

# THE *May 15, 2003* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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# Redeemed from the Curse of the Law

*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.*

Galatians 3:13

**O**ur whole redemption is found in these few words. Here we find all our comfort for this life and for the life to come. Christ is all that we need. Without Him, whoever we may be, whatever we may have, all is hopelessly lost.

We are under the law. Before the fall, the law was our life because we had the ability to keep it. The picture is different now. After the fall, the law kills us because we cannot obey it. "But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith" (v. 11). We can see that there is no hope in that direction, for the law is not of faith but of works. The law does not say "believe" but "do." Because man cannot do what the law says, he cannot live by the law. "For as

many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (v. 10).

However, the Scriptures do not stop here. Our text plainly tells us that what the law could not do Christ did for us. He redeemed us, that is, ransomed us from the curse of the law. That curse can be understood best when we see it in contrast to its opposite, God's blessing.

God's blessings are not to be found in mere things. That which is pleasing to the flesh does not necessarily mean that it is a blessing to us. When one receives rain and sunshine, material prosperity, food and shelter, or abilities, that does not mean that in these things he is being blessed. That whole conception is earthly, arrived at when one separates the temporal from the eternal, and the natural from the spiritual. In fact, not even the preaching of the Word and the sacraments are blessings in themselves, for they can also be a savor of death unto death.

The blessing of God is the expression and the operation of His grace. It is that good word which

God speaks in behalf of the creature. A blessing is the word of God's grace which He speaks concerning the creature when He looks upon him in favor and love. It is what the creature receives as a fruit of the word of divine favor. Whatever God gives in His love is a blessing that can be summed up in one phrase — eternal life. "Behold, how pleasant and how good it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!... As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore" (Ps. 133).

In contrast to this is the curse. It is the operation and expression of God's wrath. It too does not lie in things such as sickness, pain, war, or death. Any of these could even be a blessing. It depends upon the heart of God. The curse is the working of all things in this life to one's eternal destruction. However prosperous and healthy you may be, if these things are not yours in the love of God and unto salvation, they are simply the expression in your life of the withering curse of the Almighty God.

The curse of the law is the curse of God as it comes to us through,

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The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692) is a semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc., 4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418.

**Postmaster:** Send address changes to the Standard Bearer, P.O. Box 603, Grandville, MI 49468-0603.

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#### SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

\$17.00 per year in the U.S., US\$20.00 elsewhere.

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16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm and 105mm microfiche, and article copies are available through University Microfilms International.

Website for RFFA: [www.rffa.org](http://www.rffa.org)  
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and because we transgressed, the law of God. This law is the expression of the will of God for the moral creature. It is the divine code that tells us what we may or may not do. We may not sin against God or any other creature in thought, word, or deed. In summarizing the law, Christ instructed us to love God with our whole being and our neighbor as ourselves. Within the sphere of the law we are blessed, but outside of the law there is nothing but the curse. Under that law we are by nature. That law curses us, not because there is something wrong with the law, for it is holy, righteous, and good. It simply demands perfect obedience without even so much as one transgression. To those who obey, the law speaks blessing and communion of life; to disobey incurs the curse.

Our first transgression of the law was committed in paradise. Ever since then man has continued in that way of transgression. By nature he can do nothing else. Ever after, the law says to the sinner, "I curse you." This is the only thing that God can say to the sinner, regardless of what anyone else will tell you. God cannot bless man even for a moment outside of the law, a law that can be kept only by love for God. That is the sorry state in which we find ourselves by nature. If salvation is to come, it will have to come from another source than ourselves, yea, it will have to be a miracle from heaven.

This is where Christ comes in. The good news, the gospel, is that Christ was made a curse for us. Just think of it! Christ, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, took upon Himself our guilt, was made a curse for us, and bore away that curse in His own precious blood. There we have manifested the unspeakable love of God.

This Christ was made a curse. We have evidence of that in the very manner in which He died. He died the death of the cross, the accursed tree, and, "Cursed is every

one that hangeth on a tree." This does not mean that He Himself personally was cursed by God. No, always it was His meat to do the will of His Father. Always He lay in the bosom of the Father even when suffering that unspeakable anguish in the garden of sorrow and while on the cross. Always He bore the witness of the Father: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased." But it does mean that He assumed all that obligation to punishment that rested on us by nature. He assumed all that follows when the law says, "I curse you." Thus, He suffered and endured all the agonies of the damned in hell, all that follows when an eternal God pours out the vials of wrath upon the sins of the human race.

This is the mystery of Calvary. On the one hand, He was completely aware of the favor of God upon Him personally. In deepest agony He could still say, "My God, my God." Yet He suffered all the agonies of the lost souls in hell. From that curse He redeemed us. He ransomed lost sinners by paying the full price. Hence, when all was finished He arose from the tomb, for the curse was gone. All the obligations of the law were fulfilled. His Father in heaven said, "It is enough." The storm had passed and there is nothing left but the sunshine of love and blessing.

All this Christ did *for us*! The wording in the original is "over us," which means that He covered us, as it were, with His own blessed body, in order that the consuming rays of the wrath of God should burn upon Him instead of us. Just as an umbrella covers us, protecting us from the rays of the sun, so the Lord protected us from God's wrath. That He died for us means that He died for the elect of God. This in turn signals that, since He died for a specific people, the sins of those people are certainly washed away. There is no doubt with respect to our salvation; it is certain, for Christ actually did

something, that is, truly and really took away our sins.

In light of this we cannot say that Christ died for believers. He did not. He died for unbelievers. Nor did He die for the born-again and righteous. No, He died for the spiritually dead sinner and for the ungodly. "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.... But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:6, 8). These redeemed are born again, they become believers, righteous children of God. But all is the fruit of redemption, never the cause.

Yet He did not die for *all* the dead, *all* unbelievers, *all* the ungodly, for then *all* would be saved. Christ died for the elect: elect sinners, elect unbelievers, elect lost, elect ungodly. He said, "I lay down my life for the sheep."

The fruit of this blessed work of Jesus Christ on the cross is that the curse is gone. Now the blessing of God may rest on us forever. By faith in Christ the curse is gone, by faith that knows itself as a lost sinner and yearns for deliverance. That is the gospel that comes to you and me in this Word of God.

Weary sinners, lay hold on it. Yes, surely, we sin against every commandment of God every day. Nevertheless, the curse, the wrath, the condemnation, is gone. By faith in Christ there is nothing but blessing. That is the negative part; that is what is gone. The positive part is that we have a new life. By this new life we know whether this redemption is for us, whether that new life is shed abroad in our heart and has transformed us into a living child of God. By this new life we learn to say by the grace of God, "O how love I thy law."


What a comfort to know that we are justified by faith, and not by works. Never should we seek the ground of our comfort in ourselves, in our works. Nevertheless, that being said, faith without works is dead. Our Savior, in the sermon



on the mount, made clear that a tree is known by its fruits. The Lord did not die just to take away our sins, so that legally we were justified before God. Justification implies also sanctification, a holy, godly walk that is in harmony with our legal position before God. If

there is no sanctification, then there is no justification. If there is no life of Christ, then there is no faith. Your and my faith is only genuine when there is evidence of love for God's law, when we are sorry for our sins, and when we long to be made perfect.

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:1, 2).

O, blessed peace! 

## Editorial

# Remembering the Schism of 1953 Schism It Was

**T**he schism in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) in 1953 was ... schism.

This is often slighted, if not overlooked, in discussion of the controversy in the PRC in the early 1950s. Interest in the doctrinal issue tends to leave the schismatic aspect of the struggle in the shadows.

Ignoring, or even minimizing, the schism is a mistake.

Any remembrance of the events in the PRC culminating in the split of 1953 must begin with the rending of the body of Christ in one of her visible, instituted manifestations.

### Rending the Body

Such is schism. Schism is self-willed, self-seeking separation from the covenant community of God in Jesus Christ, that is, the church, with agitation that brings strife and division into that covenant community. The *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* defines schism as "formal and wilful separation from the unity of the church." Schism is sin against the unity of the church.

Schism is grievous sin. I Corinthians 12:25 admonishes against any "schism in the body." Ephesians 4:3 calls every church member to exert himself strenu-

ously "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." The Belgic Confession calls every person to join the true church and forbids the members to separate themselves from it as a matter of "maintaining the unity of the church" (Articles 27-29). Article 80 of the Church Order of Dordt mentions "public schism" second in the list of gross sins that make a Reformed officebearer worthy of suspension or deposition from office. Only heresy precedes it. The Reformed "Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper" bars from the sacrament "all those who are given to raise discord, sects and mutiny in [the] Church," that is, those who are guilty of schism.

The instituted church displaying the marks of the true church is the body of Christ. To leave that church is to leave Christ. To divide that church is, as regards the schismatic's action and intention, to lacerate Christ's body and to wound the head.

The reason why schism is not taken seriously today is a widespread contempt for the church. Independency and individualism prevail among religious people. Schism is self-willed and self-seeking, rather than church-willed and church-seeking.

### Schism Doctrinally

1953 was sin against the unity of the church in the PRC. The faction that broke with the PRC in order soon to return to the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) divided the body of Christ. They did that by introducing false teaching into the churches. False doctrine is usually, though not always, the cause of schism. The false doctrine that tore the PRC apart was the teaching of a universal, gracious covenant promise of God to every baptized person, indeed to everyone who hears the gospel, which gracious promise is dependent for its realization and fulfillment upon man's work of faith as a condition. This teaching is diametrically opposed to the confession of sovereign, particular, unconditional grace in the Canons of Dordt, the official and binding creed of the PRC.

Apart from its falsity, the doctrine of a universal, gracious, conditional promise of the covenant opposed the fundamental stand of the PRC from the very beginning of their existence as a denomination of Reformed churches. Every minister in the denomination knew this well. When two Protestant Reformed ministers told Reformed ministers in the Netherlands, who were rightly cautious about sending their emigrant members to the

PRC, that the PRC had no definite covenant conception, they lied. Their lie was believable, and even defensible, as every effective lie is, because it was crafted around a kernel of truth. Until the PRC adopted the "Declaration of Principles" in 1951, they had no definite conception of the covenant *officially*.

But they had a definite conception of the covenant and its promise *unofficially*. Already in 1927, Herman Hoeksema wrote the work that would soon be published as *Believers and Their Seed*, setting forth the covenant conception of the PRC. The book was, and was recognized as, a foundational work for the PRC. In this work, he outlined and condemned the covenant conception that would later be defended by the faction that split the PRC. Hoeksema demonstrated that this doctrine of the covenant, as taught by Prof. Heyns of Calvin Seminary, was at the root of the doctrine of common grace adopted by the CRC in 1924, particularly the first point's teaching of a well-meant offer of the gospel. Of course, it was the CRC's adoption of three points affirming common grace that had resulted in the formation of the PRC.

