Kooiker, and Mr. Don VerMeer.

The FMC heartily acknowledges the diligent labors of the councils of the calling churches, the Hull PRC and the Doon PRC. The lion's share of the oversight work here in the USA is done by the standing mission field committees

of each council who are assigned the work of pouring over the missionary reports and correspondence and then the work of preparing recommendations for the monthly council meetings. Once the councils have acted on the material, the FMC reviews the decisions and gives its concurrence. In some instances, the FMC has worked jointly with the mission field committees of the calling churches on issues that have required extensive study. The FMC greatly appreciates the work of the councils and their committees. This work has made the work of oversight efficient and enjoyable.

The past year has been full of activity, and because of space limitations we are forced to relate only the highlights of the work of bringing the Reformed faith to those peoples among whom the Lord in His providence and blessing has given us the privilege to serve.

### Ghana

The FMC was delighted to hear that synod 2001 approved the call-

ing of a second missionary to Ghana. Immediately thereafter, the Hull PRC began extending a call for a second missionary to the field. Rev. Wayne Bekkering received and accepted the call, and he was duly installed into the office of missionary pastor in Hull on the Friday night of October 12, 2001. Rev. Steven Key, Hull's pastor, led the installation worship service, and he preached on I Corinthians 3:6-9. Rev. Daniel Kleyn, president of the FMC, read the installation form and installed the brother into office. Then, after less than two months of hectic preparations, the Bekkerings moved to Ashaley Botwe, Ghana.

On the evening of December 6, 2001, the Bekkerings were greeted at the airport in Accra by a large, enthusiastic group from our mission fellowship in Ashaley Botwe. As is customary for the arrival of visitors, delegations, and new assistants to the field, the group sang Psalms and choruses, and missionary pastor Rev. Richard Moore offered a prayer of thanksgiving to

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*Rev. Smit is secretary of the Foreign Mission Committee of the Protestant Reformed Churches.*

our God for the safe arrival of the Bekkerings. Since then, Rev. and Mrs. Bekkering and daughter Brenda are adjusting to the culture and pace of Ghanaian life on the mission field. In fact, already by March, Rev. Bekkering reported that they were feeling more at home on the field.

The Bekkerings have contended with the health problems associated with life on a mission field in the tropics. Like the Moores, they have been infected with malaria, a mosquito-borne disease. Medical authorities say that there are four different strains of malaria in tropical countries, and that Ghana is one country in which the most common strain is resistant to chloroquine, a common antidote to the disease. Our missionaries, their families, the missionary assistants, and some past visitors know the symptoms and difficulties of malaria. Prolonged exposure and infection by malaria does take its toll on one's health. In fact, since returning from their furlough last summer, the Moores have been repeatedly infected with malaria, and this has worn them down physically. This reminds us all that health is a precious earthly gift of our heavenly Father, and especially so for our missionaries, their families, and missionary assistants on mission fields in the tropics.

The health concerns and the advancing age of the Moores have prompted Rev. Moore to request emeritation. His council and Classis West have approved his request, and classis in turn has forwarded the request to synod, asking that synod grant him the status of an emeritus minister in our churches as of July 31, 2002. The Moores plan to return to the USA prior to that time and then will settle back into church life in North America. Indeed, the Moores have faithfully served the Lord on the Ghanaian field for three years. The FMC expresses great appreciation to Rev. and Mrs. Moore for the sacrifices made and the mountains of work

done in establishing the beginning of the mission field in Ghana and the mission fellowship in Ashaley Botwe. May the Lord richly bless Rev. and Mrs. Moore in their retirement years and in the fellowship of our churches and their children throughout Canada and the USA.

On account of the emeritation of Rev. Moore, the FMC has submitted to synod the proposal for a second missionary to serve on the field. The FMC and Hull council believe that a second missionary is necessary for the field because of the workload and because of the need to train the men to be officebearers, and especially some of them to be pastors. It has become clearer to the FMC and council over the past year, on the basis of the missionary reports and the last delegation's visit in the fall of 2001, that this work cannot be properly fulfilled by only one, isolated missionary. In fact, once Rev. Moore leaves the field, Rev. Bekkering will be in the same position of an extreme workload in which Rev. Moore was last year about this same time. We believe that the field continues to need two missionaries. In that conviction, the FMC asks the churches for approval. Whether the Lord will provide another missionary to the field with our current need for ministers in our churches, we will leave in the Lord's hands. In the meantime, let us continue to pray that the Lord of the harvest will grant laborers in His harvest and stir up in the hearts of young men in our churches the desire to labor in the ministry of the Word in our churches.

Since Rev. Moore will be leaving the field in June, a transition has been underway since January. Rev. Bekkering gradually has assumed more responsibilities and work. Preaching on the Lord's Day is divided between the missionaries. Rev. Bekkering is now leading the weekly Bible Studies and catechism classes, while Rev. Moore will continue the weekly radio pro-

gram. Pastoral visits and duties continue to be shared. This is especially necessary for the work the missionaries do for benevolence care of the members. In addition, Rev. Moore has begun instructing some of the men of the fellowship weekly on Mondays and Saturdays in the principles of church polity using the Church Order as the textbook. According to the reports of the missionaries, all of this work gradually is bearing fruit in the members of the fellowship.

