

# THE *April 1, 2004* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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Volume 80 ♦ Number 13



# Come, See the Place!

*"And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay."*

Matthew 28:5, 6

**T**he women feared indeed! They came with fear to the grave early that morning on the first day of the week. They had witnessed the horrible death of their beloved Lord upon the tree of the cross. They grieved at the shame He endured at the hands of men. They trembled before the power of God's wrath executed in the three hours of darkness. They were deeply troubled by their Lord's cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Then He had been taken from them by the cold hand of death. Their hearts were rent asunder by their Lord's death. They were also filled with fear. How much light they had by His teaching! Now that

light was extinguished. How much peace they felt in His company! Now there was only restless brooding. What would their future hold? Would they suffer the same ridicule and scorn, perhaps the very same death?

In that fear they came to the grave where their Lord had been laid.

Approaching nigh to that grave, they met with another cause for fear!

That cause, and that fear, was altogether different.

This fear was the fear of sinners before the glory of a holy and majestic God. The angels, sent by God to bear these glad tidings, brought with them the glory of God. Before that brilliant glory these women were filled with great fear. They were weak creatures. They were sinners. Before that glory they felt their sins and their corruption as never before. It lay upon them as a heavy weight. Where was the peace they thought they possessed? Would not this burning fire of God's glory consume them utterly?

Fear of men! Fear of God! Where would they turn? Where

was any comfort and peace to be found?

That fear of men must be banished. Their fear of God must not be terror at impending destruction. That fear must give way to peace. A proper, holy fear it must rather be. Their fear of God must rather be mingled with joy and love. It must be that the great God of heaven and earth has saved them by great and terrible works, works far beyond their ability to conceive. Their tumult of soul must be stilled.

Peace is the purpose of the glorious, glad tidings given on this first day of the week.

He is not here: for He is risen, as He said!

The angel himself speaks these words. What a difference this must make! Suddenly, his glory is no longer a thing to terrify! That glory now gives these words all the weight necessary to cut through every doubt and every fear. By grace, that glory drives the glad tidings to the depths of the soul, banishing all dread. There is now peace and calm.

He is risen!

The Lord had been taken from the women by the enemy. He had

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borne the shame and ridicule of His enemies. The crown of thorns, the lash of the whip, the nails, the cross, the spear He endured, even as instruments to bring Him to death. Into that cold hand of death His enemies thought to have given Christ over forever.

But now death is subject to Him! Over His enemies and their horrible instruments He has triumphed gloriously! Let them now fall silent, put wholly to shame.

Three days earlier the Lord had left these women. Lonely must have been the way to Calvary's hill. No room had there been for the disciples, let alone the women. The Mediator must carry on His work alone. Alone He must bear the wrath of God. He must be cut off out of the land of the living. Alone He must suffer in absolute darkness the hell into which He descended. Alone He must sink, even into death and the grave.

But now He has returned from death and the grave. He has returned to be their Savior and Lord! He is risen!

As the words of the angel filled the ears of these women, their hearts are filled with joy. Their sorrow is gone. How great their Lord is! They had known something of His greatness by His past words and works. How much greater He must be by His resurrection! How much more glorious is He by His triumph over death and the grave! He is the Lord of glory!

Of that glorious triumph, which gives true peace and joy, there is absolute proof. Not only does the angel have something to tell, he has something to show. He ushers the women into the tomb with the words, "Come, see the place where the Lord lay!"

Those words were of great significance.

The women had before seen that place of which the angel spoke. They beheld Joseph and Nicodemus lay the body of their dead Lord there. Earlier on Sunday morning they had fully expected to find that

body in exactly the same place. To that body they wished to attend, bestowing upon it the last care they might ever give.

Apart from the glorious words of the angel, an empty tomb would only have increased their sorrow. They could have only supposed that someone had stolen the body of their dead Lord. Frustrated would have been their desire to bestow this last act of love. The one final opportunity to show honor to their departed Master would have been denied them. Their Lord's body was no longer there.

