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Volume 80 ♦ Number 3

Godly Sorrow

For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

II Corinthians 7:10

There was a great deal of trouble in the church of Corinth. There was division among the members, immorality the likes of which was not even found in the pagan community, abuse of the Lord's Supper, as well as false doctrine touching the resurrection.

The apostle Paul had dealt with these problems very firmly in his first epistle to the Corinthians, giving necessary and appropriate rebukes. Paul rejoiced when he learned that this letter made the Corinthians grieve. He rejoiced not simply because they were made sorry but because they were made sorry after a godly manner. They sorrowed unto repentance. Paul rejoiced at this kind of sorrow in Corinth because "godly sorrow

worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of."

It is very well possible that this was a proverb often used in the New Testament church. There is a very important truth expressed in this proverb. On the one hand, godly sorrow works repentance, which results in salvation. And those who attain this salvation will never repent (regret) their repentance. On the other hand, the sorrow of the world works death. The truth of this proverb made Paul rejoice in the sorrow of the Corinthians.

And what of our sorrow? We all sorrow. Is it the godly sorrow that works repentance to salvation? Or is it the sorrow of the world that works death?



There is much sorrow in life. The creation is under the curse because of sin. This results in much pain and suffering. There is the pain of sickness, poverty, war, broken relationships, loneliness, death ... and the list goes on. This suffering comes on the righteous as well as on the wicked. And with

that pain comes sorrow, both for the righteous and for the wicked. Such, however, is not the focus of this passage.

The focus is rather on the sorrow connected with sin. Sin clings to every one of us. The world without Jesus Christ is totally depraved, so that all it can do is sin. And these sins are becoming increasingly more abominable. But even the saints of God, who are redeemed in the blood of Christ, sin. The work of grace is not finished in them. They have still a sinful nature. The result is that they daily stumble into sin, sometimes into great sin. And in connection with that sin, there is sorrow. Certainly born again children of God sorrow over their sin. Their sorrow is the godly sorrow mentioned in this passage. But this passage also speaks of the sorrow of the world, i.e., a sorrow that the world has in connection with sin.

What is this godly sorrow of the saint? And what is this godly sorrow in contrast to the sorrow of the world?

The term "godly sorrow" is literally "sorrow according to God."

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This speaks of a sorrow that is according to a certain standard. And that standard is God. There are several things we can say about God in this regard. God is the God of all perfection and virtue. For that reason He hates all sin and delights in all righteousness. In fact, He grieves over the sin of His people. For this reason we are admonished in Ephesians 4:30, "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." Now a sorrow that is according to God is a sorrow that reflects God's perfections and His attitude toward sin. It is a sorrow that reflects His hatred of sin and grief of sin. In short, it is a deep sorrow over sin itself.

To understand this more clearly, we must bear in mind that this sorrow according to God results from God's renewing grace. Those who are renewed in Jesus Christ by the grace of God have the beginnings of God's perfections, so that with God they delight in all righteousness and hate all sin. For that reason they also grieve over sin. They grieve when they see sin around them – in the world, in the church, in their children. But especially do they grieve when they find sin in themselves. By their sin they have offended the God whom they have come to love. They have brought shame to Him, rather than glory. And by their sin they have hurt their neighbor, whom they in Christ love for God's sake. What grief this brings to them.

The sorrow of the world is quite different. The term "sorrow of the world" speaks of a sorrow that arises out of the world. For that reason it is also a sorrow that is characterized by the wickedness of this world. This is a sorrow that grieves not over the fact of sin but only over the evil consequences of sin.

Sin has consequences. Every sin has consequences. This is because God judges sin. Sometimes these consequences are terrible.

Under the judgment of God sin has ruined marriages, destroyed families, brought disease, inflicted penalties.... And all sin leads to hell. The sorrow of the world is a sorrow over these terrible consequences of sin. Because of its depravity, the world hates all righteousness and delights in sin. This remains true even under the most severe judgment of God. So long as the wicked remains in his depravity, he will delight in his sin. But over the devastating consequences of his sin he grieves.



Godly sorrow worketh repentance.

Repentance is a change of mind, a change of heart. It presupposes that you once considered sin to be a good thing. For that reason you desired sin and delighted in it. But now, after the sin is committed, you have a change of mind. What you once thought was so good, you now see as horrible. What once seemed so wise, you now see as terribly foolish. And you wish you hadn't done it.

There are two elements in true repentance. First, there is the seeking of forgiveness and reconciliation with God. One who is repentant wants to be forgiven by God and reconciled to Him. This leads him to confess his sins and to flee to the cross in prayer to find the covering of Christ's atoning blood. But true repentance is also a turning away from sin. One who is repentant doesn't want to continue in his sin. He wants more than ever to turn away from it in order to walk in righteousness. This leads him to the cross to find the power of Jesus Christ to turn from his sin back to God.

Obviously you will not find this repentance in the world. The world in its depravity sorrows not over sin but only over the consequences of sin. The world delights in sin. For that reason the world is without repentance. It does not

seek forgiveness and reconciliation with God. You will not find the world on its knees at the cross. Nor does the world seek to turn from its sin unto righteousness in the power of Jesus Christ. It is true that when the evil consequences of sin become unacceptable, the world will turn from its sinful behavior. This, however, is not a genuine repentance. It is not a turning away from sin to God in righteousness. It is a mere avoidance of a particular sin in order to enjoy other sins in which the world delights.

Godly sorrow, however, works repentance. Where there is godly sorrow there is hatred of sin. Where there is godly sorrow, there is tremendous grief of soul that one has offended God and hurt his neighbor. This sorrow leads one to the cross to find forgiveness in the blood of Jesus Christ and to find the power to turn from sin unto God in righteousness.



Godly sorrow works repentance to salvation not to be repented of. The sorrow of the world, however, works death.

Notice the contrast between salvation and death. Death is obviously the eternal death of hell. Salvation, then, is the salvation of final glory in heaven.

Godly sorrow works repentance to salvation. This indicates that godly sorrow results in salvation. The reason is obvious. Godly sorrow leads one to the cross to find reconciliation and the power to live a new life. This is the one and only way to the salvation of heaven. Another way there is not. However, the sorrow of the world works death. The world in its sorrow has only remorse over the evil consequences of sin. Its sorrow leads not to the cross but to an avoidance of certain sins whose judgments become unacceptable, in order that it may indulge in other sins. This is the way that surely leads to hell.

Godly sorrow works repen-

tance to salvation *not to be repented of*. This means that there will be no regrets on the part of those who in godly sorrow repent of their sins. How many sinful pleasures must be given up for those who walk the way of repentance! How many responsibilities and burdens true repentance adds to those who are given to godly sorrow! Yet the joys of salvation are so great that the repentant sinner never has any regrets. When one day he walks


the streets of the New Jerusalem, there will be no regrets. The way of repentance put him on a narrow way less trod. There were many sacrifices and hardship. But it leads him to the glory of heaven. And it was worth it all.

Regret will be known only by the world. Their delight in sin led them to a life of impenitence. They would not give up the pleasures of sin, except in those cases where the judgment of God became too severe. They sorrowed after the con-

sequences of sin, but continued in their sin for the sake of sin's pleasure. When one day they receive their just reward in hell, there will be only regrets. The torments of hell will overshadow all the good times of sin. All there will be left will be eternal regrets.

What is the nature of your sorrow?

Sorrow with a godly sorrow that works repentance to salvation!

You will never regret it! 

Editorial

Labor Union Membership in the Light of Scripture (4)

Calling of the Christian Workingman

The previous editorial in this series (Oct. 1, 2003) gave the biblical testimony calling the Christian workingman to submit to the authority of the employer as the authority of Christ. In light of this testimony, the Christian workingman—every Christian workingman—must refuse membership in the union, or, if presently a member, must get out. He must do this willingly. He must do this in obedience to the Word. He must do this out of respect for the authority of God. He must do this as an act of discipleship after Jesus Christ. He must do this in gratitude for gracious salvation. He must do this as he values his eternal salvation.

In carrying out this holy calling, the Christian workingman must be willing to suffer loss.

Servants [men working for wages], be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps (I Pet. 2:18-21).

Against the testimony of Scripture, which is clear and compelling, there are two arguments in favor of a Christian's joining a labor union. These arguments are powerful. Both of these arguments come down to this: "If I do not join the union, I will suffer."

One argument is that the owner, the employer, the boss, management, the capitalist is a greedy, cruel, blood-sucking mon-

ster. Without unions, workers have suffered, and will suffer.

The other argument is the visceral one: "I have to eat." If a man is unwilling to join a union, work is denied him, and then he and his family starve to death.

The Bible refutes both these arguments.

As regards the first, concerning the unjust employer, there are indeed wicked employers who take advantage of the worker. Their only concern is profits for themselves. Workers are merely disposable means to that end. Scripture recognizes such employers and damns them: "Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you" (James 5:1). These were the farmers for whom the Christian laborers of James 5 were working. These farmers kept back the hire of the laborers, thus killing the righteous workingmen. "The hire of the laborers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back

by fraud, crieth ... Ye have condemned and killed the just" (James 5:4, 6).

This injustice and cruelty, however, do not warrant resistance on the part of the workers—a general strike. Rather, the laborer "doth not resist you" (James 5:6). Radically different is the activity to which the gospel of Christ calls the defrauded workingman: "Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord" (James 5:7). Christ the judge will punish the greedy capitalist who has defrauded his workers. Such a businessman "has heaped treasure together for the last days" (James 5:3). The millions he gave to charity in his old age, to soothe his conscience and get a name for himself, will not mitigate his punishment in the least. Christ will also reward the suffering, patient workingman. "The end of the Lord (is) that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy" (James 5:11).

As regards the second argument, namely, that we must eat, the biblical refutation is exactly that we do not have to eat. Eating is not the "bottom line" in the life of Christians. For the Christian, what is absolutely necessary—that to which all in life must give way—is obeying God. When eating conflicts with obeying, as it often has in history, eating is given up.

Karl Marx and his disciples in the labor union movement are wrong in their teaching that the material is everything.

The man who makes eating the main thing in human life, to which all else, even the Word of God, must give way, is an idolater. His god is his belly. Some god!

Whoever takes the position, "I must eat," will, on this basis, soon also take the mark of the beast, for without that mark in the kingdom of Antichrist one will not be permitted to buy or sell (Rev. 13:17). Whoever takes the mark will be permitted to eat. He will also drink. He will "drink of the wine

of the wrath of God" forever (Rev. 14:9-11).