The fruit has been particularly evident in the matter of marriage. It became evident that not all the couples in the fellowship were properly married even according to the accepted requirements of a customary marriage. As a result, the missionaries instructed the members in the error and sinfulness of not being married according to the principles of Scripture. The fruit of all this instruction by the Bible Studies and the preaching is that couples have seen the error of their way, are turning from their sin, and are establishing marriages and registering proper customary marriages with the Ghanaian government. This shows that the people desire to live a godly life in the truth of the Scriptures with respect to marriage. This is vital for the formation of a future Reformed congregation.

Along with teaching the truths about marriage, the missionaries faithfully emphasize the importance of family devotions in the homes. The lack of this was reported by the delegation from the FMC and Hull council who visited in November 20 to December 10, 2001. Just as regular family devotions are so vitally important to the spiritual stability of our homes here in North America, so it is also vitally important for the homes of God's people in Ghana. In that conviction, the mission fellowship is being led to improve this important aspect of their covenant home-life.

The visiting delegation in the



fall of 2001 were busy in their work of oversight. Mr. Henry Hoksbergen and Mr. Alvin Kooiker with their wives spent several weeks among the fellowship. Besides a time for rest and relaxation, the delegates made over twenty visits, and also directly oversaw the preaching, catechism classes, Bible studies, and the radio program work. They also had firsthand experience at using an interpreter while meeting with members of the fellowship who were not fluent in English. The delegation thoroughly enjoyed their good taste of life on the mission field. Their experience has been valuable for the work of the council and FMC. As a result, we are more convinced that the yearly visit of a delegation to the mission field is vital to our proper oversight of the mission work in distant Ghana.

Of course, we may not overlook the valuable contributions of our missionary assistants, Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Bleyenbergh, in the past year. The Bleyenbergs came to the field last April 2001 and completed their term of labor at the end of March 2002. The fellowship greatly appreciated their work, and they even sent a letter to the FMC thanking the churches for sending and providing the Bleyenbergs to the mission fellowship. We, too, express our hearty thanks to the Bleyenbergs for giving a year of their life for the support of the mission work, the missionary families, and the members of the mission group.

Since the Bleyenbergs have left the field, Mr. Doug Bekkering, a member of our Georgetown PRC, has been serving as an interim replacement on the field since mid-April. Because he is our interim assistant, this means that the field continues to need the assistance of an older couple. Those who may be seriously pondering giving a year or more of their life should be encouraged by the fact that all living expenses (housing, health insurance, food, phone, utilities, per-

sonal, and travel) on the field and any expenses at home (church budget, home payments, etc.) while serving on the field will be covered. Further, the assistants are provided separate housing, which is situated on the same property as Rev. Bekkering's house, and a vehicle for transportation and work. Although this is all volunteer labor, yet all expenses are supported through the Foreign Missionary Assistants Fund.

In addition, the past missionary assistants can attest to the fact that the experience and the fellowship are well worth the necessary sacrifices to serve in the practical aspects of the field. If any of the older and married members of our churches are seriously considering the work and need someone to talk to about the work involved or other important questions, do not wait a moment longer to contact one of the above-mentioned members of the FMC, the undersigned by e-mail ([rchjsmt@prca.org](mailto:rchjsmt@prca.org)) or by phone (712-726-3382), or the missionaries by e-mail ([bekkering@africaonline.com.gh](mailto:bekkering@africaonline.com.gh)).

Lastly, we must not forget that the rigors and pressures of the mission work require some time for relaxation and a little fun. For example, Arnie Bleyenbergh, who is noted in the Edgerton area as a top-notch hunter and fisherman, decided to try out his skills on trapping a crocodile in a river near Ashaley Botwe. With the help of a friend, and after much patient waiting by Arnie and many others back home, finally a crocodile was trapped! After many had their picture taken with the fair-sized green beast, it was butchered and prepared for a meal. How does fried or cooked crocodile taste? You will have to ask the Bleyenbergs, if you ever see them, or drop a quick e-mail note to the missionaries. They will fill in the details.

Besides the catch of a crocodile, the brethren have had opportunity to visit the beautiful sights in the areas surrounding the greater

Accra region. Many visitors to the field over the past years can attest to the beauty of the land.

In conclusion to this brief overview of the work in Ghana, the missionaries and families continue to express their dependence in their work upon the sustaining blessings of our Father for Christ's sake alone. Of this, one of the missionaries candidly writes in a recent report.

We are thankful to our heavenly Father for His mercy and grace to us in our needs. We are growing in the recognition of God's help as we grow in the understanding of the great responsibility that we have in Ghana.

Please, continue to pray for us.

Likewise, may we in our fervent prayers seek the Lord consciously for our daily physical and spiritual needs and for those of our fellow saints in Ghana.