For ministers of the PRC to say that the PRC had no definite covenant conception, and to suggest that having one was of no importance to the PRC, was a lie. It was as if, prior to Dordt's adoption of predestination, ministers in the Reformed churches formed through Calvin's teaching would have said, "We have no definite conception of predestination, and having a definite conception is of no importance to Calvinism."

Introduction of the doctrine of a conditional covenant into the PRC was calculated to throw these Churches into turmoil and divide them.

### Schism Church Politically

The schism of 1953 also had church political features. The fac-

tion that left the PRC did not submit to church government. This too commonly characterizes schism in the church. Schismatics despise the authority of the assemblies and ride roughshod over the rules of the adopted church order. Without protesting, a faction in First PRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan refused to submit to the decision of the April and May 1953 meeting of Classis East and the decision of the consistory of First Church that certain teachings of one of the ministers of First Church were heretical and that the minister must apologize or be suspended from office. Nor did this faction submit, under protest if need be, to the suspension of the minister and the deposition of a number of elders by the consistory of First Church with the advice of a neighboring consistory. Later in 1953, Classis West high-handedly denounced and renounced decisions taken by Classis East and by the consistory of First Church, Grand Rapids, even though these decisions were altogether outside the jurisdiction of Classis West.

Vital principles of the Reformed church order, that is, the living government of His church by King Jesus, were flagrantly violated. The result was schism in the body of Christ.

### Conniving at the Schism

To the undying shame of the CRC, that denomination welcomed the schismatic faction into their fellowship with open arms, along with the hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash and property that had originally been given and built for the sake of the truth confessed by the PRC. No confession of the sin of rending the unity of, and well-nigh destroying, the PRC was required.

Hoeksema bitterly lamented this conniving of the CRC at the sin of schism:

The Synod of the Christian Reformed Church does not deal with

the Protestant Reformed Churches but with schismatics and with a schismatic Synod. Does not the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church know this? Of course, they do. Does not the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church know that a minister of the Protestant Reformed Churches was legally deposed from office and that this deposition was sealed by Classis East? Of course, they do. Does not the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church know that, when the Classis approved of the suspension and later of the deposition of the minister referred to above some of the delegates simply left the Classis and organized a separate Classis which later was recognized by the schismatic Synod? Again, I say: of course, they do. And, therefore, it is very plain that the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church knows that it is not dealing with the Protestant Reformed Churches, in this attempt to unification, but with schismatics. And in doing so, they heap sin upon sin (*Standard Bearer*, Oct. 1, 1960, p. 4).

### Harbingers of the Coming Storm

Before 1953, there were harbingers of the coming storm. There was a spirit of independency in the churches. Hoeksema publicly criticized that spirit in an editorial condemning the use of catechism books that had not been adopted by synod.

Churches in a denomination are autonomous. They are not independent. The fundamental idea, necessity, and purpose of denominational federation (literally: covenant-union!) are the unity of the church. To the unity of the Reformed denomination belong oneness of doctrine; oneness of liturgy, which includes the Bible version and the songbook used in public worship; oneness of government, according to an adopted church order; oneness of Christian, holy life; oneness in the training of ministers; and oneness in the cooperative work of missions.

For certain congregations, ministers, or groups in the churches to

go off on their own in these areas, apart from and even in disregard of the federation, is independency. Independency is a threat to the precious unity of the churches, if it is not inherently divisive.

Looking back, one may wonder whether the creation of a new church paper in 1944, *Concordia*, was not a tremor along a fault-line, hidden at that time, but really present, which would violently shake the churches fewer than ten years later. Was there dissatisfaction with the distinctively Protestant Reformed theology and polemical nature of the *Standard Bearer* under the editorship of Herman Hoeksema?

It is certain that when the doctrinal controversy surfaced a few years later, in the late 1940s, *Concordia* became a vigorous opponent of the Protestant Reformed doctrine of sovereign, particular grace in the covenant and an equally vigorous advocate of a conditional covenant. *Concordia* displayed no affection for the *Standard Bearer*. It closed its pages to Herman Hoeksema, before the split became a reality.

### Treachery?

There is reason to suspect treachery in the schism of 1953. The treachery would have been the secret determination of at least some of the ministers to take the PRC, or as many of the people as they could, back into the CRC, while these ministers were insisting that they maintained Protestant Reformed doctrine and intended to continue as the PRC.

There are good reasons for the suspicion. First, within the astonishingly short span of eight years, the faction that left the PRC completed its negotiations with the CRC and returned to that denomination.

Second, I myself, then a seminarian, attended the 1961 synod of the faction that had left the PRC (at the behest, I may add, of Herman Hoeksema, who very

much wanted to know what went on at that synod, but would not, of course, attend himself). This was the synod that decided to return to the CRC, the motion at the 1960 synod to return having been defeated by a vote of eight to eight. In the discussion, which was open to all present and previous officebearers in that denomination, a leading elder of the faction's First Church vehemently opposed the motion to return to the CRC. Without contradiction and in obvious anger, he declared to the assembly that "within six months of our leaving the PRC, Rev. De Wolf was teaching our young people in catechism that we should return to the CRC. The consistory had to reprimand him for this." "Leaving the PRC" were that elder's words, and for this the chairman rebuked him.

Third, recently there has come into my possession an intriguing set of papers. The papers are studies of the doctrines that separate the PRC and the CRC. The authors are ministers of the faction that left the PRC and leading ministers of the CRC. Evidently, the papers were presented at meetings of the two groups of ministers at which the papers were discussed. One of the papers begins, "The subject for this evening's discussion." The obvious purpose of the papers and meetings was to negotiate the return of the faction that left the PRC to the CRC.

These are the authors and subjects of the papers: Rev. M. Gritters, on the equal ultimacy of election and reprobation; Rev. Henry Vander Kam, on the world of John 3:16; Rev. J. Howerzyl, on the world of John 3:16; Dr. P. Y. De Jong, on God's hatred; Rev. John Geels, on the well-meant offer; Rev. M. Gritters, on God's purpose with the preaching of the gospel to the unsaved; Rev. C. R. Veenstra, on the meaning of grace; Dr. P. Y. De Jong, on the second point of common grace of 1924; Rev. J. Howerzyl, on the second

point of common grace; and Rev. J. Blankespoor, on the third point of common grace. There is also a paper by an unknown writer on God's favorable attitude to the reprobate.

What is intriguing about the papers, and ground for suspicion of treachery on the part of at least some of the leaders of the faction that split the PRC in 1953, is that the earliest of the papers is dated January 15, 1954. The others follow on a monthly schedule. Since the schism in the PRC became final with the decisions of Classis West in September 1953 repudiating the decisions of Classis East and supporting the suspended minister and deposed elders of First Church, the papers show that meetings of ministers of the faction that had just left the PRC and ministers of the CRC with the purpose of the return of the faction to the CRC were taking place a scant four months after the schism in the PRC was a reality.

Were meetings arranged, papers assigned, and papers written between the middle of September 1953 and the middle of January 1954? Or was the groundwork for such meetings laid long before the split occurred? Perhaps such meetings could be arranged in four months. But the climate for such meetings had to have been prepared long before. And even if, of a sudden, in September 1953 the ministers of the faction that had left the PRC asked Christian Reformed ministers for meetings to explore the possibility of the return of the faction to the CRC, during all this time the ministers of the faction that had left the PRC were loudly proclaiming to the world that they were the legitimate PRC. They were assuring their own people that they intended to remain the true PRC and had no intention of returning to the CRC.

### Lessons of the History

Schism it was.

As schism, it was wicked on



the part of those responsible for it, especially the ministers and other officebearers, though all the church world approved.

As schism, it was painful to the PRC and their members, agonizingly painful. Those were cruel days for us. Ask those in the PRC over sixty who were members at the time.

As schism—the tearing of His body—it displeased the Lord Jesus Christ. He will judge. He has already judged in history—the history of the faction that broke with the PRC, the history of the PRC, and the history of the CRC.

What can we members of the PRC learn from the schism of the schism of 1953?

In mercy, Christ spared the Churches for His name's sake. Fifty years later, we must be thankful.

Christ did more. He brought good out of that evil. The good was, and is to this day, a clear understanding of the unconditional-ity of the covenant of grace and an entire denomination of Reformed churches committed to living, developing, and confessing the unconditional covenant of grace.

We are also warned against schism. No one should find dividing the body of Christ more detestable than we, who have suffered the evil. The warning is urgent in our time. Ours is a time when every discontented church member feels free to stir up the congregation against the consistory, or leave. Ours is a time when any minister who does not get his way in the church and can hoodwink enough members to support him divides the congregation and abandons the denomination. Ours is a

time when groups of disaffected members, who dislike some decision or other, or who probably have lost control of synod, strike out on their own, to form a new denomination.

Regardless that the church or churches that are abandoned clearly display the marks of the true church of Jesus Christ! Regardless that the issue is not a fundamental doctrine of the gospel!

Ours is a time when theologians introduce into the Reformed churches novel, false doctrines concerning both faith and life.

Regardless that the basis of the church's unity is the truth!

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! ... for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore" (Ps. 133:1, 3).

— DJE 

Understanding the Times

Mr. Cal Kalsbeek

## Eastern Ideas (2)

# Their Influence on the West

*"And of the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do; the heads of them were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their commandment."*

(I Chronicles 12:32)

**G**od is dead, long live the Goddess!

David Miller, Professor of Religion at Syracuse University, is a polytheist. He was also part of the "death of God" movement of the sixties. At the funeral of the

God of the Scriptures, Miller declared: "The Gods and Goddesses of Greece are our heritage. Sooner or later it is they who will reappear."<sup>1</sup> Miller then goes on to introduce us to Sophia. He informs us that Sophia is the god for the new world. She is the new myth for the Age of Aquarius. Sophia is the wisdom within.

Strange language to be hearing in the West. Would the West really fall for this Eastern hocus pocus (cf. *Standard Bearer*, Feb. 15, 2003)? The answer of Scripture is, "yes!"

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their own imagi-

nations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts and creeping things (Rom. 1:21-23).

Peter Jones explains it this way:

The Bible is right. Sin is real. Transgressions produce objective consequences, specifically the dull, throbbing pain of real guilt. For this reason, the goal of pagan spirituality is clear, and is

1. David Miller, *The New Polytheism: Rebirth of the Gods and Goddesses* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974) 12.

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stated clearly—to stifle guilt.... But this revolutionary goal of contemporary pagan spirituality redefines everything, turning good into evil, and evil into good. This is why the free-love hippies went East. This is why the Hollywood stars of the West love Eastern Buddhism and the Dalai Lama. This is why the occultic “Jesus” who channeled messages to Helen Shucman, author of the best-selling New Age text, *A course in Miracles*, says to the reader: “Do not make the pathetic error of clinging to the old rugged cross.... Your only calling here is to devote yourself with active willingness to the denial of guilt in all its forms.”<sup>2</sup>

In addition to relieving guilt the East provides that which the West has fast been discarding: the spiritual side of man. Secular humanists and Marxists are materialists: for them material is all that exists. No matter how much those who hold to these beliefs might want it to be otherwise, life based on materialism leaves no hope. Life is meaningless if when you die, that’s all there is. The East’s belief in reincarnation fills this void. In this connection Johanna Michaelsen writes:

Literally millions of people are involved in a desperate search for spiritual reality, and it seems that most of them don’t much care what the source of it is or where they find it just so long as it’s “real.”