"Pillar and Ground of the Truth"

If the Christian workingman is to carry out his calling, the church must take a stand—the biblical stand—and instruct the workingman, as well as discipline him, if he should join a union. The church is "pillar and ground of the truth" (I Tim. 3:15). She is pillar and ground of the truth of the godly life of her members. For the widespread disobedience to the will of God on the part of professing Christians in the sphere of labor today, the unfaithful churches are to be blamed more than the workers.

The Protestant Reformed Churches take a stand. Their stand is avowedly and undeniably biblical. This stand against labor union membership is not something about which they should be embarrassed. Rather, it is a significant part of their honor as true churches of Christ by the grace of God. True churches of Christ are identified by their confession of the truth of the Word of God. This confession includes more than only the great doctrines of the faith. It includes as well the churches' teaching the nations "to observe all things whatsoever I [Jesus Christ] have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). As these editorials have shown, the Lord Jesus has commanded His disciples in all nations to honor the authority of the "master" in the sphere of labor. Therefore, the Protestant Reformed Churches may not hide, or downplay, their stand against labor union membership. Christ calls them to teach and proclaim this stand.

Exactly because of the stand of the Churches from their very beginning, Protestant Reformed workingmen can still get exemption from union membership, including the requirement to pay dues to the union, under the law of the land as "conscientious objectors."

The stand of the Churches, faithfully preached and taught, guides the members of these Churches in a holy life. This is true love on the part of the Churches for their workingmen.

The Churches' stand is also an important part of their witness to the outside. It leaves impenitent rebels against the authority of Christ in the ordinance of labor without excuse. It gains others to truth, holiness, and Christ.

The encouragement both to suffering workingman and embattled church is James' exhortation:

Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. ...behold, the judge standeth before the door. Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy (James 5:7-10).

Come, O Christ, and judge on behalf of your defrauded, but patient workingmen and on behalf of your reproached, but faithful church. Amen.

— DJE 

A Word Fitly Spoken

*If property is lost, nothing is lost.
If courage is lost, much is lost.
If honor is lost, more is lost.
If the soul is lost, all is lost.*

—Dirck Jansz,
Reformed believer in Friesland,
early 1600s

Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life (conclusion)

The previous article on John Calvin's doctrine of the Christian life showed that, in addition to the law as the rule of the Christian life, Calvin found in the New Testament an important pattern of the life of every true Christian (*Standard Bearer*, Oct. 15, 2003). With specific reference to Romans 12:1, "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God," Calvin defined this New Testament pattern as the believer's belonging to God. The entire life of the Christian is formed by his conviction that he is not his own, but belongs entirely to God.

A life formed by this conviction and conforming to this pattern has certain characteristics. Three of these characteristics are service of God, self-denial, and bearing the cross. The previous article mentioned these characteristics, briefly explained them, and demonstrated that Calvin taught them as fundamental to the Christian life.

A fourth characteristic of the life of every Christian, according to Calvin, is contempt for this present earthly life and hopeful meditation upon the future heavenly life—the life that the Christian will enjoy after death and especially upon the return of Christ. This characteristic is related to the preceding—bearing the cross—inasmuch as tribulation—the cross in one's life—has the unavoidable and salutary effect on the Christian that he learns to despise this life and

hope with ardent longing for the coming life.

In urging this characteristic as part of the pattern of the Christian life, Calvin used vigorous language. He used language that is much too strong for our age, but language that our age, particularly Reformed saints in our age, very much needs to hear. If we were to address Reformed and Presbyterian people with Calvin's statements on the necessity of holding this earthly life in contempt, without informing them that the statements were those of Calvin, most would respond by screaming, "World-flight!" "Anabaptist!" They would charge, with the sublimest, unwitting irony, that we lack a "Calvinistic" world-view.

Listen.

"(We must) despise the present, and . . . aspire to the future life."

"This life, estimated in itself, is restless, troubled, in numberless ways wretched, and plainly in no respect happy."

"All we have to seek or hope for here is contest."

"When we think of the crown we must raise our eyes to heaven."

"Our mind never rises seriously to desire and aspire after the future, until it has learned to despise the present life" (*Inst.*, 3.9.1).

"There is no medium between the two things: the earth must either be worthless in our estimation, or keep us enslaved by an intemperate love of it."

"We (must) hasten to despise the world, and aspire with our whole heart to the future life" (*Inst.*, 3.9.2).

Calvin exercised some sharp spiritual/psychological examination of every one of us.

Every one of us, indeed, would be thought to aspire and aim at heavenly immortality during the whole course of his life. For we would be ashamed in no respect to excel the lower animals; whose condition would not be at all inferior to ours, had we not a hope of immortality beyond the grave. But when you attend to the plans, wishes, and actions of each, you see nothing in them but the earth. Hence our stupidity; our minds being so dazzled with the glare of wealth, power, and honors, that they can see no farther. The heart also, engrossed with avarice, ambition, and lust, is weighed down and cannot rise above them. In short, the whole soul, ensnared by the allurements of the flesh, seeks its happiness on the earth (*Inst.*, 3.9.1).

Calvin went on to explain that he intended that we view this life as preparation for the glory of the heavenly kingdom and, therefore, do not make this life the end, or goal, or main thing. He guarded against misunderstanding of his exhortation that we despise this life by warning that "contempt" is not hatred of earthly life, or ingratitude to God for it. "This life, though abounding in all kinds of wretchedness, is justly classed among divine blessings which are not to be despised" (*Inst.*, 3.9.3).

Viewing earthly life as preparation for the better, heavenly life, the Christian does not tremble in terror of approaching death.

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Rather, he desires death. "No man has made much progress in the school of Christ who does not look forward with joy to the day of death and final resurrection (II Tim. 4:18; Titus 2:13)" (*Inst.*, 3.9.5).

In his explanation of the Christian life as cross bearing and, therefore, a despising of earthly life in hope of the heavenly, Calvin made plain that he saw no "golden age" of carnal millennial ease and glory in store for the church in history.

Thus, indeed, it is; the whole body of the faithful, so long as they live on the earth, must be like sheep for the slaughter, in order that they may be conformed to Christ their head (Rom. 8:36). Most deplorable, therefore, would their situation be did they not, by raising their mind to heaven, become superior to all that is in the world, and rise above the present aspect of affairs (I Cor. 15:19) (*Inst.*, 3.9.6).

As he suggested when he explained that contempt for earthly life is not ingratitude to God for it, Calvin saw in the New Testament as a fifth characteristic of the Christian life that the Christian use the benefits of earthly life rightly. In general, this will consist of using "its [the earth's] blessings only in so far as they assist our progress [to the heavenly kingdom], rather than retard it" (*Inst.*, 3.10.1). Following the pattern of the New Testament, Calvin warned against two dangers. One is the binding of the conscience, whether by oneself or by others, with the unbiblical restriction that the Christian may use earthly things only if they are absolutely necessary. In his treatment of Christian liberty, later in the *Institutes*, Calvin expressed the spiritual danger of this ascetic view of the Christian life in a classic statement.

Many think us absurd in raising a question as to the free eating of flesh, the free use of dress and holidays, and similar frivolous

trifles, as they think them; but they are of more importance than is commonly supposed. For when once the conscience is entangled in the net, it enters a long and inextricable labyrinth, from which it is afterwards most difficult to escape. When a man begins to doubt whether it is lawful for him to use linen for sheets, shirts, napkins, and handkerchiefs, he will not long be secure as to hemp, and will at last have doubts as to tow; for he will revolve in his mind whether he cannot sup without napkins, or dispense with handkerchiefs. Should he deem a daintier food unlawful, he will afterwards feel uneasy for using loaf-bread and common eatables, because he will think that the body might possibly be supported on a still meaner food. If he hesitates as to a more genial wine, he will scarcely drink the worst with a good conscience; at last he will not dare to touch water if more than usually sweet and pure. In fine, he will come to this, that he will deem it criminal to trample on a straw lying in his way (*Inst.*, 3.19.7).

The second danger is an immoderate use of earthly things amounting to licentious self-indulgence. "Many are so devoted to luxury in all their senses, that their mind lies buried: many are so delighted with marble, gold, and pictures, that they become marble-hearted—are changed as it were into metal, and made like painted figures. The kitchen, with its savory smells, so engrosses them that they have no spiritual savor" (*Inst.*, 3.10.3).

Positively, although "the liberty of the Christian in external matters is not to be tied down to a strict rule," there are two laws governing the Christian's use and enjoyment of earthly things. One is that he use the world as not abusing it, as I Corinthians 7:29-31 teaches. This is a use that does not involve making too much of the world, so that the world and its things divert the Christian from seeking the heavenly life. The


Christian will avoid gluttony, excessive drinking, ostentatious dress, pride, and luxury.

Calvin was especially fearful of luxury in the life of one professing to be a disciple of Christ. Although advocating the middle way between ascetic self-denial and licentious self-indulgence, Calvin exhorted a moderation that sins more on the side of the former than of the latter: "We wish men would follow a moderation closer to abstinence than to luxury" (John Calvin, "Concerning Luxury," in Ford Lewis Battles, *Interpreting John Calvin*, Baker, 1996, p. 329).

The second law directing the Christian's use of earthly things is that he bear poverty peaceably and patiently.

Implied by these two laws is a third law: Live earthly life using and enjoying the creatures in the consciousness that we are stewards of these things. For our use of earthly things, we must one day give account. "We must, therefore, administer them [earthly things] as if we constantly heard the words sounding in our ears, 'Give an account of your stewardship'" (*Inst.*, 3.10.5).

Sixth, and finally, the New Testament patterns the Christian life by requiring that the Christian view and occupy his place in everyday life as a divine calling—a "vocation." Calvin spoke of one's "mode of life." He referred to one's earthly station, or job. Viewing his job as a calling, the Christian will not rashly and restlessly abandon it for another. He will patiently bear whatever "inconveniences, cares, uneasiness, and anxiety" attend his "mode of life," "persuaded that God has laid on the burden."

Viewing your station, no matter how lowly, as a divine calling "will afford admirable consolation, that in following your proper calling, no work will be so mean and sordid as not to have a splendor and value in the eye of God" (*Inst.*, 3.10.6). 