### **The Philippines**

The FMC was also delighted to hear that synod 2001 had approved sending a missionary to the Philippines among the mission groups and contacts in Manila, in Bacolod City, and in the Daet region. Soon after the FMC received the official notification of that decision, the FMC informed Doon PRC that they should begin the calling process for a missionary. Doon extended two calls, the second of which was to Rev. Audred Spriensma, who at the time was a pastor serving in the Grandville Protestant Reformed Church. Before answering the call, Rev. Spriensma visited the field with Mr. Al Brummel, a member of the FMC. Upon returning, Rev. Spriensma accepted the call and was duly installed into the office of missionary pastor among the mission groups in the Philippines. The installation worship service took place in the Doon PRC on Friday, January 18, 2002. Rev. R. Smit, Doon's pastor, led the service, and he preached from Acts 17:2-5. Rev. Kleyn, president of the

FMC, read the installation form and installed the brother into the office of missionary pastor.

Since then, Rev. Spriensma and family have been busy preparing for the move in mid June. As part of the preparation for moving, Rev. Spriensma and Mr. Gene Van Bemmél, an elder from Doon, will visit the mission groups in Manila and Bacolod City. The brethren will arrive on the field on Saturday, April 19, and return about two weeks later. This will serve as an opportunity for taking care of some practical business for moving, for renewing contact with the mission groups, and providing the Doon council some more hands-on involvement in the field.

Even such short visits are greatly appreciated by the mission groups and contacts. In fact, at the request of the mission groups in Manila and Bacolod, we pass along their heartfelt thanks to our churches for sending all the many past delegations and Rev. Spriensma as a missionary pastor to lead them in a growing understanding of our precious and distinctly Reformed spiritual heritage.

Another newsworthy item for which the mission groups are particularly thankful is the beginning of the Reformed Witness Hour broadcasts in Manila and Bacolod City. On Saturday, March 16, 2002, the Reformed Witness Hour was aired at 6:30 P.M. in Metro Manila. Through the joint efforts of the mission group in Manila, the FMC's Philippine sub-committee in Edgerton, and the Reformed Witness Hour Committee and its sound engineers in Grand Rapids, the broadcast has been successful and is continuing weekly at a prime time on Saturday night. Recently, the broadcast has also begun in Bacolod on a weekly basis. It is our hope that these broadcasts will serve the mission groups and our work among them for the establishing of them in the Reformed faith as well as for evangelism work in their respective cities. We also express our thanks to Rev. C.

Haak and the Reformed Witness Hour Committee for their enthusiastic support and tremendous help in beginning this joint venture of airing the Reformed Witness Hour internationally in the Philippines.

As the month of June swiftly approaches, Rev. Spriensma is currently taking missionary-related courses at our Protestant Reformed Seminary as well as in other Grand Rapids area seminaries. He has also been kept busy with preaching on the Lord's Days for vacant churches or wherever it has been needed. In addition to that, Rev. Spriensma, his wife, and daughter Jessica have been learning some Tagalog, the language most commonly spoken in Manila. Mrs. Grace Seif, a member of our First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, kindly offered to teach them Tagalog. The FMC expresses many thanks to Mrs. Seif for all the time given to helping the Spriensmas learn Tagalog. The learning of the language of the people is important both for the field in the Philippines and in Ghana. Although many Filipinos can understand English, yet there are some who are not fluent in spoken English. This makes it wise for the missionary to learn their native tongue.

Perhaps many readers wonder about whether, after last year, it is safe for US citizens to live in the Philippines. Since last summer and fall, the media have reported about clashes between the militant groups and the Philippine military. The FMC was also informed that some missionaries were recalled from Davao, a large, southern city on the island of Mindanao. All of this has increased concern for the safety of our missionary family. In response, the FMC looked for accurate information to determine the security risk. The US State Department and another international government source assured the FMC that our missionary family would be safe where they plan to live and work in the Philippines.

Since last fall, the Philippine military has dealt significant blows to the militant groups, the Abu Sayaf and the MILF. Besides that, the Philippine military is being assisted by military advisors and equipment from the USA to contain the militant groups in the extreme southwest of the Philippine archipelago. In addition, we must remember that Manila, the Daet region, and Bacolod, where our missionary will live and labor, are separated from the problem area by a significant barrier of hundreds of miles of ocean. The FMC believes that with this information, we should not be deterred in sending a missionary family to live and labor in the northern areas of the Philippines.

Once the missionary is established on the field, the FMC will be seeking the help of a missionary assistant couple on the field, if necessary. This reminds us all that the Foreign Missionary Assistants Fund will continue to need the regular support of the churches. With the potential for an additional set of volunteer assistants, the expenses for all of the assistants will more than likely double as a result. The FMC is proposing to the synod that synod approve a budget of \$50,000 for the coming year for the support of all our foreign missionary assistants. The missionaries and the FMC believe that having missionary assistants on our foreign fields is important for various reasons. Hence, we seek for your continued support not only by your offerings and prayers, but also perhaps by a few of you giving even a year of your time for volunteer work in the Philippines or in Ghana.