But with the words spoken by the angel, all is joy. The heavy burden is lifted from their shoulders. Fear is banished. Peace now floods their soul.

Now that grave is a place of great joy. For where the Lord lay He lies no more. He has been raised. The emptiness of His grave is the joyful proof that the Lord lives.

He lives!

Hear with the ear of faith the call of the angel, "Come, see the place where the Lord lay." See with your eye of faith the empty tomb. Know and understand that there the Lord did lie, but no longer. He has been raised by the mighty power of God.

Rejoice in that empty grave! Nothing there to see! Empty and void!

Grand and eloquent is the testimony of this empty grave, accompanied by the words of the heavenly messenger! It speaks of great things. It speaks not only of the glory of the Lord who had been laid there, but also of our salvation by that glory.

We bring to that empty grave our questions. From it we hear answers most blessed!

It bears witness of the forgiveness of our sins. The One whose body was laid there died for our sins. In our stead He died on the cross. At Calvary He took our guilt upon Himself, that we might be declared innocent. Upon that cross He died, going to death for us His

people. Only by suffering that bitter end might He wholly remove our sin.

Was that suffering complete? Did He remove all our guilt and sin? Did God find the sacrifice of His dear Son the perfect atonement for all our sins? Might there be a sin remaining, one neglected out of so many, left uncovered? Might there be a sin so heinous that it could not be covered?

Come, see the place where the Lord lay!

That sacrifice is the full payment. Our sins are forgiven. We are given the title to heaven, our inheritance by His perfect sacrifice alone. Nothing can possibly be added! Nothing was left undone!

That empty grave also testifies to us of our present condition. We sin often, and we sin grievously against God. We determine to obey, and we disobey. We seek the glory of God, but we fall far short. We find within us every token of the corruption of sin. Is there no deliverance? Must we groan, despairing of ever doing anything good, anything pleasing to God?

Come, see the place where the Lord lay!

Just as Christ was raised from the dead, so are we raised up to a new life. Joined as we are to Christ by the Holy Spirit of Christ, the chains of sin are broken. We are freed to love and serve God. So must we also, having reckoned ourselves dead unto sin by the death of Christ, reckon ourselves to be alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Risen with Christ! The empty grave is the destruction of sin's dominion, never again to reign.

That empty grave also testifies to us of our future. Apart from that empty grave, our future would be truly bleak. Should the Lord tarry, we will follow the generation before us into the grave. There our bodies will lie, undergoing corruption. They will fall into the very dust from which they came. Generation after generation, born, dying, buried, cor-



rupted beyond any possible restoration. Where is the hope? Where is the comfort? How can we possibly bury our beloved in their graves in hope? Why should we have any hope or confidence, before the truth of our own death?


Come, see the place where the Lord lay!

Just as Christ is risen, so also shall we who die in the Lord rise in Him and by Him. Through

death unto life! As Christ has risen, so shall He cause all His elect to rise again on the blessed day of His return. He shall utter His voice, and the dead shall rise. The elect He shall conform, even in their bodies, to the pattern of His blessed, glorious body. All of them shall He take to live with Him forever and ever.

His empty grave will become our empty graves!

By faith hear the word of the angel that drives out all fear. "He is not here: for he is risen, as he said." By faith see the place where the Lord lay. Rejoice in His glorious resurrection! No fear: only wondrous peace! Justified, sanctified, glorified. All by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Come, see the place where the Lord lay!" 

## Editorially Speaking

In this issue of the *Standard Bearer*, we begin a three-part series on the history and present doctrinal and spiritual condition of the Dutch Reformed church in South Africa. The articles feature the *Gereformeerde Kerken van Suid-Africa* (Reformed Churches of South Africa), known popularly as the "Dopper" churches. In the past, this has been the soundest of the Reformed churches in South Africa.

Most readers of the *Standard Bearer* have little knowledge of the Reformed church in South Africa and its present struggles. The only mention of the Reformed churches in South Africa by the religious press in North America has been

castigation of apartheid. The more important issues of faithfulness in doctrine and worship are of no concern to these magazines and journals.