Western occultism and Humanism have embraced Eastern mysticism to their bosom, and the bizarre offspring of this union has been christened the New Age Movement. What was once the squalling infant of the hippie era is growing up fast. The New Age Movement is spreading its roots into every facet of our society. Housewives can’t even get out of their local supermarkets without running the gauntlet of magazines and weekly periodicals heralding the latest information on channelers, psychic healers, gurus, astrologers, etc.

It is truly ironic that our space age, technological civilization whose god has been science, progress, rationalism, and cold-blooded empiricism has seen a mass stampede in the direction of Eastern mysticism and occultism that constitutes the backbone of this New Age Religion.

The statistics are staggering. According to a poll conducted by George Gallup, Jr., at least one out of every four Americans now believes in reincarnation.... Over 20 million are turning to psychics and channelers.... Almost half of American adults (42%) now believe they’ve been in contact with someone who has died. And at least two-thirds of these adults report having experienced ESP.<sup>3</sup>

Clearly, Western society is enamored with Eastern ideas. However, we should not suppose that this is new.

Transcendentalism introduced Eastern thought into America as far back as the 1800s. Two of its early adherents, Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, were basically pantheists influenced by the mysticism of the East. Like New Agers of today, they were eclectic, accepting or discarding whatever they wished from Eastern thought.<sup>4</sup>

Other early currents of Eastern influence on the West include Christian Science, which is based on the work of Mary Bakker Eddy; theosophy, as taught by the Theosophical Society founded in 1875; and psychoanalysis, a leading proponent of which was Carl Jung (1875-1961), who believed in the deity of man.

Although Eastern thought is not *new* to the West, what is new is that it is becoming very much mainstream. Because it is having such a dramatic influence on the West, and because what happens in society around us also has an influence on us and our children, present-day Issachar does well to consider how Eastern thought is

having a significant influence on the institutions of American society.

### Eastern influence on education

It’s easy to see why those who promote Eastern thought want to have an influence in America’s classrooms. If their ideas are accepted by America’s children, it is only a matter of time before the West is West in name only. Just to gain a flavor of what is going on in some of America’s classrooms, consider the following:

Twenty-five first-graders lie in motionless silence on the classroom floor. The teacher intones soothing phrases to aid relaxation. Within moments, the meditative journey begins. The children imagine the sun ... they are told to bring the sun down from the sky and into their own body ... until their bodies are ablaze with light.

Then follows instruction on how to become perfect, by filling the mind with knowledge until their whole body becomes a beam of light. Eventually they contain all of the light in the universe. Now they are at peace and are perfect. They are told that they are intelligent, magnificent, and *contain all the wisdom of the universe within themselves.*<sup>5</sup>

Although this is just one example of what is happening in one classroom in Los Angeles, California, consider that the teacher, Dr. Beverly Galyean, has developed this educational technique as part of a federally-funded program of “confluent education.” She describes her program as a “holistic approach using thinking, sensing, feeling, and intuition.” One wonders, could it be that current emphasis on self-esteem in public (and some Christian) schools has its roots in the New Age Movement?

That such New Age thinking has *widespread* influence in America’s schools is confirmed by what Michaelsen writes:



In March of 1982 the U.S. Department of Education held seven hearings around the country on the proposed regulations for the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment. These hearings were attended by hundreds of parents who testified concerning the subjection of their children to such practices as Yoga, Transcendental Meditation, hypnosis, guided imagery and visualization sessions, parapsychology, sensitivity training, psychiatric exercises, and other practices designed to change the thinking, values, beliefs, and behavior of the children (all in the name of "education," of course).<sup>6</sup>

#### Eastern influence on politics


Western politics has been penetrated by Eastern thought as well. Green Parties are becoming more and more influential. While it is true that all who claim Green Party membership would not also identify themselves as New Agers, nev-

ertheless their ideologies are basically the same. In addition to their influence in the Green Party, New Age groups are active in Greenpeace U.S.A., Planetary Citizens, Sierra Club, Amnesty International, and Zero Population growth. Although we might consider these of little significance, New Age apologist Marilyn Ferguson views them as part of the New Age network and as such she believes they generate...

... power enough to remake society. It offers the individual emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and economic support. It is an invisible home, a powerful means of altering the course of institutions, especially government.

Anyone who discovers the rapid proliferation of networks and understands their strength can see the impetus for worldwide transformation.<sup>7</sup>

Marilyn Ferguson may be wrong about a lot of things, but concerning the influence of New Age thinking on Western politics she appears to be right on target. One need only consider our government-sponsored annual celebration of Earth Day. And where, pray tell, did that come from? You guessed it, its roots are in the pagan spirituality of the 1960s.

... to be continued. 

2. Peter Jones, "Pagan Spirituality," *The Outlook* 5 September, 2000: 6.

3. Johanna Michaelsen, *Like Lambs to the Slaughter* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1989) 10-11.

4. Erwin W. Lutzer and John F. DeVries, *Satan's "Evangelistic" Strategy For This New Age* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1989) 55.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 136-137.

6. Michaelsen 47.

7. Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy* (Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, 1980) 213.

*That They May Teach Them to Their Children*

Prof. Russell Dykstra

## Humanism vs. Protestant Reformed Teachers: No R & R

**C**hristian teachers are always dealing with ideas. Which is to say, they are always evaluating ideas. This evaluation may take place in the esoteric realm of the philosophy of education. On the other hand, it occurs continually in the concrete methods of instruction: How to teach reading, or math, or spelling, or a particular lesson in history. Teachers are called upon to evaluate textbooks from time to time. They examine resource material, and preview films. Good teachers

desire the right information, the best methods, the most effective way of teaching.

Teachers become a filter for much of the information that covenant children receive. Christian teachers filter out much that would damage the souls of the young believers. And what cannot be removed is put into the proper biblical perspective. In this sin-cursed culture, teachers must deal with the anti-Christian, the immoral, and the heretical in a manner appropriate to the age of the students. I dare say that Protestant Reformed teachers are well aware of these evils, and are ready for the hard task.

A more difficult struggle in

school is filtering out ungodly influences. Influences, both good and bad, come from many sources. They arise out of one's own upbringing. Teachers are influenced by their colleagues and administrators. The lives and attitudes of parents as well as those of every student who walks into the classroom exert influence on teachers. Not only people, but things can influence, as, for example, the news media, as well as textbooks and other resource material. It is good for all Christians to recognize the fact that many forms of pressure can and do affect the thinking and attitudes of believers, including Christian school teachers.

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These articles will examine a pernicious and evil influence in our world, namely, humanism. This is not only timely, it is important. Humanism is the battle of the ages, for it sets up man as the standard instead of God and His law. It worships the creature rather than the Creator.

Humanism is pernicious exactly because it does not identify itself, but it permeates other ideas in society. Not infrequently humanism is the hidden foundation of a social movement or a philosophy. And it is deadly, being the rankest form of idolatry—the worship of man. What carbon monoxide is to the body, humanism can be to the soul—a silent and unnoticed killer.

It is a timely topic in that we live in the end of the ages, in which the root of this evil is grown up and producing its ugliest, and most potent fruit.

It is the burden of this article that Protestant Reformed teachers have a calling to combat this godless influence, this man-centered philosophy. Teachers must understand that it is exactly the devil's goal to make them to be conscious and deliberate providers of this deadly poison. Failing that, his desire is to slip it into the teachers' instruction unawares, and thus into the students' daily portion.

The battle is constant; the foe relentless. Hence the title of the article.

In this short series of articles we will first explain what humanism is. Next, we must be made aware of how the evil attacks Christian teachers and schools, and specifically Protestant Reformed teachers and schools. And finally, we must be cognizant of the arsenal of weapons at the disposal of the Christian school teacher, and be trained to use them.

### What Is Humanism?

Humanism is defined in various ways, specifically as a historical movement, as a philosophical

movement, a literary movement, a sociological movement, and even a religious movement. However, the essence of humanism is this: The belief that man is the measure of all things.

Humanism's origins are of ancient and venerated stock. As a philosophy it is deeply imbedded in Greek thought. The philosopher Protagoras (born almost 500 years before Christ) made this the cornerstone of his philosophy, namely, man is the standard of all, including truth.

Even though Protagoras did not win over the other Greek philosophers of his day, steeped in idolatry as they were, to his explicit glorying in man, the notion never completely died out. The whole of the Greek culture was man-centered. Protagoras was revived in the fourteenth century Renaissance in Europe and has been promoted by philosophers ever since, and that, with a vengeance in the last century.

As ancient and respected as Protagoras is to the humanists, he is not the source. The root is found in our first parents, Adam and Eve. Accepting the lie of Satan, Eve evaluated the forbidden fruit not according to God's standard of truth, but by hers. She judged that it would improve her lot, and thus it was a fruit desired to make her wise. She would have her freedom, and Adam readily joined her. Out of this man-centered root of sin would develop all the evils of humanism.

Modern humanism spawned in the Renaissance. Fourteenth century thinkers longed to escape the suffocating restrictions of the Church of Rome. In order to accomplish this, they separated philosophy from religion. This enabled the scholars to philosophize as they pleased while insisting that they remained faithful to the church theologically. Faith teaches this; philosophy something else. We can accept both. This is a significant and fatal move. It is based

on the proposition that man could come to truth by means of his own thinking. This is rationalism and is clearly man-centered.

Turning from God, the Renaissance thinkers gloried shamelessly in man. They exalted in freedom for promotion of the autonomy of man. Man has the ability to form his world, to change it, and to better it, they averred. Pico della Mirandola, a fifteenth century writer, is representative of these humanists who virtually deify man. In his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, he attributes these words to God:

I have given to you, Adam, neither a predestinated place nor a particular aspect nor any special prerogatives in order that you may take and possess these through your own decision and choice. The limitations on the nature of other creatures are contained within my prescribed laws. You shall determine your own nature without constraint from any barrier, by means of the freedom to whose power I have entrusted you. I have placed you at the center of the world so that from that point you might see better what is in the world. I have made you neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal so that, like a free and sovereign artificer, you might mold and fashion yourself into that form you yourself shall have chosen.