## Conclusion


The FMC expresses many thanks to the churches for their faithful support of our denominational foreign mission labors in West Africa and Southeast Asia. The continued support of the churches is greatly encouraging for



the committee and the calling churches. More importantly, direct vocal encouragement to our missionaries, their families, and their assistants by letter, by e-mail, or by Internet voice chats goes a long

way to bridge the oceans that separate them from us in North America.

Let us then continue uphold- ing our missionaries before our

Lord in prayer that utterance may be given unto them to open their mouths boldly in order that they may make known the mystery of the gospel as they ought (Eph. 6:18-20). 

# There Are Fish in the Net

Don Doezema

**T**he Lord becomes manifest as the Lord of the fish.

That's what happens in missions. That's what happens in *our* mission work. Not our efforts, not our funds, not our policies bring one fish into the net. Only the "Lord of the fish" does that. The command, the execution, the fruit — all are of Him. We thank the Lord, therefore, at the very beginning of another article on missions in our churches, that He becomes manifest in a positive way as the Lord of the fish in the work that He has given us to do. Whether it be in Ghana or Myanmar or Pittsburgh, He is pleased to use our proclamation of His gospel to bring fish into the net.

## Eastern Home Missions

Since 1998 our domestic missions have been divided geographically into a western and eastern portion. That's the year that Rev. Mahtani accepted a call to serve as eastern home missionary. He was stationed in Pittsburgh, with the understanding that he work there "initially but not only." Accordingly, he has been active, as time permitted, in following up on leads from elsewhere in the eastern states but has focused his attention primarily on Pittsburgh. Rev. Mahtani and the mission group have worked hard there, making good use of radio, sponsoring lec-

tures, developing a mailing list, manning a mission office, making follow-up telephone calls, and, not least, by personal witnessing. Witnessing, that is, to the truth that they have learned to love. Witnessing in and by the life they live in their place in the world. Their number is small, and holding, at around thirty; but, encouraged by the number of visitors, and trusting that the Lord rewards faithful labor and that His Word never returns empty, they press on in the work.

## Western Home Missions

In the west, Rev. Miersma's center of labors is in Spokane, WA, where he is missionary-pastor of the Sovereign Grace Reformed Church. Like Rev. Mahtani in the east, Rev. Miersma in the west does not restrict his attention to Spokane. But, for good reason, the SGRC and its work of evangelism in the vicinity of the church are uppermost in our western home missionary's mind and heart. Good reason, we say, because the desire of the SGRC from the beginning was to be affiliated with the PRC. And that takes preparatory work. For one thing, there was the matter of size. The congregation was very small. Hence the emphasis on local evangelism. We're pleased to report that two families have joined the church since the time of our last news from the DMC in the SB. Besides, there is what Rev. Miersma calls a "rather constant flow of visitors to

the services from the Spokane area." So, though the congregation still numbers but eight families, there is reason to be optimistic about long-term viability.

As important as numbers may be in determining when to apply for admission into the PRC, numerical growth is not the only, or even the main, consideration. In a very real sense, a congregation must *grow into* a federation of churches. Affiliation is not so much an *event* as it is a *process*. Developing a "feel," not only for a denomination's doctrinal distinctives, but also for its life and practice, takes time. In a careful and unhurried way, Rev. Miersma has been pursuing that end. We commend him for that, and commend also the consistory and the congregation, for it is clear to us, also from the testimony of our emissaries, that the conformity achieved is not a matter of formality but of conviction.

In August of last year, the consistory of the SGRC adopted, and the congregation formally approved, a number of propositions according to which the SGRC reaffirmed its desire to be received into the PRC with officebearers intact; reaffirmed its commitment to the three forms of unity; adopted the liturgical forms in use in the PRC; adopted the Church Order of the PRC and the decisions attached to its articles; and adopted the decisions of the PRC classes and synods as settled and binding under Article 31 of the Church Order.

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*Mr. Doezema is secretary of the Domestic Mission Committee of the Protestant Reformed Churches.*

What heretofore was implicit has thus become explicit — another confirmation of the seriousness of purpose of the SGRC in their desire one day to be received into the PRC.

### Fayetteville

Then there's Fayetteville, North Carolina. Fayetteville is, of course, part of eastern home missions. But because of the level of activity in this developing field, it has taken on a life of its own. That's reflected even in the structure of the DMC. We have three main sub-committees — one for western home missions (Spokane), another for Pittsburgh, and, beginning this past year, a third for Fayetteville. And a good part of the business of our regular monthly meetings relates to matters of the Protestant Reformed Fellowship of Fayetteville.

The development of the work in Fayetteville has really been quite remarkable. Already a year ago we were advised by some of our ministers who went there to preach, that the time was ripe for calling a missionary. There is, one reported, "thankful reception of the preaching; commitment to PR doctrine; increasing trust; dedication of time and money; Christian hospitality — and all at the sacrifice of family and former friends and church ties." The DMC, however, thought it better at that time to give the Fellowship another year to prove itself before asking synod to authorize the calling of still another domestic home missionary.