Eastern Ideas (3) 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)

Eastern influence on Hollywood

Not only is the East having a significant influence on education and politics, its ideas are also endorsed by many on the cutting edge of Western culture: Hollywood. About this, Don Feder writes:

From spirits and reincarnation to telekinesis and the occult, the movie industry is in the grip of a new Age mania.

Consider the re-released Star Wars trilogy ... there's the Force, "an energy field created by all living things" that humans can connect with to accomplish incredible feats of valor — karma-coated popcorn.

...today it (Hollywood, ck) rolls out one piece of New Age schlock after another — Phenomenon, Powder, Dragonheart, Little Buddha, The Craft and the Frighteners, in the past year (1993, ck) alone.

Hollywood loves religion, as long as it's non-Western. Richard Gere (who meditates with Tibetan masters) and Oliver Stone

are Buddhists. Travolta and Cruise, disciples of L. Ron Hubbard. Shirley MacLaine clones, like Oscar-winner Jon Voight, are practically tripping over each other.¹

Concerning Hollywood's influence, Johanna Michaelsen adds:

Saturday-morning cartoons are proving to toddlers that "I AM THE POWER!" They are told that there are "good" sorceresses and Witches and shamans and wizards who have access to untold power, and the telepathy and telekinesis (and those words are the exact ones used) are normal and useful abilities to cultivate.² (Welcome to the wacky world of Harry Potter. ck)

Eastern influence on business

The New Age Movement is not content with the capture of our children, it would even rule the way we do business. In a lengthy article in *Christianity Today*, Jeff Sellers provides the following insights:

Visualizing the future, several businesspersons at a Manhattan hotel are acting out what the ideal corporate board meeting will look like in 2012. "May all the decisions we make today be guided by values and by love," the board chairman says. "Let's meditate on it. Tune in to your intuition on all levels."

It's the Spirit in Business World Conference, where more than 500 business people and assorted "change agents" have come to unleash each other's inner powers. They will spend three days

spurring each other on to positive thoughts at the Sheraton New York Hotel and Towers, a sanctuary from the grit and litter outside. Then they will go to the ends of the earth as part of a fledgling movement to transform the world.

Yes, they're believers — in human potential. They believe in the power of enlightened business to imbue life with meaning. Many of them, especially their leaders, believe business will help usher in a universal shift in consciousness.

They mean many things by the term *shift in consciousness*, including the notion that business people should rely less on rational thought and more on intuitive "inner wisdom." On a less esoteric level, the envisioned business revolution would affirm values—rather than shareholder value—as the driving force of business.³

In the rest of his article Sellers makes the case that New Age influence in the business world has gone from a fringe movement to being mainstream. He bases this contention on the growing number of books on the subject of spirituality in the workplace, the proliferation of conferences on spirituality in business and the workplace, and the increasing (up to 10%) number of management consultants that include spiritual emphases.

Eastern Influence on Western society in general

Further, the widespread influence of the New Age on the West is so prevalent in our everyday life

Mr. Kalsbeek is a teacher in Covenant Christian High School and a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, Michigan. (Preceding article in series: May 15, 2003, p. 367.)

that it simply cannot be ignored. Consider just a few examples:

- An article in the *Grand Rapids Press*: "Pagan Pride." This article describes a recent celebration of New Age pagans who in their activities show respect for life and the earth. "The goal of Sunday's event was to foster pride in pagan identity through education, activism, charity and community, and to show others that pagans are just normal people."⁴
- An article in *Healthy Living*: The use of yoga is promoted as a means for staying healthy. Instead of being used only by the fringes of society, the article states: "These days, the art of yoga — a centuries-old health program of stretching and breathing exercises, often accompanied by meditation techniques — has gone thoroughly mainstream."⁵
- An article in *Reader's Digest*: "Give Peace a Chance: Meditation for busy, normal people." This article attempts to give a scientific validation to meditation, and even presents a detailed explanation of how one is to do it.⁶
- Another article from the *Grand Rapids Press*: "Eastern religions inspire wisdom in two books." The reviewer of these two children's books (*Stone Soup*, by Jon J. Muth, and *What about Me*, by Ed Young) tells us, "Eastern religions are the source of wisdom in two folktales." We are further informed: "Both these tales have been told before, but not in their eastern context with such beautiful illustrations. They are indeed teaching tales with wise words for children. But they are so palatable they'll feel more like a treat than a lesson."⁷

Many other examples of Eastern influence on our society could be cited. One of the more interest-

ing is the connection some are making of the recent craze in the West of tattooing and body piercing to the pagan influences of the East. Gene Edward Veith in *World* magazine observes that while third world dictators seek what the West has to offer in business suits, weapons, industry, health care, etc...

Ironically, at the very same time, many Westerners — despising or ignorant of their own civilization — are tattooing their bodies like Maoris, piercing their bodies, and cultivating a "new primitivism." Already, "advanced nations" have brought back into vogue practices associated with the worst barbarism — sexual license, recreational violence, and infanticide. Civilization requires vigilance both from without and from within.⁸

While on the subject of body piercing and tattooing, it is interesting to note some current development of these practices throughout the United States:

...tattooing and piercing are evolving in ever more radical ways, including mutilation, branding, scarification, and implants under the skin. There is an Association of Professional Piercers, who place steel balls or other shapes under the skin to create a variety of looks, including devil's horns poking out of the forehead; branding the skin with hot metal; and ritual scarification using a scalpel to slice the face or body. Eric Sprague has undergone intensive procedures in an attempt to look like a lizard. He has implants over each eye for a "horned ridge effect," teeth filed to sharp points, and even a split tongue. He said the tongue "is the culmination of childhood daydreams and fantasies."⁹

Issachar's response

How must Issachar respond to these things? Are they just passing fads or do they constitute a real threat to the spiritual well-being of Israel? If one piercing per ear for

boys, two per ear for girls, and one "small" tattoo for each is acceptable today, why not three piercings, a large tattoo, filed teeth, and steel balls tomorrow? One person responded to the above mentioned quote of Gene Edward Veith this way: "The most troubling thing to me, however, is the 'new primitivism' found among professing Christians who dismiss tattooing, piercings of unusual body parts, and the wearing of less and less clothing (even to church) as just being 'fashionable.'"

In contrast to this concern a New Age apologist, Dick Sutphen, brags about the strategies that New Agers have employed to make their ideas acceptable to American society.

One of the biggest advantages we have as New Agers is, once the occult, metaphysical and New Age terminology is removed, we have concepts and techniques that are very acceptable to the general public. So we can change the names and demonstrate the power. In so doing, we open the

1. Don Feder, "Hollywood's New Age love affair," *AFA Journal*, April 1994: 19

2. Michaelsen 13.

3. Jeff M. Sellers, "The Higher Self Gets Down to Business," *Christianity Today* February 2003: 34.

4. Morgan Jarema, "Pagan Pride," *Grand Rapids Press* 16 September 2002, D1

5. "Yoga Moves into the Mainstream," *Living Healthy* Fall 2002: 18-19.

6. "Give Peace a Chance: Meditation for busy, normal people," *Reader's Digest*, October 2002: 116-121.

7. Sue Stauffacher, "Eastern religions inspire wisdom in two books," *Grand Rapids Press*, 22 March 2003: B7.

8. Gene Edward Veith, "Saps for Savages," *World*, 20 July 2002: 11.

9. David Cloud, "Pagan Art of Body Tattooing and Piercing Getting Weirder," *The Christian News*, 28 May 2001: 22.


New Age door to millions who would not be receptive.¹⁰

What is so ironic is the almost fanatic concern by our increasingly pagan society with anything that even remotely symbolizes Western Christianity (manger scenes, Christmas trees, prayer, etc.) contrasted with the West's ready acceptance of the pagan symbols of our time because they are "cool" or just another passing fad.

Modern-day Issachar should recognize that essentially nothing has changed since the Lord warned

Israel of the dangers posed by the pagan Canaanites. As then, so today, "Israel then shall dwell in safety alone..." (Deut. 33:28). Israel has nothing to gain and everything to lose! By accepting the symbols (ying and yang, crystals, etc.) and practices (yoga, tattoos, piercings, etc.) of New Age paganism, Israel places herself and her future generations at risk. Rather than stand with our children as close as possible to the altar of the Baals and Molochs of our day, we would do well to keep our distance. At the same time, by adopt-

ing the symbols and practices of the New Age, she mutes her response to those who are caught up in the hopelessness of the New Age Movement. After all, why would a pagan ask an Israelite who looked and acted no different than he "...a reason of the hope that is in you" (I Pet. 3:15)?

Sons of Issachar, let us continue to grow in our understanding of the times and live! 

10. Dick Sutphen, "Infiltrating the New Age into Society," *WHAT IS*, vol. 1, no. 1, Summer 1986, p.14.

That They May Teach Them to Their Children

Miss Agatha Lubbers

The Christian Story and the Christian School (5)

A Defense of the Narrative Approach in Reformed Christian Education

With this article we bring to a conclusion the discussion of the narrative approach in Reformed Christian education. The defense and development of an understanding of the narrative approach is the burden of the book *The Christian Story and the Christian School*, Christian Schools International, 1993, by Dr. John Bolt. In this book Dr. Bolt contends that the problems in Christian schools arising from contemporary education and our culture could be addressed best and solved by the narrative approach. We have previously described the narrative approach as one in which the Chris-

tian school tells a specific and distinctive story that reflects the truth of the inspired Scriptures and the Christian creeds in every area of the curriculum.

Dr. Bolt contends that the narrative approach can be a possibility and reality because our Christian schools exist in what can be called communities of memory. These communities of memory are repositories of stories that will be most helpful in the employment of the narrative approach. In the final chapters of the book Dr. Bolt considers the idea of "story" or "narrative" as a method to discover the content of Christian education. He argues that narrative provides an enrichment of our understanding of human experiences and that it is a constructive way of understanding the reason for Christian schools and the goal of Christian education.

The Story of God and His People

Dr. Bolt asserts that the Christian faith is first and foremost a story—a story of the triune God and His people. Often Christian testimonies will take the form of a story. The believer will tell how the Lord has taken him from the bondage of sin and has changed his life. He may recount his sinful past, his present redeemed state, and his hope for future glory. The Christian confession of faith results in a confession that becomes a narrative, and therefore it can be called one's spiritual autobiography.

Bolt notes that the Christian faith takes on a narrative form that is used in worship and liturgy. The Apostles' Creed can serve as an example because it covers the entire narrative history of the universe from creation to the consummation of all things. The second article of

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the Apostles' Creed is a simple summary narrative of the life of Jesus, the Savior—the God-man—from His conception by the Holy Spirit to His rule at the Father's right hand and His return in glory.