In addition, these Renaissance humanists held to a form of naturalism that placed all the emphasis on man as a part of the earthly creation. Though they emphasized the soul of man in connection with freedom, they were concerned almost exclusively with man's activity in this world. The dominant question was not: What is man's relation to God? Rather it was, How does man fit into the creation? For many, pleasure was the sole good for man and the sole end of human activities. It is not surprising, then, that the Renaissance humanists restored to honor the Greek philosopher Epicurus, who



identified pleasure as the highest and only good.

That the Renaissance would be man-centered is in harmony with the fact that it was a return to antiquity and to the ancient writers. That meant a special emphasis on the pagan Greek philosophers, including Protagoras.

As for religion, although the Renaissance men rejected asceticism and theology, they saw some value in *religion*. The fundamental function of religion, for them, was to support a man in his work, particularly in his civic work. They preached tolerance of various religions. That flowed out of their conviction that all religious beliefs of man have an essential unity. Religious peace is, therefore, the right goal and attainable.

These ideals of the Renaissance continued to develop through the centuries, but usually with a lip service to a God who was above and beyond the creation. That is, until Darwin and his theory of evolution. In the mind of the humanists, evolutionism gave a legitimate explanation for the existence of all things, and had the desirable result of eliminating any need for God.

The theory of evolution is probably the single greatest factor in the explosive growth of humanism in the last century and a half, and its pervasive influence today. Prior to Darwin, rank humanism was held in check by this reluctance of most to deny God openly. Now ungodly men can develop their humanistic philosophies unabashedly.

The humanism that abounds today can be summarized under five points. First, man is the standard. He is autonomous, free to set and to seek his own goals. He both may and can frame his own world. This foundational position of the humanist varies somewhat from one humanist to another based on the particular emphasis of each. Some emphasize the *individual* — his choices, his individual happiness. This amounts to an astounding selfishness, with the bold

claim that it is virtuous to seek oneself and to love only those who serve that self interest. Others emphasize the *community* of man. The goal of man ought to be the common good. Good is then defined as that which serves the welfare of the race.

These views of man have a profound effect on ethics. Man is the standard of what is good or evil. There is no established standard of right or wrong. Ethics are situational.

The above naturally leads to the second element of humanism, namely a denial of God as the sovereign, transcendent God revealed in the Bible. There are variations in the tenets of humanism, but all humanists share a belief in evolution which, as noted earlier, eliminates the need for God. This God is replaced by atheism, or, more accurately, a god of their own making, depending on the particular strain of humanism. They may kneel at the altar of science, or bow before the race of mankind. They may put their trust in government, or worship culture as the savior of man.

Often, the individual himself becomes the humanist's god. This is blatantly maintained by Ayn Rand, who writes, "And now I see the face of god, and I raise this god over the earth, the god whom men have sought since man came into being, this god who will grant them joy and peace and pride. This god, this one word: I" (*For the New Intellectual*, New York: Signet, 1961, p. 123).

A denial of God necessarily demands a rejection of miracles as recorded in Scripture. That would include, obviously, the incarnation and the resurrection of the Son of God, without which there is no Christian faith.

This denial of God is set forth plainly in the *Humanist Manifesto II*, in the first article of their beliefs: "No deity will save us; we must save ourselves."\*

The third characteristic of modern humanism is its totally earth-

centeredness. As humanists themselves express it, religion may inspire one to strive for high ideals, but "traditional dogmatic or authoritarian religions ... do a disservice to the human species" (*Humanist Manifesto II*, art. 2). The same article goes on to say that "promises of immortal salvation and fear of eternal damnation are both illusory and harmful." That, because "they distract from present concerns, from self-actualization, and from rectifying social injustices." Besides, "science can find no credible evidence that life survives the body."

Fourthly, the freedom of man remains a central pillar of humanism. This comes into focus in many spheres. For example, humanists insist on sexual liberty, and promote acceptance of all forms of sexual activity possible between adults, including homosexuality. This "freedom" includes also the "rights" of birth control, abortion, and divorce, all on demand.

This humanistic freedom lies behind much of what are called civil liberties, and among those liberties that humanists defend is euthanasia. Humanists seek an open and democratic society where the person is more important than laws. And they tout separation of church and state, by which they mean that the state and society must be free from any church dominance.

The fifth element found in most modern humanists is the desire for unity and peace. Humanists desire political unity, also among the nations. They labor tirelessly for the abolition of war. They are busy working together to solve the problems of resources as well as the unequal distribution of technology. They advocate better use of communication for the purpose of promoting worldwide unity and peace.

The believer can see immediately that humanism strikes at the very heart of the Christian faith. It is a denial of God, in order to re-

move God from the throne, shut Him out of His creation, and set up man as god. This is exactly the condemnation expressed in Romans 1. Man knows God, but denies Him, and worships the creature rather than the Creator.

Humanism is a rejection of the biblical doctrine that natural man is depraved. According to the humanist, man can improve his world. Man can even save himself. Thus, there is not only no room for Christ in his scheme, there is not even a need for Him.


Humanism is a rejection of all biblical standards of right and

wrong. God's righteous law is negated. Man makes the standards.

It is a denial of heaven, hell, and life after death. Only the life on earth matters.

Obviously, the ultimate goal of humanism is the kingdom of the Antichrist. This is the kingdom of man, whose number is six hundred, threescore, and six. Humanism is man in the service of self, though really, he serves Satan. Humanism is the ultimate working out of the sin of Adam and Eve, and the lie of Satan, "Ye shall be as God."

How does this affect the Chris-

tian teacher, and how does it affect the classroom? To this we turn next time. 

\* In 1933 a group of thirty-four self-confessed humanists (including John Dewey) drew up a brief *Humanist Manifesto* consisting of fifteen articles. Forty years later, another manifesto was drawn up (hence the name, *Humanist Manifesto II*) about four times larger than the first. Both of these documents are readily available on the Internet. The latest, *Humanist Manifesto 2000*, is a 76-page book, available for purchase.

*Taking Heed to the Doctrine*

*Rev. James Laning*

## The Freedom We Enjoy in Our Nation

**M**any who have immigrated to the United States have done so out of a desire to experience "freedom." This country claims to be "the land of the free," a sort of promised land for people of all nations. It is true, of course, that people in this country are allowed to do some things they are forbidden to do in other countries, and we thank God for the fact that, at the moment, we are able to worship Him in this country without being physically persecuted. We must not, however, allow the unbelieving nation in which we dwell to determine for us what it means to have liberty and to dwell in the real land of the free. We believers are the citizens of a holy nation (I Pet. 2:9) in which we have true freedom, a freedom that can never be stripped from us.

To experience sanctification is to experience being freed more and more from the dominion of sin, so that we grow to experience more the blessedness of dwelling consciously in the real, heavenly land of the free. This is true freedom, freedom of which the ungodly world knows nothing. In this article we consider the subject of sanctification from this point of view.

### True Freedom

The Scriptures speak of the believer as one who is free from the guilt of sin and free from the dominion of sin. That we are justified means that we are free from the guilt of sin. In this article, however, we are speaking of how we are set free from the dominion of sin, so that we are able to do what God commands.

To be free is to be loosed from the bondage of sin, so that we are able to serve God willingly. It makes no sense to speak of someone being

free to fulfill the sinful lusts of the flesh. The sinful lusts of the flesh strive to enslave us, and someone who is giving in to his wicked desires is an afflicted and oppressed slave. He is the opposite of a free man. Some people think that to have freedom is to be allowed to choose the good or the evil. But to choose the evil is to be a slave to the evil. To be able to seek and to do the good is to be free.

Sometimes a question arises about whether God's people who have been born again by the Spirit of God are still totally depraved. This question often arises when one does not have a very thorough understanding of the distinction between the old man and the new man. Understanding well this distinction helps us better to understand what sanctification really is.

As regenerated believers we are free, but only in the new man. In the new man, we are completely free from sin's dominion. This means that we no longer sin in the

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new man. This is taught, among other places, in I John 3:9, where we read: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." In the new man we have been born of God, so that we are like God and are unable to sin. In the new man we do not want to sin. Rather, we hate sin and delight to do what pleases our heavenly Father. The apostle Paul made this confession in Romans 7:22, where he said, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." In this new man we are truly free.

In the old man, however, it is still the case that all we do is sin. The apostle Paul, as a regenerated believer, knew that there was still nothing good in his sinful flesh (Rom. 7:18). In question eight of the Heidelberg Catechism, we confess the same thing. The question is asked whether we, true believers, are then "so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness?" The answer that is given is, "Indeed we are." It does not say, "Indeed we used to be," but, "Indeed we still presently are." It then, however, goes on to mention that we believers have been regenerated by the Spirit of God. This statement means that in the new man we are able to do what is good and pleasing in the sight of God. But in our old man we are still totally depraved, and inclined to all wickedness.

### **The Two Laws**

Looking deeply into the subject of the old man and the new man, the Scriptures tell us that these two are at war because they have different laws within them. The law of God is written in the heart of our new man, so that we delight to do what God demands. If that Word of God is in our heart, then we, from that heart, delight to do what that Word says. We "delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom. 7:22). But in our old

man there is another law – the law of sin.

The apostle Paul speaks of this in the next verse. "But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." This other law is called here "the law of sin," and in the next chapter it is called, "the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2). This law of sin is in our sinful nature, so that nothing good comes out of that nature. Rather, this wicked source is constantly striving to get us to sin and to walk in the way of death.

This law of sin in our members wars against the law in our new man, striving to bring us into captivity to it.

Yet the victory is with the new man, for the law of God in our new man has set us free from this law of sin and death. This truth is set forth in Romans 8:2, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Because the Spirit of God dwells within us, and causes us to desire to keep the law which He has written in our heart, we are free from the tyrannical dominion of sin, and are able to begin to do that which we really desire in the new man, which is to obey our heavenly Father. We cannot do even one work perfectly, however, because the sin that constantly flows out of our old man defiles even our best works (Lord's Day 24). Yet we do begin to keep not only some, but all of the commandments of God.

### **Experiencing This Freedom**

As those who love our heavenly Father, we earnestly desire not only to confess the truth concerning this freedom, but also to experience it more in our daily lives. Although the child of God has been freed from sin's dominion in principle, he does not always experience this freedom. Even though the seed of the new life will never be taken from a child of God, it is

possible for him to allow sin to reign within him. This is why, even though we have already been delivered from sin in principle, the command of God found in Romans 6:12 still comes to us: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof."

Therefore, it is very important that we understand how it is possible for sin to reign in the child of God. If we know that something is a sin, and we continue to do it anyway, our heavenly Father will discipline us by causing us to experience more the controlling power of that sin. A child of God, for example, knows that fornication is a sin. But if he allows himself to think about it now and then, and even occasionally takes a look at pornographic pictures, he will find that his lustful desire to do this is getting stronger and stronger, and that it is bringing him more into bondage.

We are constantly sinning, and not one of our works is free from sin. But there is a difference between sins that we truly are fighting against, and sins that we are impenitently walking in. It is when we knowingly and impenitently commit sin, that our Father causes us to experience more the enslaving power of that sin. This is the way He leads us to cry out to Him, not only for forgiveness, but also for deliverance from the power of the sin that has a hold on us.