Now it's a year later. And, with another synod just ahead, the DMC was again faced with the question of what to advise regarding the method of labor in Fayetteville. When a work reaches this level, can it be done, properly, by "visiting" ministers and by the part-time attention that can be given to it by an eastern home missionary? Or does it require the full-time presence of a missionary? That was the question. In light both of precedent and policy, a re-

view of the history of our work in Fayetteville seems to leave little room for doubt. The preparatory work there has been done — and done, too, in keeping with the mission policy adopted in 1965. During the course of some four years, the work progressed from an initial provision of audio-video sermon tapes and a lot of pamphlets, to airing of the Reformed Witness Hour, to bimonthly visits by our eastern home missionary, to public lectures, to two Sundays per month "pulpit supply" by various of our ministers, to the current five-month presence of Rev. Dick — all in response to needs arising out of a developing work. And now there are some six families in regular attendance, four of them young families, with a total of sixteen children who, incidentally, by the testimony of all the ministers who have gone there, are a delight to catechize.

As for precedent, never in recent memory has the DMC had better grounds to offer for calling a missionary to a developing field. And the above-mentioned policy, which gives synodical direction to the labors of the DMC, simply *assumes* the presence of a missionary at this stage in a work. We are *well past* the investigation stage. Now is the time to be *building*. If our goal in missions is not merely to preach the Word wherever and whenever we have opportunity to do so, but to establish churches, then both Pittsburgh and Fayetteville in the eastern states require now the "concentrated and thorough" work of which our 1965 policy speaks.

And yet, it isn't quite so simple, this year, is it? Our churches have just called a second missionary to Ghana and a missionary to the Philippines, and there are now two ministers-on-loan in Singapore. And there are five vacant churches.

Those are valid considerations.

The '65 policy seems to say as much:

But as surely as we are called to be busy in this work, it is our re-

sponsibility to expend our very best efforts in this area of the churches' calling, in harmony with the means which the Lord has given us. Only then can we expect the Lord's blessing upon our labors.

The qualifier jumps right off the page doesn't it? "...in harmony with the means which the Lord has given us." When the question of whether or not to call a missionary to Fayetteville comes to the floor, the question that immediately begs an answer is exactly that: Would doing so be in harmony with our *means*? The issue now is not *financial resources*. For, how many of us have been reduced to giving of our penury (cf. Luke 21:4)? But *manpower* is another thing. Five vacant churches! And that's in a denomination of but twenty-seven churches. Almost one in five without an undershepherd. Would it not be irresponsible to suggest that yet another vacancy be created? True, we must "expend our very best efforts" in the church's great calling to preach the gospel even to the ends of the earth. But, for one thing, aren't we already *doing* that, with no fewer than *seven* of the currently active thirty-three clergy in the PRC engaged in missions? And, for another, is not our calling with regard to the spiritual well-being of the sheep, and of the little lambs, in our own congregations as great as, or greater than, our calling to missions?

Reasons why *not* to recommend that synod approve calling a missionary to Fayetteville would seem to be compelling.

As a *mission* committee, the DMC must of course bring recommendations to synod that are in the best interests of the work in which it is engaged. But as a *denominational* committee, the DMC is obliged also to give serious consideration to circumstances that obtain elsewhere in our churches. We tried to do that. And in the end



we decided to advise that synod approve the calling of a missionary to Fayetteville. Why?

I have chosen to enter into this aspect of the work of the DMC in some detail, not to argue our "case" ahead of time. That's already been done in the Agenda for synod. I do it here because I know that the matter of maintaining proper balance in the carrying out of our calling as churches is one of genuine, legitimate concern on the part of many who will never see the Agenda — and who might not think to read, later, what's buried in the supplements at the back of the Acts. The issue is not an easy one. I write therefore in the hope that what helped *me* might be helpful also to others.

I say "helped *me*" because I, personally, had a little help after the fact. A good friend of mine called me the other day and said, "Listen to this." And then he read me a short excerpt of a sermon by Herman Hoeksema. The sermon was on the appearance of the resurrected Lord to seven of His disciples at the Sea of Galilee. The disciples, you remember, were on the sea, in a boat, fishing. In fact, they had been fishing all night — and had not a thing to show for it. Especially disconcerting, that must have been, for those of the seven who were fishermen by trade. Peter was one of them. He knew where to fish, and when to fish. "I go a-fishing," he said. The others went with him, and, plying all of the skills they had learned from years of practice, they got nothing. Inexplicable, really. Evidently the right time and the right place, and a good net — but not a single fish.

Not, that is, until someone on the shore told them to cast their net on the other side.