Dr. Bolt cites Deuteronomy 26:5-9 as an example of an Old Testament narrative form that serves as a communal confession of faith and a summary salvation history.

A Syrian ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous: and the Egyptians evil entreated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage: And when we cried unto the LORD God of our fathers, the LORD heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labor, and our oppression: And the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders: And He hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, even a land that floweth with milk and honey.

The Christian story, according to Bolt, is not merely our story, our narrative of discovery and imagination.

The Christian story is the story of God and His people. From creation through redemption unto the consummation the Christian story is a covenantal narrative, a narrative about a relationship between the triune God and His people. John Calvin begins his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* by underscoring this inseparable covenantal duality: "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves" (Bolt, p. 186).

Dr. Bolt asserts that the covenantal relationship between God and His people does not involve "equal partners."

God is the sovereign who initiates and governs the relationship. He created the world for His glory and He breathed life into human beings.... We are children of God, not by human will or decision. Rather we are 'born of God' (John 1:13).... God's people respond to His initiative, and their story is a recital of what God has done for them, in them, and through them (Bolt, p. 186-187).

Bolt continues by stating that the story that relates what God has done, and is doing, and will do, cannot be told apart from the community of faith. New Testament metaphors such as the body of Christ and temple of the Spirit remind us that the locus of God's presence and the manifest sign of Christ's kingly rule in the world are the people of God (cf. I Cor. 12:27 and I Cor. 3:16).

Since the people of God are so important in the story God is telling, Bolt insists that it is important to know the context of God's story today. This means that we must know the influence of ideologies like modernism, secularism, and paganism and the pervasive influence of the media as these affect and shape the story of the people of God today. We should remember that the world in which we live was created perfect but is now a world that has fallen. It is a world in which men serve the creature rather than the Creator, who is God blessed forever (cf. Rom. 1:25). It is a world that serves the god of this world (Satan), who has blinded the minds of those that do not believe (cf. II Cor. 4:4). It is a world in which the redeemed of the Lord are called to live as those who look for the new heavens and new earth. Christian students must be taught to see that God's purpose is "to bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head, even Christ" (cf. Eph. 1:10).

Christian education that Christian parents promise to provide for their children must fit into the story of God and His people and must

serve the mission of God. The story of God and His people is the story of the triune God's mission that is commissioned by the Father, accomplished by Christ, applied by the Holy Spirit, and is in process until the end comes and God is "all in all" (I Cor. 15:28).

The Christian School:

A Visionary Community of Memory

Dr. Bolt also argues that the Christian school must be a community of memory. We must think of the Christian school as a visionary community of memory. This is another formulation of a narrative framework because all narratives are temporal in nature, joining characters and events in a plot over time. A narrative joins past to present in memory and then joins both to the future in anticipation or hope. A narrative understanding of the school therefore situates it between the past and the future, between memory and vision.

The very nature of the school as an educational institution qualifies it and defines it by the special task of remembering, says Bolt. He writes: "The school is the place where the broader community seeks to pass on to the next generation its civilizational memory, its cultural wisdom" (Bolt, p. 189).

The school's task according to Dr. Bolt is

to prepare its students for citizenship in a specific community, to mold character, and to encourage virtues consonant with the historic values and traditions of that community. Teachers are to be custodians of a civilization and students are to be its heirs. The school is a specialized community in which the larger community preserves and passes on its cultural memory. Education is a matter of passing on and of nurturing students in a shared memory, incorporating them into a shared story (Bolt, p. 189).

Dr. Bolt views the Christian School as one that is concerned

with the story and symbols of the national community, but more broadly with the story and symbols of God's kingdom and mission in the world.

The wisdom that the student must learn is rooted in memory and tradition, says Bolt, that are passed on from generation to generation. To educate students is to civilize them, to make them wise. Bolt states that we are wise "to the degree we share traditional memories and live by traditional wisdom. We are educated to the degree that we know and begin to participate in the community's story" (Bolt, p. 190).

Bolt asserts that a good Christian school curriculum must draw significantly from the wisdom of the ages. This requires good teachers who drink deeply from wells of tradition, so that their students are incorporated into a story of the past, the present, and the future of God and His people. Students incorporated into this story are given a memory, a vision, and in this way a mission.

Teaching As Storytelling

Dr. Bolt believes that when one thinks of the school and teaching in narrative terms this has implications for the identity of the teacher, the shape of the curriculum, and even the structure of specific lessons.

Concerning the identity of the teacher, we should note that when the school is viewed in narrative terms, one thinks of the teacher as the community's storyteller. The Christian school must be rooted self-consciously in the grand narrative of the acts of the triune God in creation, redemption, and the renewal of all things.

The curriculum is the story the teachers are to tell. We must recognize that stories are the preeminent means by which we make sense out of our experience. We also must recognize that, because of divine revelation, Christians have access to the story that must be em-

ployed to judge all the stories that teachers tell. The Christian school curriculum that tells the Great True Story and all derived and supporting stories is the way that Christian education helps students make sense of their experience.

The narrative of Scripture will play a foundational role in the curriculum of the Christian school. A good Bible curriculum that introduces students to the grand narrative plot of Scripture and explores its vast and rich imagery is the cornerstone of a solid Christian education. Basic biblical literacy is important to shape the Christian identity and character of students. It also provides students with an essential cultural vocabulary for understanding Western civilization.

The second great building block of a rich curriculum is church history. To be taught correctly and effectively church history must be more than data and information about God and His people. Students who are going to become the kind of Christians that will courageously resist the encroachments of the pagan world must hear stories of men like Moses, Daniel, Stephen, Polycarp, John Huss, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, Herman Hoeksema, George Ophoff, and many others. Dr. Bolt states that the

Christian school curriculum must provide students with a good measure of biography so that they will learn the story of God and His people, identify with it, and develop the habits and character that are consistent with the mission of God's people in the world (Bolt, p. 194).

History is an obvious candidate for the narrative approach. Because of the concern of social studies for events, values, places, intentions, individual people, and groups, history comes shaped for a story. The challenge for the Christian teacher is to frame these stories in the content of the story of God and His people.

Bolt suggests that we should extend the narrative approach beyond Bible, literature, and social studies to courses like mathematics and science. Quoting from *Teaching as Story Telling*, by Kieran Egan, Bolt asserts that the narrative model helps a teacher "to use the power of the story form in order to teach any content more engagingly and meaningfully" (Bolt, p. 198).

Bolt argues that the entire spectrum of the school curriculum can be viewed as story. The schoolteacher in every area of the curriculum can be viewed as a storyteller because the narrative approach encourages one to see lessons or units as good stories to be told rather than sets of objectives to be attained!

The Narrative Payoff

Dr. Bolt concludes his presentation of the narrative method exactly where I should like to conclude, viz., in a discussion of the benefits of the narrative method.

Dr. Bolt states that telling the Christian story and telling it well is an invitation to students to join the mission of God and His people. Bolt writes that stories draw us in by calling us to identify with their characters and drawing us in as participants in the plot. Bolt continues by stating that without indoctrinating and without treating the school as a place for evangelism, a compellingly told account of the Christian story as it is actually practiced in history by real individuals and groups will convict students about the demands of Christian discipleship. A focus on narrative does not simply pass on information but it models and invites participation in God's mission. The narrative form of God's mission provides the context for reflection and action and also provides the counter-cultural alternative to the influential story told by modern mass media.


The narrative approach passes on the memory of Christian reflec-

tion and action and provides a vision for Christian living.

The narrative approach is a fashionable topic in educational

circles but it is not merely a passing fad. Storytelling is a way for people to give order and meaning to their experience. It is at the heart of the Christian method of in-

struction and the Christian faith.

The Christian story is the only foundation, content, and goal of the Christian school. 

Go Ye Into All the World

Rev. Jason Kortering

Mission Preaching in the Established Church (5) *The Gospel Service*

Some of our readers may not be comfortable with designating a special worship service in the established churches as a gospel service. This designation is intended to distinguish such a service from the regular worship services that take place twice every Lord's Day. But, one might ask, if every worship service ought to include gospel preaching, and if the gospel is the good news of salvation that the pastor is commanded to bring every time he mounts the pulpit, why would we speak of a *special* gospel service?

Actually, the idea is not foreign to us. We just make use of it in a different way.

Many of our congregations designate an occasional evening service as an opportunity for our members to take neighbors, relatives, colleagues, or friends who may be members of various other denominations or who may be nominally Reformed but have not thought through the distinctives that we have come to appreciate as churches. Usually, the Evangelism Committee puts forth special effort to promote this service by

advertising it in the local newspaper, and special tracts are prepared so that the members can hand them out as invitations to others to attend this service. The pastor picks a passage from the Bible that is conducive to achieve this goal and more than likely takes into consideration that he must watch his vocabulary and not use "theological jargon," which may not be commonly understood in today's society.

I do not use "jargon" in a disparaging way. We preachers can easily use theological terms much as a doctor uses medical ones. When we visit the doctor, he describes what ails us, and we have to stop him and say, "Wait a minute; I don't understand a thing you are saying." We must not ourselves err in this regard when we speak to non-Christians or to those who are not familiar with specialized terms. We must, certainly, use precise terms, but we must be careful to explain what they mean. This is helpful both in our conversation and in our preaching.

A gospel service is the same idea as it relates to "mission preaching" in the established church. The focus of this service is upon those who may never before have heard the gospel or who may have been exposed to Christianity but not made any commit-

ment to the gospel of grace. Preparations are put forth by the Evangelism Committee to promote this service, and the members are encouraged to invite those who cross their paths who are not Christians to come with them and hear the Word of God preached. The pastor takes this into account as well, and he chooses a text that is appropriate for this purpose and puts forth special effort to make the call of the gospel simple and understandable, including a call to respond by repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The point that we have been making in this series of articles is that such special services are really not necessary if the pastor has the right view of his congregation and preaches regularly with the passion that any faithful servant of God does. This is important to maintain, because special gospel services must be just that, special. They have a very limited but definite place in the life of the church. But they must never be taken as an alternative to regular "mission preaching" or gospel preaching, which preaching is incumbent on every faithful minister of the Word of God on a regular basis.

The place of such gospel services is limited and special.