In the way of our sincerely crying out to God for deliverance from sin, God will certainly hear us. When we pray such a prayer, we must say from the heart, "Amen," being confident that our heavenly Father will certainly grant our request. We can and must be confident of this, because this deliverance is what Christ earned for us by His atoning suffering and death.


Sometimes an aged saint confesses that the older he gets the worse sinner he becomes. This statement is true when one is referring to himself as he is in his

old man. But it is also the case that when we are truly repenting of our sins and believing the promises of God, we experience that we are increasingly delivered from the power of our sinful flesh, so that we are able to enjoy doing that which is pleasing to our heavenly Father.



Only we who have been redeemed know what it is to experience this. Only we, the elect people of God, dwell in the real, heavenly land of the free.

This is a freedom we can never lose. Our true freedom is never threatened by terrorists or anyone else. Though our God and Father

sometimes chastens us, and causes us to experience, for a time, the enslaving power of sin, He never completely withdraws His Holy Spirit from us. In the new man we have been born free, and free we shall forever remain. Such is the glorious salvation that is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord. 

## All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

### ■ Partial-Birth Abortion

**T**he battle against the horrible sin of abortion, for it is murder, continues. Those who are "pro-choice" fear any evidences of progress against this evil. These strongly resist any attempt to change the current practices. On the other hand, those who oppose abortion seek to chip away, little by little, the laws that have been adopted and Supreme Court rulings allowing for abortion. The latest battle is the issue of "partial-birth abortions." During the Clinton administration, both houses of Congress voted to outlaw the procedure. Then President Clinton vetoed the measure. Now that the Republicans control the House and Senate as well as the White House, it appears that this measure banning partial-birth abortions might be passed.

*World* magazine, March 22, 2003, reports:

The numbers were there, so with no surprises the Senate approved 64-33 a ban on partial-birth abortion that should swiftly pass the House and receive the president's signature. That will ignite another legal battle sure to land in the Supreme Court. Three Republicans—Rhode Island's Lincoln Chafee, and Maine's Susan Collins and Olympia Snowe—voted against the ban, placing

them to the left of Democratic liberals like minority leader Tom Daschle and Vermont's Patrick Leahy, who voted to criminalize partial-birth abortion. Of three senators who did not vote on the measure, two (John Kerry of Massachusetts and John Edwards of North Carolina) are running for the Democratic nomination for president. Another presidential hopeful, Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut, voted against the ban.

The *New York Times* and *Washington Post* editorial pages—resigned to defeat—bemoaned the debate as "ominous" (the *Times*) and "pointless" (the *Post*).

Actually, the debate was pointed and poignant. Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist of Tennessee, a surgeon by profession, authoritatively noted that regardless of one's position on abortion, partial-birth is not a recognized medical procedure. Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) for the seventh straight year challenged opponents to show a single case where a partial-birth abortion was declared "medically necessary," and pro-abortion senators could not muster an answer. "This is a rogue procedure for the convenience and economic benefit of abortionists and abortion clinics," Sen. Santorum thundered from the Senate floor. Pro-abortion senators were left to argue that banning any single method unravels the entire abortion enterprise, which is the goal of pro-life forces.

The best line came from Sen. Peter Fitzgerald (R-Ill.), who called out his opponents for selective compassion: "I don't un-

derstand how those who can hear the howl of a wolf or the squeal of a dolphin can be deaf to the cry of the unborn child."

So the battle continues. The current proposal most likely will become law. Then it will probably be challenged all the way to the Supreme Court. The final decision will be based more upon politics than on the morality of God's law. The question will be whether there are enough "conservative" members on that bench to uphold the new law.

If partial-birth abortions are outlawed, will that be the beginning of the tearing down of the "pro-choice" position on abortion? That remains to be seen. The practice has become so embedded in our society that it hardly seems likely to change. Children of God, however, continue to condemn abortion as violation of God's command, "Thou shalt not kill." God's prohibition applies whether the babe has just been conceived, or is three or six months old in the womb, or is about to be born—only to have its brains sucked out before the head leaves the womb. (Of course, if the mother should kill the babe just after it is born, she would be prosecuted for murder.)

### ■ Freedom of Speech

...Except...

**T**he U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in California ruled ear-

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lier that "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance is an unconstitutional "establishment of religion." According to a report in *Christian Renewal*, March 10, 2003, this court has gone now even further.

Nicholas Lassonde's grade-point average made him co-salutatorian of the 1999 graduating class at Amador High School in California and school officials invited him to make a speech at graduation. Nicholas is a Christian, and wanted to speak as a Christian to his peers. When Principal Bill Cope read a draft of Nicholas' proposed speech, however, he ordered three "proselytizing" comments deleted.

Nicholas wanted to tell his peers that God could help them "survive the trends of 'modern society.'" He wanted to quote from Psalm 146: "Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot even save themselves.... The Lord watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked." Nicholas was to share with his peers from Romans 6:23 that "the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" and ask them: "Have you accepted the gift, or will you pay the ultimate price?" Mr. Cope decided that allowing Nicholas to say such things would violate the Constitution's ban on an "establishment of religion."

One obvious benefit of a written constitution is that we, the people, can read it. The First Amendment begins: "CONGRESS shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." The first curious thing is that this case involves local public school officials, not Congress at all. The Supreme Court, however, ruled long ago that the First Amendment applies to state and local government. Obviously, the Constitution's framers had not said so; the Supreme Court did it for them.

Even so, the First Amendment is directed at government. Like every constitution, our federal charter is law that governs

government, not a statute that governs individuals. How could one young man do so simply by sharing his heart with his fellow graduates? It's just a graduation speech.

Well, the Supreme Court had also addressed, and messed up, that issue. When it banned clergy-led graduation prayer in 1992, the Court said that merely allowing someone to pray up on stage forced everyone in the audience to participate in a religious ceremony. The Court really said that. No one, of course, was forced or even asked to participate in anything. The idea that we even agree with, let alone participate in, any speech uttered in our presence is absurd on its face.

The Ninth Circuit now has taken that absurd conclusion two steps further into the bizarre. Nicholas, after all, was not a rabbit brought in by the school, but one of the school's own students. Second, his was merely a speech that included a few religious references, not an invocation or prayer at all.

Nonetheless, the Ninth Circuit ruled that merely "permitting a proselytizing speech at a public high school's graduation ceremony would amount to coerced participation in a religious practice." Merely sitting there in the audience, merely being in the room, is now "coerced participation"?

The author, Thomas L. Jipping, concludes:

I used to think that religious speech is protected twice, by both the First Amendment's free speech clause and its free exercise of religion clause. Instead, it seems religious speech has less protection than dirty sex-talk.

It used to be that the government censoring speech based on its content was a classic free speech violation. The Ninth Circuit says that the school must violate the First Amendment's free speech clause to avoid violating the First Amendment's establishment clause. The First Amendment violates itself! This is what happens when judges believe they

can amend the Constitution at will, when they take over the authority to run the country and define the culture. Welcome to the revolution.

The report is, of course, very disturbing. The obvious conclusion would be that the public school system, government sponsored, must inevitably lead to results such as this. That is why Christian parents, wherever possible, provide Christian schools for the instruction of their own children. There they can yet maintain their religious convictions, have that taught to their children, and repudiate false doctrine of free-willism.

Also, the revolting conclusion must be as stated by the author of the above article: we can have "free speech" when one uses God's name in vain; we can have "free speech" when speaking the most filthy, sexually explicit, language; one can have "free speech" to advocate such practices as homosexuality (all of this in public schools too); but one cannot have "free speech" when some reference is made to the Christian faith. One wonders if this same standard might not soon be applied not only in public schools, but wherever the public gathers.

## ■ The "New Path" to Wedlock

The "Religious News Service" (RNS), as quoted in *Christian News*, April 7, 2002, reports from London:

A new report commissioned by a diocese in London urges the Church of England to change its teaching on sex before marriage, in favor of viewing cohabitation as a "new path" to eventual wedlock.

The document, prepared by a working party of the Southwark Diocese and titled "Cohabitation: A Christian Reflection," says the church's traditional view on premarital sex is a hangover from a different society in a different time

and has become a "heavy load" in this modern era.

Peter Grinyer, a member of the group that prepared the report, said "the great majority of people I talked to agreed that there is an urgent need for the church to come to terms with a changed society and to provide a new, and what some may consider a radical, even heretical, understanding of sexual relationships for the 21<sup>st</sup> century."

...The report does not condone cohabitation with no intention to marry. What it does say is that "it is clear that all the media now present cohabitation uncritically as the practical equivalent of marriage, and in this context it is difficult for the church to present Christian teaching


about marriage in a positive and attractive light."

"Society as a whole, not just the church, is in a state of crisis in its attitude to cohabitation and marriage," it says.

The document insists that a change is needed if worshippers, particularly younger ones, decide the church's historic teaching is irrelevant or unrealistic, or both. A shift should not be seen as a demeaning of marriage but as a "new path from the single state to the married one."

It is shocking. There is apparently not even an attempt to "re-interpret" Scripture to prove this "new way." Scripture has become

irrelevant. The seventh commandment is no longer applicable. Now "fornication" has become the "new way." Because the world has adopted this practice commonly, because many in the churches violate the seventh commandment routinely anyway, the church could just as well adopt this "new way" as well.

The report could better have recommended the disbandment of the church, the adoption of the practices of the world today, and thus satisfy those who believe that "the church's historic teaching is irrelevant or unrealistic, or both." In the minds of many within the churches, this is evidently the conclusion. 

## Go Ye Into All the World

# Mabuhay!

**J**ust like hearing "Akwaaba!" when one visits fellow saints on the mission field in Ghana, so "Mabuhay!" (ma-boo'-hi) is the greeting one might receive when visiting fellow saints on the foreign mission field in the Philippines. Likewise, the members of the Foreign Mission Committee (FMC) welcome you to observe some highlights of our work in the past year.

### Ashaley Botwe Mission

We are coming close to the end of our fourth year of oversight of the mission work in Accra, Ghana, with missionaries present on the field. The Lord has granted us a mission fellowship with an attendance that has leveled off at about

140 in the 9:30 A.M. service and about 50 in the 4:00 P.M. service. The preaching of the gospel remains the primary focus of the missionary as he preaches on the Heidelberg Catechism and, lately, a series on James. Rev. Bekkering also teaches three catechism classes, leads two Bible study meetings, and conducts the weekly pastoral work that comes with laboring among the group, the members of which are also subject to many vicissitudes of life. Mrs. Bekkering and Mr. Doug Bekkering, son of the Bekkerings and a volunteer assistant on the field, lead the Ladies' Bible study and the Young Adults' Bible study respectively.