That was the setting for the sermon. Here, then, is the excerpt from it:

... the Lord appeared in another form. As He appeared unto Mary

Magdalene in the form of a gardener, so it is very well possible that He appeared here in the form of one of the fishermen of that place. That this is true is evident from the fact that when they reach the shore they still do not recognize Him. They knew that it was the Lord, but they did not recognize Him by *sight*. That is why we read that none of them "durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord." They *knew* that it was the Lord, but they did not *recognize* Him in that form. Now, why did the Lord appear that way? Because the apostles had to learn that they must not live and work by sight, but by the power of His Word and grace. You understand, when the Lord says, cast your net on the other side of the ship, the wonder is that they do it. You realize, they did it before they had recognized Him. What does that mean? It means that the Lord did not give them some fisherman's advice, but that He caused the word of His power to go out to them causing them to obey. The Lord still does that. It is He that says, Cast out the net. It is He that also points out the field of labor. You talk about mission work. You have done a lot of missions. To do mission work does not always mean that you have to go to the Hottentots. To do mission work is to preach the gospel. You must not say: I go a-fishing. But you must hear the calling, and preach the gospel at every opening. Then the Lord will show the field. You must not say, Let us go there. The Lord said, Cast your net on the other side. What does that mean? The Lord becomes manifest as the Lord of the fish. The disciples do not go a-fishing; the Lord brings the fish into the net. We read that there were a hundred and fifty-three. I do not think that this number has any meaning. Perhaps the significance of this number is exactly in this, that it has no meaning. The significance is exactly that it is no round, no symbolical number. If we would see anything in it, it is this, that the apostles do not finish the work. The church must continue it. The church must continue it until the net is filled, un-

til the whole church has been gathered.

The caller, I think, knew that I needed that. So I asked him, "What does that mean ... for Fayetteville."

His answer, worth pondering, was simply this: "There are fish in the net."

Hoeksema's exposition of John 21:6 helped me understand, better, the discussion on the floor of the DMC concerning what it is that we are about. It's fishing that we are about. But what's the true nature of this undertaking? We must not, Hoeksema warned, say, "I go a-fishing." The DMC must not, in other words, go to synod and say, We went to Fayetteville. We worked this potential field for four years, and we were guided in that labor by the policy of 1965. Now there are *six families*. We can't stop *now*.

At least not that, *by itself*. Because we must not say, "I go a-fishing."

Fact is, in a very real sense the DMC did not find Fayetteville. Fayetteville found us. First of all in the person of a pediatrician who discovered our literature, liked it, and did not content himself with ordering a stack of free pamphlets. But, no matter the details of the beginning of the work, we must get a hold of the truth that "the Lord still does it. It is He that says, Cast out the net. It is He that points out the field of labor." It is He that "becomes manifest as the Lord of the fish. The disciples do not go a-fishing; the Lord brings the fish into the net."

The "bottom line" in our advice to synod for calling a missionary to Fayetteville was this: "The King of the church gives our churches both the manpower and the financial resources to do the work when He opens the door, as we believe He has in Fayetteville."

I see more clearly, now, what that means. It means: "There are fish in the net." Not just *a* fish, or

two or three fish. But the kind of numbers (and families) that we have always considered to be sufficient evidence that the Lord has opened the way for us. There are fish in the net. Who put them there? "The Lord of the fish" — who knew very well, in 1999 and 2000 and 2001, what our resources would be for the work in 2002. Because He gives them to us.



But, someone may ask, what about those numbers? What about five vacant churches? What about seven ministers working outside our established congregations? Well,


for one thing, those numbers, though accurate for the moment, are not the whole story. With the imminent retirement of a missionary and a minister-on-loan, the number of ministers employed in missions will soon be reduced to five. And after the filling, soon, of the vacancy in Classis West, and after the graduation of two seminarians in June, D.V., the number of vacant churches could conceivably be reduced to two. Besides, although pulpit supply is no substitute for having one's own pastor, it is true that help for vacant churches could be readily available in the persons of a good number of still able and willing emeriti

ministers. No vacant church, therefore, need be left without the lively preaching of the Word.

But there's another, more important, consideration.

"... pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2).

I wonder, sometimes, if that prayer is more quickly answered when the thrust of it is not, Send us laborers for the work that we might be able to do if only we had more laborers, but, Send us laborers for the work in which we are already engaged.

Think about that. 

## Bring the Parchments



A third reason why all Protestant Reformed people should faithfully support and read our paper, and that too in close connection with the preceding, is that our calling as Protestant Reformed Churches is to be very specific, and that the *Standard Bearer* is the sole representative in print of this specific calling.

We may not be satisfied with a sort of general gospel. We may not even be satisfied with a vague and general confession of the Reformed truth. It is very evidently our calling as churches to be very specific, to cross all the t's and to dot all the i's of the Reformed truth. This specific character of our Protestant


Reformed faith must especially be found in the strict maintenance of the Protestant Reformed conception of the covenant, which, according to it, is not the promise of the gospel, nor a way of salvation, nor a contract between two parties, but is the everlasting relation of friendship and intimate fellowship between God and His elect people, according to which He is their eternal Friend, and they are His friendservants.