The only way that we can appreciate the need for such services

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is by maintaining a focus as a congregation on non-Christians that surround us. If our only focus is upon "other Christians," then our only special service will be one that sets forth our Reformed distinctives. Though it is very right and proper for a Reformed church to do that, we need more, and that is that we also direct our attention to non-Christians who are upon our pathway. Christ, the Lord of the church, commissions us to include a ministry for them.

This forces us to examine a deeper issue, whether we as an established church have this focus in our ministry? It is obvious that the churches in Singapore have such a focus of ministry. The members of the congregation have a great interest in reaching out with the gospel to their non-Christian family members, colleagues, schoolmates, and neighbors. They carry this burden in their heart and expect the church to include in the church calendar special opportunities for them to take their acquaintances along so they can hear the gospel. There are other ways in which opportunity is given, some more informal, some even social, allowing non-Christians to come to fellowship in a less formal and less "intimidating" setting. It takes a great deal of courage and spiritual willingness for a non-Christian to come to church and be involved in the worship service. Usually this follows other efforts, which have been accepted, and the person is "comfortable" to enter into a Christian house of worship.

Now we are speaking of the established church in America. Do our congregations have some focus upon non-Christians? Is this only in other countries and not here in the USA?

The purpose of this article is not to belabor a point or try to prove that our congregations ought to include in their outreach ministry one for non-Christians. We can understand clearly that America is not Singapore, nor are we blind to

the differences. We understand clearly our history and the different circumstances of the Reformed churches in America today. We appreciate our place in the development of the truths of the gospel and our Reformed distinctives. All of this is reason for thanksgiving to God. The bottom line before God is that our outreach ministry must always include those who are outside the kingdom and who know not the Lord Jesus as their Savior and Lord. This might lead us to a futile debate whether Arminians are lost or saved, a judgment that is not ours to make. We must only discern whether Arminianism is the lie or not, and we must do that without compromise. Our purpose here, however, is to address the question, are there around us those who openly and without any reservation show no interest in the gospel of grace and are deluded in their unbelief? These people are unchurched, adhere to cults, or hold to strange religions. Such people are non-Christians, clear and simple. There are plenty of these people around us here in America.

Mission work has these people in view. They are without Christ. "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (I John 5:12). Our evangelism work must be directed to such as well. Our members must know how to relate to non-Christians. This is not a matter of choice; this comes under the divine mandate of Christ to His church. No matter how we may judge the ecclesiastical world today, no matter how we view our place in the church world today, we must include in our mission or evangelism work, whatever we call it, outreach to the non-Christian. This relates to the outreach ministry in our local congregations. It also relates to our domestic and foreign mission work. The real burden of every one of us is to bring the gospel to those who are without Christ and without God in the world.

Understanding this, we also appreciate the need for gospel services from time to time.

The advantages of such services can be identified.

First, the scheduling of such services will help the entire congregation to focus on the importance of bringing the gospel to those who are lost in sin and unbelief. Obviously, the success of such efforts will depend on the members of the congregation taking such persons to the service. Hardly ever do non-Christians walk into the church service apart from honest effort and invitations by the members themselves. The same is true for any effort to advertise our existence and the gospel we represent by radio, TV, or literature. It is understandable that these media hardly ever draw guests into the church worship service. Much preparatory work has to be done before a member of the congregation can even give such an invitation and reasonably expect a positive answer. When the members know that such a gospel service is going to be forthcoming, they are encouraged to pursue their efforts to prepare a family member, a colleague, a schoolmate, a neighbor, or anyone with whom they come into contact, for such an invitation. Just knowing that the church is interested in such persons encourages every member to be sensitive to the opportunities to take them along to church. It stimulates this activity. In this way we are faithful to Christ's mandate to do it.

Second, as the members respond to their duty to reach out to non-Christians and actually put forth such efforts, they are much encouraged when a special gospel service is held. True enough, they are able to take such a person to any service and be assured that they will hear "mission preaching," the gospel which is so necessary for this non-Christian to hear. But it does not take much awareness to appreciate that a special gospel ser-

vice can meet this need in a better way. Part of the planning for such a gospel service is that the pastor will choose a text that is appropriate. It does no good to say, the entire Bible is the gospel, so why make such a distinction. There is truth to that, of course, but if the purpose of the message is to be certain that the listener will hear God's call to repent and believe in the God of the Bible and to understand why he ought to give serious consideration to becoming a Christian, certain specific texts of the Bible are very helpful in this regard. Anyone who has put forth effort to speak of the gospel to a non-Christian is well aware that he has to know his Bible and be ready to make use of certain passages as they are helpful in teaching what it means to become a Christian. Non-Christians ask certain questions and have certain problems with Christianity, and these have to be addressed to some extent in such a gospel message.


Thirdly, as we mentioned before, the blessing of a special gospel service is that the message can be simplified to make it especially adaptable to those who do not know the Bible or Reformed doctrine. This means that the pastor will put forth effort to present the gospel message in as clear and forthright a manner as he is gifted to do. This takes practice and much effort. I quickly learned when we were requested to conduct such gospel services in Singapore that it took the most effort and longest amount of time just to get that message ready. Pastors probably get some experience

with this when they have to prepare chapel talks for children in grade school. To be effective in such an endeavor, we have to forsake much of our "pastoral posture" and prepare a message geared for children. This also includes doing it in a shorter time than a sermon. Preparing gospel messages is even more difficult because you cannot assume that the listener knows anything about the Bible or theological terms. Concepts must be presented clearly, and complete thoughts must be expressed in as succinct a manner as possible. All pastors benefit from such exercise, and if we have special gospel services from time to time, it would give them opportunity to develop this skill.

Fourthly, as we indicated in previous articles, there are among our own members those who are not truly converted to God for various reasons. Holding such gospel services will give the pastor opportunity to speak directly to them and bring the gospel to them. Yes, this is done throughout the preaching in a regular manner, yet the message at a gospel service may be helpful and be used by God to bring the call of the gospel to such persons with greater force and emphasis.

Finally, you might ask, what if no non-Christians come to such a church service, is it then a failure, and should the effort then be abandoned? This is an important point to address because it is not certain that even with the best efforts God may work sufficiently in a non-Christian's heart that he is willing to accompany one of our members

to the worship service. You may discover that if you are able to instruct your congregation in this important and necessary work, the response will be very small. Suppose that happens, should we then abandon the scheduling of gospel services and settle for other means to minister to the unchurched? Let me answer that question this way: in addition to holding before the congregation the necessity of their daily awareness to reach out to non-Christians, by conducting gospel services, there is the advantage that the congregation learns from the pastor how to speak to non-Christians. The gospel service is an excellent opportunity to teach the congregation how to speak to non-Christians. The cumulative effect of such services is that the congregation learns how to witness to those who are without. This is very important and a great blessing.

If these articles may accomplish something positive among us, my prayer is that they will help us focus on the object of missions. All too readily we look about us and decide to build the church by those who are already Christians and, even more pointedly, those who are closest to us in their faith and practice. This is relevant and important for our outreach. But if we do not get beyond this viewpoint, we fail our Lord really to carry out His mandate to us to make disciples of all nations. Jesus had in mind lost souls, those who were without the church, non-Christians. We ought also to have such souls in view as we seek to be obedient to our Master in the established church. 

All Around Us

Rev. Kenneth Koole

■ Australian Muslims Take Pastors to Court over "Vilification"

Religious vilification. At least that is the charge. As Patrick Goodenough, a Bureau Chief for the Pacific Rim news network, re-

ports:

Two Christian pastors in Australia will appear in court next month to face complaints brought by Muslims who accuse them of vilifying Islam.

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Their appearance in a legal tribunal in the state of Victoria is the culmination of an 18-month dispute between a Christian group that organized a seminar on Islam and three Muslims who attended it.

The three claimed a speaker at the seminar had incited "fear and hatred" against Muslims and, backed by the state's Islamic Council, took their case to a special state commission operating under controversial new hate legislation.

The Christian group, Catch the Fire Ministries, denied the vilification claims, saying the seminar had merely informed Christians about Islam and its teachings, as set out in the Quran and other religious texts.

Acting under Victoria's new Racial and Religious Tolerance Act, the complainants took their case to the state commission, but attempts to resolve it through conciliation failed.

This is a case that bears watching. It is what one might call a landmark or test case. Notice the reference to "controversial new hate legislation." (This, of course, is legislation that covers what we in the States now know as "hate crimes," a whole new category of law in Western jurisprudence.) The Muslim accusers are taking advantage of this recently passed legislation to see how broadly it can be interpreted. Can it be used to suppress what heretofore in Western democracies has fallen under religious liberty and freedom of speech? These Muslims intend to find out.

The case is now before the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, a body which operates like a court and not only can impose various fines, but also, by implication, should the defendants be found guilty, declare all propagation of similar views towards the Muslim religion and teaching as "hate language" and hence illegal and punishable. This would mean that, in time, you can forget about

exposing the errors and evils of the Muslim religion throughout Australia. It will be contrary to civil law.

What is of interest, first of all, is how unprovoked the complaint and accusation was, and second, who it is these Muslims are bringing the accusation against, namely, a certain Daniel Scot, who, irony of ironies, had to flee Pakistan less than two decades ago because the Muslim leaders there threatened violence against him. He was charged with blasphemy and threatened with imprisonment and possible execution for preaching Christ Jesus and then daring to call Mohammed a false prophet. This is the man they are charging with misrepresenting the Muslim religion. And it is Christianity that is the religion that promotes hatred and violence against other religions, not the Muslim religion. Such accusations are being given serious hearing by those who are now in charge of Western law. Unbelievable. I am tempted to say, "Only in America!" But I guess it is true in Australia as well these days.

Mr. Goodenough goes on to report:

Facing the complaint is Catch the Fire pastor Danny Nalliah, who has worked with the underground Christian church in Saudi Arabia, and seminar speaker Daniel Scot, an expert in Islamic studies who migrated from Pakistan to Australia to escape religious persecution....

Nalliah said in an earlier interview the three Muslims attended the obviously Christian seminar uninvited, and evidently took offense at what they heard.

"We will not bow down to any pressure, as we have the right to stand for what we believe, in a free and democratic country," he said in a statement this week....

In its written response to the complaint, Catch the Fire ministries rejected allegations that its teaching incited hatred. "It cannot be regarded as controversial that there are passages in the

Quran...[and other important religious texts] which could and do incite believers in Islam to violence and hatred of non-Muslims. These passages are well-known, and widely cited by terrorist groups," it said.