### Sifting and Visitors

The mission fellowship has experienced some sifting in the past year. After working through several problems and the conse-

quences of public sins, some members have left. In addition, the implementation of a couple of changes to benevolence distribution has resulted in some individuals leaving because they have learned that they cannot abuse benevolence for personal gain.

Although there has been loss of members for various reasons, there have been regular visitors and some new additions to the group. The missionary has reported that members in the fellowship regularly invite their friends and acquaintances to the services and Bible studies. This is especially true among the young people and young adults, who continue to show a lively participation in the life of the mission fellowship. We are thankful to see that there are visitors and to see the active participation of the young adults in the life of the fellowship since they are the generation in

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*Rev. Smit is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Doon, Iowa and secretary of the Foreign Mission Committee.*



which there are, the Lord willing, the leaders and officebearers of a future congregation.

### **Second Ghanaian Missionary**

The Protestant Reformed Church of Hull, Iowa, the calling church for the mission field in Accra, Ghana, continues to call a co-laborer to the field. The second missionary is needed for developing the work in Ashaley Botwe, for training potential officebearers on the field towards the goal of establishing an autonomous, self-supporting, indigenous, Reformed congregation, and for the preparation of a future transition since Rev. Bekkering, 60 years old now, is approaching retirement age. In addition, the amount of work that there is in Ashaley Botwe, as well as work that could be done in other areas, underscores the need for a second missionary.

To fill that need, Hull PRC has called but to date has received declines from the Reverends M. Dick, M. DeVries, W. Bruinsma, and R. VanOverloop. Recently, on March 26, Hull PRC called the Rev. D. Kleyn, who planned to answer the call on April 20, the Lord willing.

While a second missionary is being called, the FMC and Hull PRC council continue trying to secure teaching assistance for the field. Synod 2002 approved of teaching assistance upon the field in the form of an ex-elder or men who have had some teaching experience and the gifts to assist the missionary while there is not a second missionary on the field. At this point, there have been only a few responses, but no one has been able to help out. Nevertheless, we hope that there will be someone willing and, in the Lord's providence, able to provide some assistance for the mission work.

### **Radio Broadcast in Accra**

Rev. Bekkering continues to conduct the radio broadcast, which reaches the greater Accra region every Thursday evening. How-

ever, what used to be a live broadcast is now a broadcast of one of the sermons from the Sunday worship services. Because the sermons are also interpreted by Mr. Stephen Acheampong into the TWI language, we hope that this will reach those in the Accra region who are fluent only in the TWI.

### **Volunteer Assistant in Ashaley Botwe**

Mr. Doug Bekkering, our volunteer missionary assistant on the Ghanaian field, is responsible for the recording and preparation of the radio broadcast messages. He records the sermons and brings the master copy to the studio each week. Besides that, he does many other duties and odd jobs for the mission work. He even helps Rev. Bekkering, his father, typeset, print, and produce a Reformed Witness Newsletter each month. He has recently helped the young adults in the group canvas different areas around Ashaley Botwe with these newsletters, which make known the existence of our mission work and our doctrinal convictions.

Mr. Doug Bekkering has consented to serve another term as missionary assistant. After his furlough in April, he will return to the field and serve until a replacement couple is ready to take up the volunteer work.

That means that the FMC continues to look for volunteer assistants, in addition to the teaching assistants mentioned above. The volunteers are asked to help out on the field preferably for one year, but may volunteer for more years, of course. We prefer also that the assistants be an older couple to provide companionship and assistance for the missionaries and their families. The living expenses for the volunteer assistants will be covered by the Foreign Missionary Assistants Fund. For more information about the work, please write the FMC's secretary, Rev. Richard J. Smit, at [rchjsmt@prca.org](mailto:rchjsmt@prca.org). Or, you are welcome to contact the cur-

rent assistant, Mr. Doug Bekkering, for information.

### **Missionary Furloughs**

Rev. and Mrs. Bekkering are looking forward to their furlough in June and July. They will be visiting the churches in Michigan and Northwest Iowa/Southwest Minnesota. Of course, they also welcome the opportunity to use some of their time for much needed refreshment and visits with their children and grandchildren. Rev. Bekkering plans to be present at synod in June when synod deliberates on the mission work in Ghana.

The missionary family from the Philippines, Rev. and Mrs. Audred Spriensma and daughter Jessica, plan to be on furlough during the month of June as well. They are looking forward to the opportunity to be with their children, grandson, and extended family again. Rev. Spriensma also plans to attend synod in June when synod deliberates on the work of the Philippine mission field.

### **Berean Church of God-Reformed (Philippines)**

The main group among whom Rev. Spriensma labors has the name Berean Church of God-Reformed (BCGR), whose members live in the greater metro Manila area. Many of the members of the church have gone from the Roman Catholic Church to the Worldwide Church of God (WCG). Having studied Scripture and come to the Reformed faith by means of literature and contact with other Reformed churches, they have severed their ties with the WCG in order to establish a congregation that is truly Reformed in life, doctrine, preaching, and church government. Hence, their name reflects their work of reformation and their desire to become a congregation that is pure and true to the Word of God and the Reformed faith as maintained in our churches. The BCGR celebrated their second anniversary on November 3, 2002.



*Rev. Spriensma teaching Catechism*

Although their name would seem to indicate as much, the BCGR are not presently a church institute, an organized congregation, because they do not have officebearers. They have men who could possibly serve as elders and deacons, but they have not been ordained yet. For that reason, they view themselves as "church" merely in the organic sense. To the goal of becoming a Reformed church institute, they are embracing the instruction and guidance of Rev. Spriensma in the doctrines and principles of proper Reformed church government by means of a thorough, article-by-article study of our Church Order. The Bereans freely admit that they have much to learn to reach their future goal of organizing and having qualified officebearers. For that goal, Rev. Spriensma shows that he is equal to the challenge of providing weekly instruction in the Saturday church government class and in the preaching the gospel of Christ each Lord's Day.

The BCGR have their weekly Sunday services at 2:00 P.M. and 4:30 P.M. Attendance averages around 45 members, whose ages range from little infants to grandparents. The BCGR were meeting in a department store, but they have moved because the department store building was leased by another tenant. At present, they are meeting in a different location, which seems much more conducive for their meetings and worship.

We have labored with the BCGR for about a year now, and

this work in Manila seems to have a good beginning.

#### **Reformed Covenant Fellowship of Bacolod City**

This group numbers eight families, and they are very zealous for establishing a pure witness of the distinctives of the Reformed faith. Rev. Spriensma visited the Reformed Covenant Fellowship (RCF) in mid-February, and recently again on April 12 and 13. He has given lectures and speeches on several doctrines, including the covenant of grace, and he has in the last visit also conducted worship services with the RCF. It is our desire that this group may also continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ and that the Lord may continue to add to their group. This work with the RCF seems to have a good beginning as well.

#### **Work in the Daet/Labo Area of the Philippines**

Rev. Spriensma has made contact with the pastors and elders of a group of very small churches in the Daet/Labo area. They are called the Body of Christ Bible Churches. These churches are Baptist in their ecclesiastical background. However, the pastors continue to be very receptive to and eager to grow in the knowledge of the Reformed teaching as it applies to their preaching, life, and church government. The pastors attended the conference that Rev. Spriensma conducted in Manila in December 2002, and they desire to have more instructional meetings and contact

with our missionary. The relationship has been helpful to the churches, particularly because they experienced in the past year some serious difficulties, concerning which Rev. Spriensma was able to give good counsel. Rev. Spriensma plans to visit there again in May, the Lord willing.

#### **Radio Broadcasts in Manila and Bacolod**

Radio broadcasts are also a tool of mission work on the field in the Philippines. The broadcast on DWBL (1242 AM) on Saturday evenings at 8:30 continues. It is a half-hour broadcast that features the radio sermons of the Reformed Witness Hour and Rev. Carl Haak. Rev. Haak has recorded some tailored "tags" (introductions and conclusions) for the broadcasts so that listeners in Manila are told to contact the BCGR at their mailing address. The BCGR continues to do most of the work of supporting the broadcast and making sure that the program recordings are submitted to the radio studio every week.

The RCF of Bacolod City plans to begin broadcasting the Reformed Witness Hour in Bacolod City in April, the Lord willing. With financial assistance from our churches, the RCF will coordinate the broadcasts and be designated as the ones whom listeners should contact for information.

The FMC would like to thank Rev. Haak, radio pastor; Mr. David Jessup, RWH radio engineer; and, the RWH Committee of First PRC (Grand Rapids, MI) for all the help, willing assistance, and many hours of on-going weekly work which has been necessary so that the distinctively Reformed voice of the RWH can be heard overseas in the Philippines.

#### **Missionary Assistants in the Philippines**

The FMC has seen the tangible and intangible benefits of missionary assistants on the field in Ghana



and initially desired to have the same for the Philippines. However, in Manila, where the missionary family live, we are faced with a different situation than Ghana because the BCGR members desire to be our "missionary assistants" and because there is a great difference in the level of living in Manila as compared to Ashaley Botwe. The members of the BCGR have readily helped our missionary family in countless ways to settle into the life and labor of the work in Manila. Faced with this willing assistance, we decided to evaluate the need for missionary assistants once a missionary was in place. This task of evaluation was given to the FMC/Doon council delegation of Rev. Richard Smit and Mr. Bob Mantel, who visited the field in late February. The delegation recommended that missionary assistants not be sent to the field. This advice was adopted because there appears to be not enough work that assistants could do. Any assistance that the Spriensmas currently need is being provided readily by the BCGR members.

### **Security Concern in the Philippines**

The safety of the missionary family remains a conscious concern of the FMC and calling church. The recent bombing in Davao, Mindanao reminded us again of the need for foreigners from Europe or North America to remain vigilant in their daily routines and to follow closely the security warnings of the Canadian and US embassies and of the US State Department. Our contacts in Mindanao and the government warnings have for some time, even prior to the bombing in Davao, advised us and our missionary not to travel to the island of Mindanao and other islands in the southwest archipelagos, Sulu and Jolo. Moreover, the Spriensmas have registered with the US embassy in Manila so that, at the earliest indication that the

lives of Americans might be endangered, the Spriensmas will be advised what to do. Currently, the Spriensmas live in a very safe subdivision in the city of Cainta, on the eastern edge of Manila. They live near Jessica's school (Faith Academy) and in an area where other foreigners live. The Spriensmas have expressed that they do not live in fear for their safety, but they freely enjoy their daily routines and remain careful and vigilant when traveling in metro-Manila or in the two other areas of our labor.

### **Gifts and Financial Information**

The FMC reports that in 2002, personal gifts and church offerings for foreign missions amounted to \$27,237.45. In addition to that, church offerings and personal gifts received for the support of the foreign missionary assistants in Ghana was \$25,016.75, so that the balance in the Foreign Missionary Assistant Fund at the end of 2002 increased to \$35,746.88.