Perhaps if we emphasize this specific truth we will never become large as churches. But it is not our calling to be big, but to maintain the truth. It may be very tempting to open doors of our churches to

others that differ with us principally in respect to the truth of the covenant, but we must certainly resist that temptation. Otherwise we will be unfaithful to our specific calling, and soon it will be found that we have no specific reason for existence as a Protestant Reformed church.

To this specific calling the *Standard Bearer* has always been faithful.

And this is a third reason why all our Protestant Reformed people should support and read the *Standard Bearer*.

Herman Hoeksema  
*Standard Bearer*,  
vol. 29, p. 126 

## News From Our Churches

### Mr. Benjamin Wigger

#### Congregation Activities

Parents of catechism students at the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL were invited to their children's fi-

nal catechism session, which included pizza, games, singing, and thanksgiving for the blessing of another catechism season. Final papers were handed out and memory awards were also given.

Many of our churches continue to experience a pressing need for church organists. The need seems

to grow more acute year by year. To answer this growing need in our churches in the Chicago, IL area, two men, Mr. Don Haak and Mr. Ernie Medema, have established an Organists Memorial Fund in memory of their wives, Mrs. Pat Haak and Mrs. Grace Medema, two long-time organ

*Mr. Wigger is an elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.*



players in their churches. Those individuals who wish to learn to play may apply for assistance. This fund was established to encourage organ playing for the benefit of our Bethel, Cornerstone, Peace, South Holland, and any other PRCs organized in the future in the Chicago area.

After their Good Friday worship service, March 29, the congregation of the Lynden, WA PRC was invited to remain and enjoy an Easter Singspiration and Program from their church choir.

The Choral Society of the South Holland, IL PRC presented their annual Spring Concert Sunday evening, April 7.

You may have thought that spring comes later and later each year. The cold of winter seems to last longer each year, but at least by March we usually see some nice weather, enough so that when we gather together in early March (March 13 this year) for Prayer Day worship services we can anticipate the coming growing season. But spring comes later in Canada than in the US, and our Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB has adjusted to this by holding their Prayer Day services on April 10, one month later than the congregations to the south in the US.

The congregation of the Edgerton, MN PRC arranged a welcome-home potluck supper for Mr. and Mrs. Arnie Bleyenbergs on April 11. The members of Edgerton were given the opportunity to visit with the Bleyenbergs, and they in turn were able to extend greetings from Ghana as well as share some of their experiences from spending a year as volunteers to our missionaries there.

#### Mission Activities

**R**ev. M. Dick, pastor at Grace PRC in Standale, MI, recently wrote his congregation from Fayetteville, NC where he and his family are spending the first six months of this year serving the

"Fellowship" there, that he had a plan to keep in closer touch with them. He was going to try and write each member of Grace a note, one every day, and he promised they would not all be the same. The hope was, of course, that each member of Grace would in turn write back, or call, or e-mail him and his family.

#### Evangelism Activities


**I**n news concerning evangelism efforts in our churches, we find that the Evangelism Society of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI recently mailed the pamphlet "Is the Christian Faith Easy" to the entire area around their church and have received a number of responses, which is always encouraging.

On April 19 the Evangelism Committee of the Grandville, MI PRC sponsored a lecture by Prof. H. Hanko at their church. Prof. Hanko spoke on the topic, "The Events of September 11, 2001: The Devil's Work or God's Plan?"

#### Minister Activities

**T**he faculty of our seminary has made arrangements with the consistories of the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL and the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI to have Mr. Paul Goh and Mr. Bill Langerak serve their six-month internships at the respective churches beginning July 1.

Rev. B. Gritters declined the call he had been consider-

ing to serve as pastor of the Grandville, MI PRC. Their new trio is Rev. C. Haak, Rev. D. Kleyn, and Rev. J. Slopsema. Rev. R. VanOverloop declined the call to Covenant. Their new trio is Rev. D. Kleyn, Rev. K. Koole, and Rev. J. Laning. Rev. W. Bruinsma declined the call he had received to serve as the next pastor of the Byron Center, MI PRC. The Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI was to call a pastor from a trio of the Rev. G. Eriks, Rev. D. Kleyn, and Rev. R. VanOverloop. Rev. R. Hanko has accepted the call he received from the Lynden, WA PRC to serve as their next pastor. 

Who shall the Lord's elect condemn?  
'Tis God that justifies their souls;  
And mercy, like a mighty stream,  
O'er all their sins divinely rolls.

Who shall adjudge the saints to hell?  
'Tis Christ that suffered in their stead:  
And the salvation to fulfill,  
Behold His rising from the dead.

He lives! He lives! and sits above,  
Forever interceding there;  
Who shall divide us from His love?  
Or what should tempt us to despair?

Shall persecution or distress,  
Famine, or sword, or nakedness?  
He that hath loved us, bears us through,  
And makes us more than conquerors too.

Faith hath an overcoming pow'r,  
It triumphs in the dying hour:  
Christ is our life, our joy, our hope;  
Nor can we sink with such a prop.