There are theological developments in the Reformed churches in South Africa that are of the greatest interest to all who love the Reformed faith. The report that begins in this issue informs us of these developments.

The author is Mr. Slabbert Le Cornu. Mr. Le Cornu is a fourth-year theological student at the theological school of the Reformed Churches of South Africa in Potchefstroom. We thank him for this account of the Reformed church and faith in South Africa.

The editorial in this issue, interrupting the series on assurance, is the text of a speech given to the students and faculty of Covenant Christian High School in Walker, MI. At the request of the administration of the school, I explained why Reformed Christians, particularly the students at Covenant, ought not to attend the movie *The Passion of the Christ*. The speech was given the morning of February 25. The movie was to be released to the public that evening. Because many have requested a copy of the speech and because the speech may be of benefit to a wider audience, I publish it here.

— DJE 

## Editorial

# Why a Reformed Christian May Not Attend the Movie, The Passion of the Christ, and What He or She Must Witness to Those Who Do\*

\* The speech given to the students and faculty of Covenant Christian High School, Grand Rapids, MI the morning of February 25, 2004. The movie opened to the general public that evening.

Galatians 3:1: O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?

Galatians 3:13: Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law,

being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.

Galatians 6:14: But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.



**T**oday, Hollywood—great enemy of the Christian faith and destroyer of untold number of souls—releases a new movie, *The Passion of the Christ*. Note the date: February 25.

Because the subject of the movie is the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, many Christian leaders, churches, and professing Christians praise the movie, attend the movie, and encourage attendance of the movie. They praise and attend the movie as a religious, spiritual experience.

I warn all of us *against* attending.

Whoever attends the movie will be sinning. The sin will be grievous sin against our beloved Lord Jesus Christ and His glorious cross. It would not be nearly so wicked to attend a filthy, X-rated movie.

I will prove that attending would be sin. The reasons for not attending will also be the witness you can give to others, why they should not attend.

### Blasphemy

To attend the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, would be to make yourself guilty of the blasphemy of the movie. Blasphemy is contemptuous insult of and bold attack on the holy God and our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, by word and by deed. A sinful, shameful human—a Hollywood actor!—dares to impersonate the sinless, glorious Jesus Christ. A corrupt man plays the “man of sorrows.”

Blasphemy!

Besides, Christ is now risen from the dead and become the spiritual Lord of glory at God’s right hand in heaven. It is wicked to try to present Christ “after the flesh,” that is, in an earthly form. In II Corinthians 5:16, the Bible says that true Christians do not know, or try to know, Christ “after the flesh.”

In addition, although Jesus is a true man, He is also God, and the divine nature of Jesus is never

separated from His manhood. Jesus’ Godhead was not separated from His manhood even when He was on the cross. Yes, especially on the cross, His Godhead was not separated from His manhood. Only because the one who suffered on the cross was the eternal Son of God did His suffering have the worth and value to redeem you and me from our sins.

A wicked human—a Hollywood actor!—plays God.

Blasphemy!

The actor, the director, and the movie itself break the first and second commandments of the law. About a man, they say, “This is God.” This breaks the first commandment, which forbids having any other god than the triune, one, true, living, invisible God in heaven. About God, they say, “He has the form of the Hollywood actor who plays Him.” This breaks the second commandment, which forbids making any representation of God whatever.

Whoever attends the movie *approves* the blasphemy, *pays* for the blasphemy, and *participates* in the blasphemy.

In Ephesians 5:11, the Bible commands us, “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” *The Passion of the Christ* is a blasphemous work of darkness. It produces no fruit for God or for the church. We reprove it.

The movie is blasphemous also because it dares to dramatize and portray the once-for-all suffering and death of Jesus Christ. It dramatizes the awesome crucifixion of Christ. As God’s great deed in history, to reveal His grace and justice, to redeem His elect church, and to judge the wicked world (including the abomination that is Hollywood), the cross was perfectly arranged by God in every de-

tail. We have the exact revelation in the Bible. For anyone to try to reenact the cross is to spoil that marvelous deed of God in history. It is something like an ordinary house painter touching up Rembrandt’s *Night Watch* with his paintbrush.