For your information, the foreign missions budget for this year is \$253,720. The proposed 2004 budget has a total of \$271,289. This means that the cost of foreign missions in Ghana and the Philippines per year per family in our churches is roughly \$150. The cost of supporting the foreign missionary assistants through collections only is about \$20 per family per year. It must be remembered that the funds for our foreign missionary assistants is raised only through offerings and personal gifts. The support of the assistants is not figured into the yearly synodical assessment amount for foreign missions.

We humbly ask that you continue to remember the cause of foreign missions and the cause of the foreign missionary assistants in the special offerings in your local congregation in the future.

### **Thanks!**

The FMC has enjoyed the benefits of non-minister members la-


boring on the committee for many consecutive three-year terms. This has provided important continuity for the committee during an exciting period in our history, during which the FMC has experienced some big changes. We have gone from simply investigating areas of labor for our churches to overseeing two foreign mission fields: in Ghana (1996) and in the Philippines (2001). Mr. Don VerMeer, a member of our congregation of Hull, Iowa, joined the committee in 1991 and will complete in June four consecutive three-year terms. Mr. Allen Brummel, a member of our Edgerton, Minnesota congregation, joined the committee in 1994 and will complete in June three consecutive three-year terms. Both have declined to have their names put up for nomination again, so that Synod 2003 will be electing new members to take their places. On behalf of the churches, we thank the brothers for their years of work and commitment to the cause of our denominational foreign mission work.

The FMC expresses many thanks to the churches for the denomination-wide interest, for your support of and concern for our missionaries, for your continuing prayers, and for your financial support of our denominational foreign mission labors in West Africa and Southeast Asia.

### **In Closing**

Please continue to uphold in prayer before the Lord our missionaries, their wives and families, the calling churches, and the members of the FMC.

May the Lord of the harvest be pleased to bless our small mission labors so that they are fruitful unto the gathering of His eternally chosen church.

May the Lord grant us His grace to be faithful workers in His harvest while His day approaches so swiftly. 

# Life's Grandest Privilege

Mr. Don Doezema

*Life's grandest privilege is to help others to learn to know God in all the glory of His character and His deeds.*

I must admit that I didn't look forward to writing this article — because, in reflecting on the work of the Domestic Mission Committee in the past year, and *years*, I found myself getting ... *discouraged*. If the goal of our home mission work is the establishment of Protestant Reformed *congregations*, I wondered, where are the "successes"? Doesn't the track record of the DMC of the PRC reveal that our team has in fact been *losing*?

It happens that this writer's first annual report on the work of the DMC for publication in the *SB* was back in 1990. Work in the Bradenton/Venice area in Florida had at that time progressed to the point where the DMC believed the time had come for our churches to declare it a mission field and call to it a missionary. So also had the work in the Larne/Ballymena area in Northern Ireland. And there was Jamaica. From the 1990 report, this:

...Jamaica is the one and only field which our churches currently have. We've had it for a good long time, for it has been some 30 years ago that we were introduced to the work on that island in the Caribbean. And where are we now? What have we accomplished? The number of congregations ... has dwindled. And the congregations which remain ...

are smaller. Besides, some of the problems with which we had to cope at the beginning have persisted to the present. One could very easily become discouraged by all of that, and wonder even whether the blessing of God rested upon our efforts there.

In the remainder of that report, we tried to give reason, not for discouragement, but for optimism.

Now, thirteen years later, where is the work in Jamaica? Who even remembers Venice? What is the status of our work in Northern Ireland today, when compared to what it was in 1990? And, since that time, what have we accomplished in the San Luis Valley? What progress can we report in Spokane and in Pittsburgh? At best, it seems, it's a matter of two steps forward, one backward — or the other way around.

The record is clear. It doesn't lie. What is perhaps not so clear, is how to evaluate it. What about Lansing, Ripon, Birmingham, Venice, Waterworks, Alamosa? Is that a list of ... failures in Protestant Reformed home missions? Just think of all the resources — manpower and money — that went into the work in those places. Would not the DMC be hard pressed to justify its *existence*, in light of the *results* over the last twenty years? Should we not be asking, "What are we doing wrong?"

The DMC is not oblivious to such concerns. Reflecting recently on another apparent setback in our labors, one of the long-time minister-members of the committee reminded us that, first, we must always be ready, in light of results, to reevaluate methodology. And I might add that this is something that we are in fact *doing*. In light of our experience, our "successes"

and "failures," we are currently working to develop a policy for labor with small groups. A first draft of that policy was the subject, earlier this year, of a mission conference we sponsored, attended by representatives of the calling churches, members of the DMC, and our missionaries. Also discussed at this conference was a section of an extensive file created last year by Rev. Mahtani and the Pittsburgh Mission, a file in which they not only articulated their mission vision and listed the activities by which they hope to accomplish their goals, but also outlined *procedures for review and evaluation*.

That, at any rate, was the first reminder. The second was posed as a question: If we judge success on the basis of numbers, what would our judgment be of the ministries of Elijah and of Jeremiah?

That's it, isn't it? Elijah had a goal. It was a worthy one — that Israel, the Northern Kingdom, the ten tribes turn again to Jehovah their God. It didn't happen. He became discouraged. He shouldn't have.

We, in our home mission work, have a goal. It's a worthy one — the establishment of Protestant Reformed congregations. The work of the DMC is purposefully designed to accomplish that — not just preaching here and there and everywhere, but efforts concentrated in a particular location with a view to gathering a *church* there. But may, then, the attainment of that goal be considered the measure of our "success" in missions? No. Not any more than the conversion of the ten tribes should be made the measure of the effectiveness of Elijah's work in Israel. Elijah learned something at Horeb,

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*Mr. Doezema is a member of Southwest PRC and secretary of the Domestic Mission Committee.*



the mount of God. He was reminded that God has His remnant, and that the calling of His prophet is simply to proclaim the truth. He need not worry about results, because they are not in his hands anyway.

I needed that reminder.

Does it seem sometimes, to us, as if our team is losing? I read a little book on missions the other day — *A Vision for Missions*, by Tom Wells (The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1985). He had something to say about the "team." "At any given moment," he wrote, "we can say little about its success." Then he went on to say that

There is a broader view. It is this: God's team is the winning team. Never mind the setbacks. They will come. But as surely as God is God, His team is the winning team. In the most discouraging place on earth, and at the most disheartening hour, the cause is never in doubt. Of what other cause can this be said? None on this earth; not one! The missionary is engaged in this world's only sure pursuit. Let him take heart. His resolve can never be in vain (p. 95).

Why is the cause sure? Wells tells it like it is: because "the harvest is in the hands of God" (p. 140).

If we have but small confidence in ourselves, that is good. That is good indeed. And if we have other fears we will look them in the face knowing that God is greater than all. The cause of God must prevail (p. 157).

### Northern Ireland

It prevails in Northern Ireland. "Never mind the setbacks.... The cause is never in doubt."

In April of 2002 the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland disbanded. But that wasn't the end. Former members of the CPRC who were still committed to the Protestant Reformed Churches reconstituted

themselves into the Covenant Protestant Reformed Fellowship in Northern Ireland. Synod 2002, not of a mind to abandon it, decided to continue the work in Northern Ireland, placing it again under the supervision of Hudsonville PRC and the DMC.

Rev. Angus Stewart was there, left really without a charge. Acting on the advice of Synod 2002, Rev. Stewart applied, through Hudsonville's consistory, for entrance into the ministry of the PRC. And Classis East, at its September meeting, decided "to receive Rev. Stewart as a minister of the Protestant Reformed Churches, with his ministerial credentials and church membership residing in Hudsonville."

That opened the way for the DMC and Hudsonville, in the months that followed, to engage Rev. Stewart in the work in Northern Ireland — both as pastor to members of the CPRF and in mission work in the British Isles. His work has been energetic and, under the blessing of God, fruitful. Hudsonville reports being "fully pleased with his many labors as pastor and missionary, and encouraged that the Lord continues to bless the Fellowship — in the members that remain, in new members and visitors, and in the many contacts both in Northern Ireland and the broader UK." Rev. Stewart himself writes that,

We envisaged the first year of the CPRF as being a year of consolidation and recovering of some lost ground, and our hopes have been more than realized. With the restoration of a clear doctrinal stand and peace in our midst, we have been able to resume the various avenues of evangelism formerly available to us, such as the Covenant Reformed News, special meetings, etc., and to engage in hitherto untried forms of witness, such as a website and broadcasting the Reformed Witness Hour. Our members were affected by the problems within the CPRC to vari-

ous degrees, but are now able to look to the future with hope again.... Our witness is growing and we are attracting more interest both in NI and the rest of the UK.

The DMC had a mandate to evaluate the work in Northern Ireland, in consultation with Hudsonville, with a view to presenting to Synod 2003 "a proposal concerning the viability of future labor by the PRCA in the British Isles." We consulted with Hudsonville. Hudsonville's assessment was that, "although the disbanding of the congregation staggered them, they have recovered and are now stronger than they were before disbanding, better able to witness in a united way to the Reformed faith." The DMC concurs, and will report to synod that "we are thankful to the Lord of the harvest that this has proved to be an easy call."

Our recommendation to synod, therefore, is that the work with the Covenant Protestant Reformed Fellowship be continued, with Ballymena as the base of our mission labors in the British Isles, and also that Hudsonville be appointed calling church. Should synod so decide, Hudsonville council plans to propose to the congregation that Rev. Stewart be called, by approbation, to serve as their missionary to the British Isles.

### Western Home Missions

For the past several years Rev. Thomas Miersma, our western home missionary, has been stationed in Spokane. He was working with and in the Sovereign Grace Reformed Church in that city, with a view to its being received eventually into the PRC. Last year at this time, all seemed quiet on the western front. Apparently some numerical growth was all that was needed before our hope for federation could become a reality. But we were mistaken. By mid-summer of 2002 it became clear that there were in fact deep-

seated differences in perspective, especially between the missionary and the consistory — differences with regard to methodology in missions, application of principles to real-life situations, and points of emphasis in preaching. It seemed, at first, as if the differences were such that they could be resolved; but, in spite of earnest endeavors on the part of the calling church and the Mission Committee to accomplish it, resolution proved to be impossible. To the consistory, in fact, it soon became apparent that the little church was not going to survive the rift that had developed in it. They decided therefore to disband the church.

Another step backward. And, to the calling church and the Mission Committee, a grievous disappointment.

But the harvest has a Lord — a Lord who supplies the workers, provides the resources, and controls the progress.

The Lord of the harvest gives also the field of labor. As it seemed to us, the door to it was not closed in Spokane by the disbanding of the SGRC. Four families and several individuals conveyed to us their fervent desire that the PRC maintain a presence in Spokane and that our missionary remain in place. Given that commitment, and the continued interest of others in the area, we decided to carry on the work there — with a core group that calls itself now the Covenant of Grace Protestant Reformed Fellowship, numbering twenty-six souls. By the testimony of our missionary, there is “a renewed sense of zeal and energy in the group, also for outreach.” And he concludes that, though we have “taken a step backward from being a church to an unorganized fellowship, there is a solid basis to go forward.” It is with some optimism for the future, therefore, that we will ask synod for approval of retaining Spokane as the base of our western home missions.