"Exposing the roots of this problem within Islam is not the same thing as inciting hatred. Since Christians are one of the named targets of jihad fighting in the Quran, they have a right and a duty to be well informed about this aspect of Islam."

The Barnabas Fund, UK-based Christian charity working in Islamic societies, is closely watching the Australia case. In a briefing, it said the fact that Scot was one of the defendants was "bitterly ironic," as he was forced to flee to Australia after he became "one of the first victims of Pakistan's notorious blasphemy laws."

In 1986, the college he worked for threatened to bring a charge of insulting the prophet Mohammed — an offense carrying the death penalty — unless he converted to Islam. "The charge was brought after he refused to do so and explained his belief that his spiritual salvation could come only from Jesus Christ, and not Mohammad," the Barnabas Fund said.

"Having fled religious discrimination in Pakistan, Scot again finds himself accused of a similar crime in Australia, the country in which he originally found refuge. This is an indication of the growing trend to place Islamic teaching and Muslim actions beyond the bounds of criticism, not only in the Islamic world, but also, as a result of misguided ideas of political correctness, in the West as well."

What is taking place in Australia is alarming. It is possible that the charges will be dismissed this time (with warnings, in the interests of appearing evenhanded, that Christians watch their language from now on). Regardless, the die is cast. Law is in place to bring charges about matters that once were protected under freedom of

speech, same as is taking place here in the States. The forces of Antichrist have been given a large club to wield against the sharp truths of the gospel. And sooner or later the charges now being made in Australia will stick, precedent will have been set, and anything that unbelievers find offensive about a Christian statement will be declared unlawful and worthy of legal action.

The specter of the "thought police" that raised its ugly head in Nazi Germany (with its bureaucrats and laws) and then in Communist China now raises its head in Western democracy, and all in the name of equality under law, and of toleration, and civil peace, and freedom from fear, and who knows what else.

It all sounds nice on paper. In reality we know what it is. It is the spirit of Antichrist gathering momentum as it gallops along.

■ Meantime, Just to the North of US

One wonders of late whether there is any headline social news that does not have to do with homosexuality in some shape or form. Worthy of note (and in connection with the above mentioned proceedings in Australia) is legislation passed in Canada September 17. Lawrence Morahan, staff writer for Crosswalk news, in an article entitled "Canada Votes to Include 'Sexual Orientation' in Hate Crimes Laws," reports:

The Canadian Parliament's approval of legislation to extend hate crimes protection to homosexuals will likely give impetus to calls for similar legislation in the United States, family groups told CNSNews.com Thursday [Sept. 18].

Brian Rushfeldt, executive director of the Canada Family Action Coalition, said the Canadian Parliament had taken a detrimental turn Wednesday when it passed C-250 a day after it voted against a motion to affirm mar-

riage as a union between a man and a woman.

C-250 amends the hate propaganda section of the Criminal Code to add homosexuals to a list of groups legally protected from incitement of hatred. Rushfeldt said C-250 was "ill-defined" and could be used to silence free speech and even make it illegal to quote verses from the Bible.

Despite claims by the supporters of this bill to the contrary, the simple fact is that the implications of this bill are far reaching, both in regards to freedom of speech and basic morality. You can be sure it will not be long before homosexuals, like the Muslims, will be lining up in courts claiming that Christians who quote Bible texts condemning their "beliefs" and practices and then teaching their children that, apart from repentance, such are under the judgment of God, are guilty of hate crimes. Sooner than we may think, Protestant Reformed parents and ministers, along with others, are going to be warned to watch what they say about such groups and their practices. There will be another special species protected by law.

And the criticism that the bill, due to its ambiguous ("ill-defined") language in key sections, has dangerous and far-reaching implications is valid as well. Significant is the (protective) bill's use of the term "sexual-orientation" in key sections. This means that the bill in time can be understood and extended to protect not just homosexuality, but every defiled "sexual orientation" and practice known to man, as, for instance, pedophilia, sadism, bestiality, and all the rest. The assurances of the supporters of the bill that this simply is not so, and that such is "fear-mongering" of the worst sort, has about as much weight as Hitler's assurances that he had no intention of invading Poland at any foreseeable date.

Let the neighbors south of Canada's borders beware. As Rushfeldt asserts

...homosexual advocacy groups and their supporters will use the passing of C-250 to push for federal hate crimes legislation in the United States. "Of course [Sen.] Ted Kennedy, who has been pushing this for a while ... will use this no doubt to try and further his hate crime legislation," Rushfeldt said.

Alan Spears, president of the Alliance Defense Fund, said laws passed in Canada influence Americans more than Americans realize. The U.S. Supreme Court cited foreign law as a guiding light in its June ruling on sodomy laws, Sears pointed out....

Robert Bork, a former federal court of appeals judge, warned in a Sept 8 speech at the American Enterprise Institute that the internationalization of law was further along than many Americans believed.

It is obvious that the pro-homosexual movement (and its silencing of all opposition) continues to gather alarming influence.

In this connection, the injury the Roman Catholic church has done to itself as any kind of creditable critic and opponent of such practices is significant.

The official, public stand of the Roman Catholic Church against homosexual practices and its condemnation of such unions has long been one of the main hindrances to legislation approving of and legalizing this immorality. Rome has been a political power to contend with. Once when Rome spoke, politicians and lawmakers listened. One would think that would be true today. According to the website — yourcongress.com, presently 24 members of the US Senate and 120 members of the US House are Roman Catholic. That's influence and clout.

A few months back the Vatican had some stern things to say against the lawfulness of homosexual unions. It uttered strongly worded warnings to Roman Catholic lawmakers when it came to voting to legalize such unions. The

trouble is that Rome, by its own recently exposed behavior both in the immoral behavior of its priests and the cover-up by its bishops, has done itself incalculable damage in being any creditable voice of rectitude in this area of life.

In a report entitled "Vatican Raises Political/Moral Stakes on Homosexual Marriage Issue," Steve Brown, of *Crosswalk News Service*, writes:

[Late August], the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith released a 12-page document reiterating its stance on homosexual marriage and directed in part to Catholic politicians.

The Vatican document stated: "When legislation in favour of the recognition of homosexual unions is proposed for the first time in a legislative assembly, the Catholic law-maker has a moral duty to express his opposition clearly and publicly and to vote against it. To vote in favour of a law so harmful to the common good is gravely immoral."

The document also emphasized that there are "absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way

similar or even remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and family." It goes on to say: "Marriage is holy, while homosexual acts go against the natural moral law."

...The Vatican also weighed in on the issue of adoption by same-sex couples, stating that such actions create "obstacles" in the 'normal' development of children. "They would be deprived of the experience of either fatherhood or motherhood," the document stated. "Allowing children to be adopted by persons living in such unions would actually mean doing violence to these children, in the sense that their condition of dependency would be used to place them in an environment that is not conducive to their full human development. This is gravely immoral and in open contradiction to the principle, recognized also in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, that the best interests of the child, as the weaker and more vulnerable party, are to be the paramount consideration in every case."

But the Vatican's rebuke prompted one political activist to respond by including the Catho-


lic Church's priest sex scandals in the discussion.

"The Catholic Church needs to get its own house in order before it starts admonishing Congress or elected officials on what proper behavior is," Mark Mead, Log Cabin Republicans director of public affairs, told CNSNews.com.

Marianne Duddy [a representative of lesbian Catholics] agreed, calling the Vatican's position on homosexual marriage "absolutely appalling" given the recent clergy sex scandals.

"The Vatican made clear that its priorities were the reputation of the Church, its priests, and maintaining its finances," Duddy said. "Children were not the greatest concern there. The Vatican has no credibility on this issue whatsoever."

With Rome's ability to influence its "own" lawmakers' stand on the legalization of same sex unions all but gone, the floodgates appear about to open. And with that inevitably will come the right to adopt children. What that will mean, one does not even care to think about.

Talk about handwriting on the wall. 

Special Articles

The Debate: "Is the Doctrine of Common Grace Reformed?"

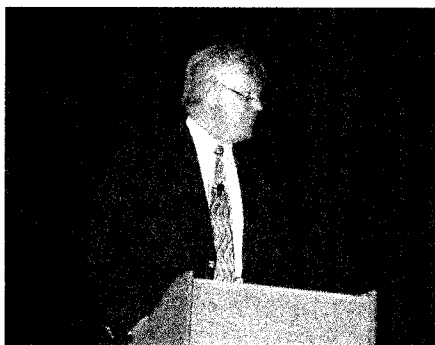
It was, by virtually any standard, a remarkable evening. There was the remarkable debate between Dr. Richard Mouw and Prof. David Engelsma on the subject of common grace.

Rev. VanBaren is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Dr. Mouw himself had generated some renewed interest in the subject when he lectured on the subject at Calvin College. Later the lectures were placed in book form and titled: *He Shines in All That's Fair*. Likely the book would not have attracted much attention—except that Prof. David Engelsma examined the book and answered its arguments

in a series of editorials ("He Shines in All That's Fair—and Curses All That's Foul.") in the *Standard Bearer*. More recently, these editorials also were published in book form, *Common Grace Revisited*.

The Evangelism Committee of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church contacted these two men and asked them to debate publicly



Prof. David Engelsma

on the subject. Both agreed. A time and place were determined: September 12 at Sunshine Community (Christian Reformed) Church.

The committee announced this debate in church bulletins for an extended length of time. They advertised it in the *Grand Rapids Press*. And the *Press* itself had a lengthy write-up of the coming event. The debate was advertised as well on the Reformed Witness Hour radio broadcast.

Surely, it would seem, the evangelism committee was aiming far too high. The subject, though of great importance, is not one that commonly generates much interest, except perhaps in Protestant Reformed circles. The generation that went through the period of controversy in 1924 has almost entirely departed this earthly scene. A second generation, which has heard of the controversy directly from their parents, is also aging and many have departed to glory. The current generation views the issue as a matter of ancient history and often cannot get too enthusiastic about that sort of subject. Within the Christian Reformed Church mention is made of the controversy in their church history books, but most hardly know about the subject or of that ancient debate. So possibly a few of the older, gray heads, would attend—but hardly would one expect the youth or middle-aged individuals to show much interest.

The format of debate also would hardly seem the way to generate interest. Debates have gone out of style many years ago. Who

would come out to hear an old-fashioned debate?