Fact is, the sufferings of Jesus Christ may not, cannot, and must not be repeated. His suffering was unique: the bearing of the wrath of God as the substitute for His church. This suffering cannot be pictured and dramatized.

Also, His sufferings were completed when He died. They may not be repeated. The Bible says, “Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many” (Heb. 9:28). The movie sacrifices Christ again.

Blasphemy!

### Image Worship

Second, to attend the movie would be disobedience to the will of God that we learn Jesus Christ and His suffering only from the Word of God: the Bible and the sound preaching of the Bible.

The movie is not only, or even mainly, entertainment. It intends to be, and is, religious education and evangelism. It has an educational and evangelistic effect on those who see it.

It teaches the people about the “Jesus” they see on the screen. It even converts people to that “Jesus.” Protestant and Roman Catholic leaders are urging their followers to see the movie for spiritual benefit.

But the only way God is pleased to give true knowledge of Christ and His cross is by the preaching and reading of His Word. This is the teaching of Galatians 3:1, which I read with you: Christ crucified is “evidently

*For anyone to try to reenact the cross is to spoil that marvelous deed of God in history. It is something like an ordinary house painter touching up Rembrandt’s Night Watch with his paintbrush.*

set forth" to us in the preaching of the gospel and in the sacraments. Our Reformed confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, instructs us that it is God's will to teach us "not by dumb images, but by the lively preaching of His Word" (Q. 96). This will of God, that His people learn the gospel of Christ only by the Word of God, is an important element of the second commandment of the law.

To attend the movie with the purpose of knowing the suffering of Christ, or knowing the suffering of Christ better, would be sin against the second commandment.

The only other motive for attending would be entertainment. Shall we amuse ourselves of a Wednesday evening with the passion of Christ?

Regardless of the intention of one who attends, the movie will educate him religiously. But the education will be false and dangerous.

The movie teaches falsely about Christ and the cross. It is not based on the Bible alone. It is based also on extra-biblical writings, specifically the supposed visions of a Roman Catholic mystic.

The movie teaches falsely also because it gives the impression that the main suffering of Christ was physical—the mockery, the beatings, the scourgings, the torture of the cross.

But the real suffering of Christ was not physical. It was Christ's suffering of the wrath and curse of God, which no film can represent or picture. This is the teaching of Galatians 3:13, which I read with you: God made Christ a curse for us, for the Old Testament Scripture said, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." Because the real suffering of Christ was the spiritual agony of hell, the Bible does not emphasize the physical sufferings of Christ, or describe them in gory detail. It mentions them. But it will not allow us to concentrate on them.

### **Roman Catholic Heresy**

Third, one who might attend would expose himself (deliberately, now that I have explained the movie to you) to Roman Catholic teaching about Christ, the cross, and salvation.

The movie is Roman Catholic propaganda. It will be released to the public today, February 25. Why? Because today is Ash Wednesday, a Roman Catholic holy day. The Roman Catholic director, Mr. Gibson, has described the movie as a "Marian film." The film features Mary, the mother of Jesus, as much as it features Jesus. Mary is prominently present at every step of the way to the cross, as at the cross itself. She is present in the movie as co-mediatrix and co-redemptrix with Christ. She is a savior with Jesus. We can only have Jesus as Savior by means of Mary.

Not so subtly, the movie promotes the Roman Catholic perversion of the Lord's Supper, Rome's mass. By the juxtaposition of images, the movie teaches that the wine in the chalice of the mass has become the literal blood that flowed on Calvary. By a scene in which, having kissed the bloody body of Jesus, Mary turns to the camera with blood on her lips, the movie teaches that we can and must drink the literal blood of Jesus with our physical mouths.