### Eastern Home Missions

In the east, our base is Pittsburgh. A year ago, however, we were finding that the work in Fayetteville was developing to the point where it seemed that we would do well to *divide* the labor in the east, calling a missionary to Fayetteville, and making it the center of work in the *south*. As a test for and with a view to that possible eventuality we even had a minister on the field for the first few months of 2002. Because of insufficient manpower, however, we were unable to sustain that level of commitment to the Fellowship, and, soon after, two families left the group.

Another step backward.

Meanwhile, in Pittsburgh there has been modest increase in numbers regularly in attendance at the weekly worship services. “We could wish,” writes Rev. Mahtani in his annual report, “for a greater and speedier growth of the mission.” Why is it that missions is slow, hard work? “We realize,” Rev. Mahtani writes in that same report, “that the faithful preaching of the Word will not always mean growth, and that, in fact, oftentimes the reason why we do not grow is by and large the fact that we continue to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints.”


Does that mean that we sit back and content ourselves with whatever will be, because, after all, the truth will never be popular, so we should not look for much in the way of positive response? No, says Rev. Mahtani, “we must be willing to review our labors, and consider ways and means to improve what we are doing.”

We think, in this connection, of that extensive file to which we referred earlier. In it, the missionary and the steering committee ask, “Have we used the resources available to us in the best possible way?” They look, then, at their pamphlet ministry, their audio-tape ministry, their video-tape ministry, their mailing list, their adver-

tising in the Yellow Pages, and their use of radio promos. And to it all they apply an objective measuring stick (viz.: number of responses and resulting contacts) to determine whether a particular effort should be continued as before, modified, or terminated. Careful attention, in other words, is paid to methodology in missions. And all of it with a view toward the goal of ... a Protestant Reformed congregation in Pittsburgh.

Will that ever happen? To ask that question is to answer it. We don't know. We need not know. We need only faithfully, persistently, and humbly to do the work. God has given us the truth, with the command to proclaim it — to bring to the attention of those who know it not, “by all fit and lawful means the glad tidings that Jesus Christ has come into the world to save sinners” (the Reformed Form for Ordination of Ministers). We can testify to the truth of what Rev. Mahtani writes about the fruit of the work in Pittsburgh:

The particular distinctives of our churches are being appreciated more and more by the saints in the Pittsburgh Mission. Love for the unbreakable covenant of God with us and our children, a clear understanding of the gospel of grace and a staunch rejection of common grace and the well-meant gospel offer, hearty singing of the Psalms, dedication of the Lord's Day to the worship of God and the communion of the saints, cheerful giving to the work of the kingdom, and a growing maturity in the call to live antithetically — those are some of the positive developments that make a missionary echo the words of the apostle in III John 4: “I have no greater joy than that my children walk in truth.”

Life's grandest privilege! For the missionary. Also for the calling church and the Mission Committee. “Life's grandest privilege is to help others to learn to know God in all the glory of His character and deeds” (Wells, p. 115). 



### Mission Activities

Our churches' missionary to the Mission in Pittsburgh, PA, Rev. J. Mahtani, and his family traveled to Grand Rapids, MI the first full week in April. He met with the council of Southwest PRC, the calling church, on Saturday, April 12, to discuss the progress of the work in Pittsburgh. Rev. Mahtani also preached for Southwest Sunday evening, April 13, while their pastor, Rev. R. Cammenga, filled a classical appointment in Faith PRC. After the Sunday evening service Rev. Mahtani gave an update on the labors in Pittsburgh and the eastern United States. A time of fellowship and refreshment followed the update.

The first weekend in April, Rev. M. Dick, pastor of Grace PRC in Standale, MI, and Elder D. Moelker of Hope PRC in Walker, MI, as members of our Domestic Mission Committee, visited the group in Fayetteville, NC. Rev. Dick was accompanied by his wife and children, and Elder Moelker was also able to have his wife and daughter accompany him on this trip. Rev. Dick preached at both services on Sunday and there was a fellowship meal planned for after the morning service.

### Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of First PRC in Holland, MI received the following request from a woman in Maryland, "I am looking for reformed books in Spanish to support some ministers in Chile. Do you know where we can find reformed titles and commentaries

in Spanish?" Thankfully, First could supply her with several titles from their ever-growing Spanish library.

### School Activities

From March 12 to April 4 the Student Council of Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, MI conducted a penny/coin drive for the three foreign missions the student body was supporting this school year. The money raised went for Ghana, the Philippines, and Tasmania.

The Board of Midwest Secondary Education hosted a speech, April 11, in the auditorium of the Hull, Iowa PRC. Mr. Rick Noorman, administrator at Covenant Christian High School, was the featured speaker. He spoke on the subject, "Training in the Language of Faith — The Valuable Work of the PR High School." We know from our own experience that distinctive preaching leads to distinctive lives. And it is in the home and the school that we apply the distinctives we hear in the preaching to the instruction of our children in the various subjects. Thus, students gain an understanding of how these distinctives can be applied to every subject and every area of life.

Covenant Christian School in Lynden, WA presented their annual spring program with the theme, "Homes Built on the Lord," on Friday, March 28. Friends of Covenant were encouraged to join together for a night of singing, speaking, meditation, and even a brief slide show as the students celebrated God's gift of covenant homes and families.

### Congregation Activities

The Ladies' Guild of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe,

AB, Canada had a baked goods table at the Easter Farmers Market on April 17. Rather than put the profits from this market towards some project at Immanuel, the ladies gave the proceeds from that day to First PRC in Edmonton to help cover expenses for their upcoming Family Conference to be held in July, D.V.

The congregation of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA was asked to reserve April 11 for a slide presentation entitled, "Some History of Hope PRC, Redlands," given by Mr. Bill Feenstra. A collection was taken, with proceeds going toward defraying expenses of their pictorial church directory. Any extra money was slated to go to their new organ fund.

The Men's Society of the Edgerton, MN PRC invited the men of our two churches in Iowa, Doon and Hull, to join them for their annual combined meeting, March 24, in Edgerton. Bible study was from James 5:1-11, with the men of Hull providing the after-recess program.

The choir of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL presented their annual spring concert on Sunday evening, April 13. Members of Peace and other neighboring churches were encouraged to come join the choir in singing praises to God as together we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In the interest of increasing spiritual knowledge with reading, the Hull, IA PRC purchased a new bookrack, for books from the RFPA. Anyone can purchase any of these books to build his own home library, or for gift-giving for special occasions. Certainly a good reminder for all of us, especially if we have a graduation or wedding coming up any time this month or next.

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*Mr. Wigger is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.*



## Denomination Activities

**T**he Psalm Choir was scheduled to give two concerts this spring. The first at the Grandville, MI PRC on Sunday, March 30, and the second, one week later at First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI. The first concert was held as scheduled, but the next Sunday much of Grand Rap-

ids was in the dark with no electricity, due to an ice storm, including First Church, so, sadly, that concert was canceled.

## Minister Activities

**S**unday, April 20, the Byron Center PRC in Byron Center, MI met and extended a call to Rev.

DeVries to serve as their next pastor. Rev. Daniel Kleyn declined the call he was considering from the Hull, IA PRC to serve as our churches' second missionary to Ghana. Rev. C. Haak declined the call he had been extended from the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI to serve as their next pastor. ☼

## Announcements

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On May 27, 2003,

#### PROF. and MRS. HERMAN HANKO

will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. We, their children and grandchildren, are thankful for God's grace evident in their godly marriage and our covenantal upbringing. To Him be the glory. "Through wisdom is an house builded; and by understanding it is established: And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches" (Proverbs 24:3, 4).

- \* Ron and Nancy Hanko  
Jen, Ryan,  
Wayne and Sarah Courtney,  
Jess and fiancé David Vermeer,  
Herman, Neal, Rose, Ed
- \* Neal and Jeanne Hanko  
Jon and fiancée Jenn Borst,  
Mike, Shari, Matt
- \* Ken and Mary Hanko  
Nathan, David
- \* Steve and Bev Hanko  
Andrew, Jared, Aaron, Josiah,  
Adrian (in glory)
- \* Carlyle and Marcia Miersma  
Katy, Justin, Philip, Stephanie,  
Brandon
- \* Tim Hanko
- \* Daniel and Sharon Kleyn
- \* Phil and Karen VanBaren  
Gwen, Isaac, Calvin, Thad

Grand Rapids, Michigan

### CALL TO SYNOD!!

Synod 2002 appointed Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, Michigan the calling church for the 2003 Synod.

The consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2003 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 10, 2003 at 8:30 A.M. in the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, Michigan.

The Pre-Synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 9, at 7:30 P.M. Rev. Slopsema, president of the 2002 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Ralph VanderVeen, 2973 Willow Run, Hudsonville, MI 49426 Phone: (616) 669-5833.

Consistory of  
Hudsonville PRC  
Ralph VanderVeen, Clerk.

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On April 1, 2003, our parents, **GERALD and MARTHA CNOSSEN**, celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.

We, their children and grandchildren, are thankful to our heavenly Father for the years He has given them together and for the covenant care and instruction they have given us. May the Lord bless them and keep them in their future years together.

"But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children" (Psalm 103:17).

- \* Michael and Helen Cnossen  
Mark and Cynthia Koole,  
Michael, Audra  
Derek and fiancée Leanne Cammenga  
Peter, Philip
- \* Bret and Deb Dykstra  
Nathan, Amanda, Alisha, B.J.
- \* Tim and Beth Ondersma  
Timothy, Melissa, Tyler, Alaina
- \* Mark and Vicky Cnossen  
Jeremy, Ashley

Hudsonville, Michigan

### Family Conference

The Evangelism Committee of First PRC of Edmonton Alberta, Canada is holding a Family Conference, D.V.,

July 4, 5, & 6, 2003 following the topic:

"The Covenant Home"

- I. July 4<sup>th</sup> ~ **Maintaining Marriage in an Age of Adultery** — Rev. S. Key
  - II. July 5<sup>th</sup> A.M. ~ **Bringing Forth Children in an Age of Selfishness** — Rev. A. Brummel
  - III. July 5<sup>th</sup> P.M. ~ **Promoting Obedience in an Age of Rebellion** — Rev. M. DeVries
- July 6<sup>th</sup> **Sermons by Rev. S. Key & Rev. A. Brummel**

RSVP needed by May 01, 2003 (but latecomers are always welcome). For more info visit our website @ [www.members.shaw.ca/firstPrEdmonton/](http://www.members.shaw.ca/firstPrEdmonton/)

Plan to Attend!!