Not all that men on earth can do,  
Nor pow'rs on high, nor pow'rs below,  
Shall cause His mercy to remove,  
Nor wean our hearts from Christ our love.

*Standard Bearer,*  
Vol. 29, March 1, 1953



## Announcements

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On May 31, 2002, the Lord will-  
ing, our parents and grandparents,

**EGBERT and HENRIETTA  
GRITTERS,**

will celebrate their 45<sup>th</sup> wedding anni-  
versary. We are thankful to the Lord  
for the covenant instruction and spiri-  
tual guidance which our parents have  
given us these past years. It is our  
prayer that God will continue to uphold  
and bless them in the years to come.

"Behold, that thus shall the man  
be blessed that feareth the Lord. The  
Lord shall bless thee out of Zion: and  
thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem  
all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt  
see thy children's children, and peace  
upon Israel" (Psalm 128:4-6).

- \* Brian and Denise Gritters  
Michon, Brittany, Shantelle,  
Rebecca, Gregory, Nicole, Jordan
- \* Rick and Roxanne Terpstra  
Allison, Erik, Alex
- \* Jim and Brenda Regnerus  
Karyn, Stephan, Jana, Lanae,  
Pamela, Ellie
- \* Loren and Nancy Gritters  
Emily, Bradley, Heidi
- \* Marvin and Marcia Gritters  
Matthew, Keith, Ryan, Daniel,  
Garett
- \* Greg and Rhonda Holstege  
Michelle, Marissa, Stephanie
- \* Dave and Susan King  
Justin, Crystal (in glory), Caleb,  
David
- \* Joel and Valerie Minderhoud  
Jared, Kara, Nathan, Trevor
- \* Joshua and Sharla Hoekstra  
Michael

Hull, Iowa

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The congregation and council of  
Peace PRC of Lansing IL extend their  
heartfelt Christian sympathy and love to  
their pastor, Rev. Steven Houck, and his  
children and grandchild in the death of

**CAROLYN HOUCK,**

wife, mother, and grandmother. The  
Lord in His mercy saw fit to take  
Carolyn home to eternal glory Decem-  
ber 26, 2001. "The Spirit itself beareth  
witness with our spirit, that we are the  
children of God; And if children, then  
heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with  
Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him,  
that we may be also glorified together"  
(Romans 8:16, 17).

Don Terpstra, Clerk

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On May 6, 2002 our parents,  
**THOMAS and LUANNE SCHIPPER,**  
celebrated their 25th wedding anniver-  
sary. We are thankful to our faithful,  
covenant Father who has given us  
such godly, loving parents, who have  
faithfully shown us throughout the  
years the truths of God's Word by their  
godly instruction and faithful walk. We  
pray that God will continue to bless  
them and keep them in His care. "All  
the paths of the Lord are mercy and  
truth unto such as keep his covenant  
and his testimonies" (Psalm 25:10).

- \* Jason Schipper
- \* Dirk Schipper
- \* Nicole Schipper
- \* Andrew Schipper
- \* Betsy Schipper

Hudsonville, Michigan

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The congregation and council of  
Peace PRC of Lansing IL extend their  
Christian sympathy to Katheryn  
Poortinga and the Poortinga family in  
the death of

**MRS. PETER S. POORTINGA**

( nee Tenie Houwing).

"And I heard a voice from heaven say-  
ing unto me, write, Blessed are the dead  
which die in the Lord from henceforth:  
Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest  
from their labors and their works do fol-  
low them" (Revelation 14:13).

Rev. Steven Houck, President  
Don Terpstra, Clerk

### CALL TO SYNOD!!

Synod 2001 appointed Southwest  
Protestant Reformed Church,  
Grandville, MI the calling church for  
the 2002 synod.

The consistory hereby notifies our  
churches that the 2002 Synod of the  
Protestant Reformed Churches in  
America will convene, the Lord will-  
ing, on Tuesday, June 11, 2002 at 9:00  
a.m. in the Southwest Protestant Re-  
formed Church, Grandville, Michigan.

The Pre-Synodical Service will be  
held on Monday evening, June 10, at  
7:30 P.M. Rev. Terpstra, president of  
the 2001 synod, will preach the ser-  
mon. Synodical delegates are re-  
quested to meet with the consistory  
before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging  
should contact Mr. Gary Boverhof, 467  
Quincy SW, Grandville, MI 49418.  
Phone: (616) 896-9561.

Consistory of Southwest PRC  
Gary Boverhof, Clerk.

### NOTICE

The Board of the Reformed Heritage Christian School Association of Kalamazoo, Michigan is inviting applica-  
tions for a full-time and part-time high school teacher for the 2002-2003 school year. Successful applicants must  
be committed to the Reformed faith, biblical inerrancy, 6-day creation, male headship, the antithesis between  
Christianity and the world, and covenantal theology. Applicants should send a letter of application and résumé to:

Reformed Heritage Christian School  
700 North Fletcher, Kalamazoo, MI 49006.  
For more information, phone 1-616-279-7373.