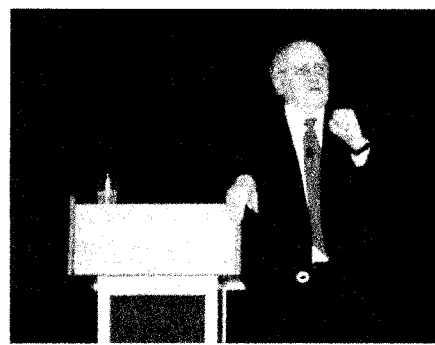
The selected location, Sunshine Community Church, also seemed to be an unwise choice. That church seats 2,291 people! Surely in the whole of Grand Rapids one could not find sufficient interested people to begin filling an auditorium of that size! Then there were also other gatherings of that evening: sporting events, weddings, and more that would further reduce the size of the audience.

What a surprise, then, it was to see the auditorium first filling rather slowly—then ever more rapidly until it was filled to overflowing. Chairs had to be brought in to accommodate the last arrivals!

If any came believing that the subject was “dated” and really irrelevant for our own time, the two speakers convincingly showed that this was not true. It is a relevant subject, worthy of debate and further discussion. The attention of those assembled demonstrated that the subject was truly interesting and deserving of study.

At the conclusion of the evening the moderator pointed out that there were a large number of young people present. This, too, was encouraging. It showed that even the youth considered it profitable to assemble to hear what the debaters had to say about the subject.

It was pleasant, too, to see the number of people from Calvin College and from the Christian Reformed Church (and other denominations as well). Certainly the debate gave them opportunity to examine anew this subject for themselves. Perhaps, just perhaps, the



Dr. Richard Mouw

evening will generate an interest that will lead to further study and discussion.

The format for the evening was nicely designed. Each debater was given 30 minutes to present his case on the subject. After the intermission, each speaker was given 15 minutes' time for rebuttal. This was followed by three questions each (presented in advance) submitted to the opposing speaker. Finally, questions from the audience were answered. From the many questions submitted, each debater was allowed to select those that would be given to the opposing debater. Significant questions were asked and answered. Though the program lasted about three hours, none seemed bored or impatient. It was truly a fascinating evening.

The moderator, Mr. Rick Noorman, did an excellent job mixing a little humor as he introduced speakers and subject. And he carefully adhered to the announced format.

The debaters commendably presented their differing positions on the subject. Dr. Richard Mouw mentioned at the outset, as he also did in his book, that the subject of common grace deserved continued study and discussion. He acknowledged that the subject had been largely ignored in Christian Reformed circles in past years. He, both in his book and through this debate, intended to bring up this significant subject for further consideration.

Prof. David Engelsma, on his part, expressed great appreciation that Dr. Mouw in his book and in

the debate was willing to treat this subject publicly. Because of this willingness of Dr. Mouw to write and speak on the subject, it was being brought again to the attention of those outside of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

A frequently asked question after this remarkable evening was, "Who won the debate?" It would be difficult to answer that question. What standards would one use to judge? And who would do the judging? I would assume that those who came to listen, and were already convinced of the error of common grace, would insist that Prof. Engelsma was clearly the "winner." On the other hand, some of those who held to the teaching of a common grace of God were heard saying (quietly) "Amen" to the arguments of Dr. Mouw.


Briefly, I would personally judge that Dr. Mouw eloquently defended the teaching of a common grace of God on the basis of "feeling." He mentioned examples of horrific crimes of rape and murder of Muslims. He emphasized that he, and any Christian, felt deep pity toward such people and great revulsion toward the perpetrators of this violence. He spoke of his

(and any normal person's) admiration towards the skill of a Tiger Woods in executing a perfect putt in a golf tournament. He could admire a skilled baseball team that became world champions. He mentioned the great musical compositions of the unbeliever that are enjoyed also by many believers—Protestant Reformed believers too. Our feelings towards those who suffer, as well as feelings of pleasure because of those who have great talents, must be a reflection of God's good feelings towards these unbelievers. How can God condemn those who have such great talent? How can He not pity those unbelievers who often are treated so shamefully?

Dr. Mouw indicated that the Protestant Reformed denial of common grace leads to a separation from the affairs of society and an isolationism contrary to the mandates of Scripture.

Though Dr. Mouw did mention a few portions from the confessions and Scripture, it seemed to this listener that these references did not defend the proposition of the debate: "*Is Common Grace Reformed?*"

Prof. Engelsma adhered to the subject of the debate. He pointed out from the Reformed creeds those passages that contradict the idea of a "common grace." He showed that the one reference in the creeds to a "common grace" was when it was condemned as used by the Arminians. He pointed to relevant passages of Scripture upon which the teachings of the confessions rest. He reminded Dr. Mouw that common grace leads to the destruction of the antithesis and ultimately to universalism.

But each ought to evaluate the arguments on his own—and in light of Scripture and the confessions. Audiocassettes and videos are available (\$3.00 for a cassette and \$12.50 for a video). As of September 25 there were 201 audiocassettes ordered and 213 videos. Doubtless that number will have increased by the time the reader sees this report. Those who would still wish to obtain cassettes or videos should write: Evangelism Committee, Southeast Protestant Reformed Church, 1535 Cambridge Ave., SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49506. Or one can order from Joel Dykstra at 616-878-1218 or e-mail: joelykstra1210@msn.com. 

Progress in Pittsburgh

Sunday, September 21, 2003 was an exciting and joyful day for the saints on the field in Pittsburgh. It was also an important day for our churches in the work of missions. On this Sunday, ten members of the core group in Pittsburgh made confession of

faith. This is a significant development in the work of our churches on the Pittsburgh field, another step towards the organization of a Protestant Reformed congregation in this city.

Because the Domestic Mission Committee (DMC) understood how important this occasion was, they asked me to go as a representative of the DMC to witness the confessions of faith. Besides my wife and me, there were many other visitors

at the mission to share in this joyous occasion. There were representatives (two elders and a deacon with their families) from the calling church for Eastern Home Missions (Southwest PRC). There was also a group of about ten young adults from the Grand Rapids and Chicago areas that made the trip. Besides this there were other visitors from our Protestant Reformed congregations.

Because the members of the

Rev. Kleyn is pastor of Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

mission and Rev. Mahtani (our missionary in Pittsburgh) also understood the importance of the event, they had made an extra effort to invite visitors to the service at which the confessions took place. School teachers from the Christian school in which they worship, friends and family members of those making confession of faith, as well as former members of the mission group were in attendance. In all, there were around 120 people at the service.

I preached for Rev. Mahtani in the morning to a full house (chairs are set up for worship in the library of Trinity Christian School), and the confessions of faith took place in the evening service. The ten who made confession of faith were made up of an older man with a Presbyterian background, two couples and a single man who are a part of the original group, another couple that joined soon after the beginning, and Rev. Mahtani's two oldest sons (Jonathan and David).

The weekend spent in Pittsburgh was exciting. God has blessed the work of our churches in Pittsburgh very much. The ten who made confession of faith under Rev. Mahtani's preaching have grown in their knowledge of and love for the Reformed faith, and particularly our Protestant Reformed distinctives. Their confession of faith is their saying, "We want to be Protestant Reformed because we love the same truth that you hold to and preach." What an answer to prayers!

The weekend was exciting be-

cause in these confessions of faith we witnessed the truth that God gathers a catholic church, from all sorts of people (different ethnic groups, ages, backgrounds, etc.). Our missionary is himself a Singaporean-Indian. There was a black couple with eight children who made confession of faith. Many of the others who made confession are from a Roman Catholic background. There was an older man, in his 70s, who made public confession.

The excitement of the weekend also came out in the enthusiasm of both the missionary and the group. Rev. Mahtani makes mission work look like exciting work. Enthusiasm flows from him, so much so, that it is contagious. This comes out especially in his preaching, but also in the way he relates to the people, mixes with visitors, and speaks of his work. The group is filled with this same enthusiasm, and it not just empty feelings. There is a real first love on the field. One man, who was Roman Catholic, speaks of when he first heard Protestant Reformed preaching. He wanted, he said, to stand on the housetop and tell the whole world he had found the truth, wanted to go knocking on doors, wanted to tell all his family and friends about it. Another man tells of how when he first heard of the PRC mission, he wanted to come to the worship services but stayed away because he didn't have a good pair of shoes. So he saved hard and got his shoes, and has never stopped coming in the four years since. You see and hear this

first love in all your interaction there. In the worship services — big nods of agreement, even a reverently spoken "Amen" here and there during the sermons and at the end of prayers. In the singing — an enthusiasm that cannot wait for the organ to get started with the first stanza so that they can sing the "psalms" rather than empty and fluffy Pentecostal hymns.

Part of the excitement of the weekend was also the contacts that the mission has. The number of visitors on that Sunday showed that this work is prospering, that contacts are being made, that people are coming in to hear the preaching and to be instructed. God is giving fruit to this work. There were, in my estimation, twice as many visitors on Sunday as there were members of the core group (this is not counting the visitors from our churches).

However, in all this excitement — and we should be excited about this too! — we must remember that mission work is not all roses. Mission work can be lonely work — you are on your own, miles away from the churches. Mission work can be tedious and slow work — people with lots of questions, and slow in their grasp of the truth. Mission work can be discouraging work — lack of fruit.

Here, we as members of the churches can play an important role in encouraging the missionaries and those gathered by the work of missions. It is not hard to find the missionaries' addresses. Let's use them by writing them notes of encouragement.




Also, if possible, we should pay a visit to the mission fields. The visit of many PR church members and officebearers to Pittsburgh on the weekend of the confessions of faith was a great encouragement to the saints being gathered there. They want to be one with us. That means not only that they desire to be one with us in truth and faith, but also that they get to know us and know our support and care and love for them, and that they get to know our names and faces.

If you live in the Grand Rapids or Chicago area, Pittsburgh is the ideal field to visit. It is only seven hours away. A weekend spent there will be profitable. A visit to the field shows your interest in this work, will be an encouragement to the missionary and the group, and will also be of great benefit to you personally.

Anyone visiting the field can be sure he will be met with abounding hospitality. Rev.

Mahtani has a special hotel rate organized for all visitors to the mission (\$49.95/night at the Holiday Inn). Besides, Pittsburgh is a beautiful city. For more information one can refer to Rev. Mahtani's monthly newsletters or call him at (412) 371-2299.

I encourage you to spend a weekend in Pittsburgh and share in the churches' exciting work of missions!

May God continue to bless this work. 

Report of Classis East

September 10, 2003
Byron Center
Protestant Reformed Church

Classis East met in regular session on Wednesday, September 10, at the Byron Center PRC. Each congregation was represented by two delegates. Also in attendance were the synodical deputies from Classis West and two representatives from the Wingham, Ontario OCRC. Rev. Rodney Kleyn served his initial stint as chair of this classis.

The main item of business on the agenda was the examination of Pastor-Elect William Langerak, who had accepted the call to Southeast PRC. Pastor-Elect Langerak preached a specimen sermon and then endured several hours of oral examination. Classis approved his examination and authorized Southeast to proceed with his ordination and installation. Congratulations

were expressed to Pastor-Elect Langerak and his wife, and thanksgiving was given to God who, in His grace, supplied our churches with another undershepherd.


Classis also considered the overture to synod from two members of the Cornerstone PRC requesting that synod appoint a committee to study the matter of proper Bible translation and to advise synod regarding the adoption of a modern Bible translation for use in public worship. This overture was declared to be illegally before the classis on the ground that the requirements of Article 46 of the Church Order had not been met. Those who present overtures must take into account and address previous decisions of a classis or synod in order for the overture to be considered legally before an ecclesiastical body. In this case, for example, the decision(s) recorded in the *Acts of Synod 1960* regarding

Bible translations needed to be addressed but, in the judgment of classis, was not.

Classis also received information via the Contact Committee of the PRC that the congregation at Wingham, Ontario would be petitioning the January 2004 Classis for membership in the PRC.

In other business, classical appointments were given to Byron Center and Hudsonville. Classis appointed its church visitors to investigate the viability of the Covenant PRC and to inquire particularly about its evangelism activity. The church visitors are to report on this matter at the January 2004 meeting of classis.

The expenses of classis amounted to \$1,225.83. Classis will meet next at the Grandville PRC on January 14, 2004.

Respectfully submitted,
Jon J. Huiskens,
Stated Clerk 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Mission Activities

The council of the Hull, Iowa PRC, the calling church for our denomination's mission work in

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

Ghana, and our Foreign Mission Committee have approved the service of Mr. and Mrs. Justin (Cathie) Koole as missionary assistants to that country. Justin is the oldest son of Rev. and Mrs. Kenneth Koole, and Cathie is a daughter of Gary and Judy Kaptein of Faith

PRC. We are thankful that God has opened the way for them to serve our churches in this capacity. They will relieve Doug Bekkering on the field as soon as it is possible for them to make the temporary move to Ghana.

Our churches' missionary to

Pittsburgh, PA, Rev. J. Mahtani, and Rev. D. Overway, pastor of Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, N.J., visited the saints in Allentown, PA the first weekend of October. Plans were made for a Bible study Friday evening, house visits on Saturday, and two worship services on Sunday.

In harmony with the decision of Synod 2002 regarding confession of faith on the mission field, the consistory of Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI, our denomination's calling church for the mission work in Pittsburgh, approved the confession of faith of ten individuals of the Pittsburgh Mission. This confession took place Sunday evening, September 21, in Pittsburgh. The representatives from the council of Southwest reported that this service was a blessed and joyful event. What a joy to see the fruit of Christ's Spirit and the preaching of His Word manifested in this way. It was also very encouraging to see Pittsburgh's place of worship packed with visitors from the area and from our churches. We rejoice with the saints in Pittsburgh over their confession of faith and are thankful to God for this blessed development of our mission work there.

The Covenant PR Fellowship of Northern Ireland in Ballymena, along with their missionary pastor, Rev. A. Stewart, sponsored a lecture in Ballymena Protestant Hall on September 26 entitled, "Why Did God Create the World?— A Tercentenary Appreciation of Jonathon Edwards."

Young Adult Activities

The young adults from our Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI were among the many visitors who helped pack the worship place of the Pittsburgh Mission. They arranged a weekend trip there to fellowship with the saints on the mission field and to witness the confession of faith that took place Sunday, September 21.

The Young Adults of Grace

PRC in Standale, MI were invited to their pastor's home after a recent Sunday evening service for discussion, song, and fellowship. The topic for discussion was "The Late Great Common Grace Debate." Rev. M. Dick hoped to consider things like "Who won, really?" and "How does proper understanding of these issues help us live out our calling?"

The Lord willing, the Immanuel PRC of Lacombe, Alberta, Canada is again planning a Young Adults Retreat to be held July 27-30, 2004 at the Goldeye Conference Center in the beautiful Canadian Rockies. Activities will begin the weekend before, on July 24. The theme for the retreat will be "The Speech of God in Creation." The retreat is open to all single young adults 19 and older. For more information contact Rev. R. Miersma at (403)782-5444 or e-mail rgmiersma@cs.com. You can also look up the Goldeye Conference Center's web page at www.goldeye.org.

Congregation Activities

This year, beginning September 22, a special class called "Through the Bible" began meeting at Grace PRC in Standale, MI. This class was first for the members of Grace, but special invitation was also extended to the community around Grace, including students from Grand Valley State University, to attend as well.

In October the members of Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI could take advantage of two Bible studies offered on Wednesday nights. One class meets on the first and third Wednesdays of the month and continues in the Essentials of Reformed Doctrine catechism book. The other class meets on the second and fourth Wednesday of the month and continues its study of Paul's missionary journeys. There are no age requirements to these classes, and everyone was invited to attend the class of greatest interest to them.


Rev. W. Langerak, newly installed pastor of Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, preached his inaugural sermon on Sunday morning, September 21. He chose for his text Joshua 1:6-9 and preached a sermon under the theme, "The Courage Required of the Gospel Minister." That same week Rev. Langerak was able to join his elders in fall family visitation, and on the following Lord's Day he was also privileged, for the first time, to administer the sacrament of baptism to two infant children of the congregation.

In connection with their congregation's 75th anniversary next year, and the 50th anniversary of the controversy of 1953 this year, the elders of the First PRC in Holland, MI chose the theme "Standing Fast and Holding the Traditions Taught Us," based primarily on II Thessalonians 2:15, for this fall's family visitation theme.

Denomination Activities

The annual RFPA meeting was held on September 25 at Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI. Rev. B. Woudenberg spoke on the theme, "Our Continuing Heritage," outlining, particularly, the basic currents of thought that ran through Rev. H. Hoeksema's theology.

Minister Activities

The Hudsonville, MI PRC has extended a call to Rev. W. Bruinsma, presently serving our churches in the Kalamazoo, MI PRC, to come over and help them. Rev. R. Miersma received the call from the Hull, IA PRC to serve as our denomination's second missionary to Ghana, West Africa. Rev. R. Cammenga declined the call he had been considering to serve as next pastor of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI. Sunday, October 5, Rev. J. Slopsema declined the call he had received from the Byron Center, MI PRC to be their pastor. 

Announcements

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On November 8, 2003, our parents and grandparents,

DAVE and LINDA POORTINGA, will celebrate their 35th wedding anniversary. We give thanks and praise unto our heavenly Father for the earthly parents He has blessed us with. We thank them for their many years of covenant care and instruction given unto us. Our humble prayer is that God may continue to bless them and keep them in His care in the years to come.

- ❖ Rod and Kim Griess
Dana, Noah, Taylor
- ❖ Craig and Tiffany Poortinga
Alexis and Jaden (2 in glory)
- ❖ Sam and Debbie Carson
- ❖ Jordan and Chandra Kamps
Loveland, Colorado

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On August 27, 2003, our parents and grandparents,

RAYMOND and JEAN EZINGA, were blessed to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. We praise and thank God for their godly example, patience, and love they have shown to us their children as they live their lives by God's grace. We pray that God will continue to show His covenant faithfulness through them, bless them in their marriage, and care for them in the years to come.

"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).

- ❖ Steve and Jody Ezinga
Richard, Matthew, Andrew
- ❖ Pamela and Larry Kooienga
Jack and Jennifer
Kelly and James Jansma
Mark, Lee, Paula, Dale
- ❖ Tammy and Robert VanUffelen
Stephanie, Derek, Ashley
Loveland, Colorado

REMINDER:

Heritage Christian High School in South Holland, IL is now in its 3rd year of operation, teaching a full course load as a four-year high school. As we plan for the 2004-2005 school year, we ask qualified Protestant Reformed teachers to consider our need of one additional staff member. Interested individuals, please contact our Administrator, Ralph Medema, at (708) 339-1733 [Ralph.medema@heritagechs.org] or Education Committee Chairman, Andy Birkett, at (708) 895-8214 [andy@preferredwindowanddoor.com]."

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The members of the Hudsonville Ladies' Society express sincere Christian sympathy to our fellow members Florence Key and Stephanie Lanning and to our Bible leader Seminarian Andy Lanning in the death of their mother and great grandmother,

CLARA DYK.

May God comfort them with Psalm 73:24, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel and afterward receive me to glory."

Barb Dykstra, vice-president
Donna Boven, secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of Georgetown PRC express their sincere Christian sympathy to fellow officebearers Pastor Ronald VanOverloop and Randy VanOverloop and their families in the death of their mother,

JUNE VAN OVERLOOP.

May the words of Romans 14:8 be a comfort for them: "For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."

Bruce Jabaay, clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies' Society of Hudsonville PRC extend their Christian sympathy to the VanOverloop families in the death of their wife, mother, grandmother, and great grand mother,

JUNE VAN OVERLOOP.

As a faithful member of our society, June will be missed, but we too must remember Christ's prayer for us in John 17:24, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am: that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me."

Seminarian Andy Lanning, president
Donna Boven, secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Adult Fellowship of Hope PRC in Redlands, CA expresses their Christian sympathy to fellow members Gary and Mary Gaastra, Randy and Nancy Hendriks, and Charles and Beth VanMeeteren and their families in the death of their beloved grandmother and great-grandmother,

MRS. ANN VAN MEETEREN.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).

Rev. M. VanderWal, President
Trudi Hopkins, Secretary

Reformed Witness Hour

Topics for November

Date	Topic	Text
November 2	"Blessings of a Godly Marriage (1)"	Psalm 128
November 9	"Blessings of a Godly Marriage (2)"	Psalm 128
November 16	"Whose I Am"	Acts 27:23
November 23	"All of God, None of Self"	I Chronicles 29:13-15
November 30	"Appearance of God's Grace (1)"	Titus 2:11