The very idea that people can be saved by concentrating on Jesus' physical sufferings and blood, so that they are moved emotionally and thus attracted to Jesus, is a Roman Catholic notion. Where in this emotional attraction to a bloody Jesus is knowledge of the righteousness of God? Where is heart-felt knowledge of sin? Where is repentance? Where is faith?

Roman Catholic teaching about Mary, Jesus, the cross, and salvation is false doctrine. Rome's teaching about Mary is denial of Christ as the only mediator and redeemer. Rome's doctrine of the

mass is a denial of the one sacrifice of Christ and an accursed idolatry. This is not my judgment. This is your judgment, as of every other Reformed Christian, for it is the judgment of the mass by the Heidelberg Catechism in Q. 80.

Rome's doctrine of the cross, that is, of the passion of the Christ, is a denial of the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. Rome's Christ is never finished suffering. This is evident in one of Rome's favorite images, the crucifix: a cross on which Christ is still hanging. Rome sacrifices Christ anew every time it celebrates the mass. The Roman Catholic director sacrificed Christ afresh for the salvation of sinners in the movie. The message of the movie is that Christ goes on suffering and dying every time the film is shown.

You would not worship at a Roman Catholic mass. You would not take instruction from a Roman Catholic priest. Why would you expose yourself to Roman Catholic heresy in a movie, which is a very effective form of instruction?

### **Learning the Cross at Church**

Young people of the covenant of God, to know Christ and His cross, go to the Bible, and go to church. There—there *only*—Christ Himself teaches the truth about Himself and His sufferings, and He teaches in such a way that you believe and are saved.

The movie threatens to ruin your right knowledge of Christ and the cross, perhaps as long as you live. This morning, a Protestant leader said, on a national network, "When you see this movie, you will never be able to read the Bible again without the film's images of the actor and of the crucifixion in your mind." The foolish man meant this as a recommendation of the movie. God forbid that you—or I—read the Bible or hear the gospel or come before God in prayer with souls stamped by the vivid images of a movie.

Those who see the movie cry



over the sufferings of Christ. With the ticket to this show come tissues. Bathos!

We must not feel sorry for the suffering Jesus. He told the weeping women not to cry over Him as He was going to the cross: "Weep not for me" (Luke 23:28).

Christ *deserved* His suffering. He deserved *all* His suffering. He had it all coming. His suffering was His just punishment at the hands of God for your guilt and mine.

Don't cry over the sufferings of Christ, no, not one tear. Cursed are the damp tissues. Cry over your sins that brought Him to the cross, not over the cross.

The cross of Christ redeemed us. Therefore, as the Bible says in Galatians 6:14 (which I read with you), we *glory* in the cross of Christ.

The movie is evil. But it is a powerful medium. Satan will use it to hurt you, to corrupt your pure knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Do not risk God's judgment upon those who involve themselves in the sinfulness of the movie.

Stay away! Rip up your ticket, if you already bought one!

Stay away, for your Savior's sake, who loved you and gave Himself for you.

Be separate from the profane world and the foolish churches!

Give a witness. Give a witness by your behavior in not attending *The Passion of the Christ*. Give a witness by explaining your refusal to attend, when you have the opportunity. Give a witness by inviting people who want to know about Christ and the cross to the gospel in our Reformed churches.

Say something like this: "Do you want to know Christ and His suffering for sin? You can learn Him and His cross in His church, not in a movie theater."

— DJE 

## Letters

### ■ Delight over Assurance

**A**s one who receives the *Standard Bearer* via overseas mail to the United Kingdom, I am always the victim of deliveries that are either belated or not in sequence. Therefore, I have to hand only numbers 7 and 9 of volume 80 containing your editorials on assurance. Nevertheless, I feel constrained to express my delight at reading these two editorials on assurance.

As the assurance of which you write is not ours, but a product of Almighty God's gracious gift, it is a just and inevitable consequence to claim that "it forms an integral part of salvation itself."

In the event that our earthly experience has its weak moments, the assurance itself remains constant and irrevocable, because it still rests in the hand of our Creator. Its ownership has not been passed on to sinful man for him to manipulate. Assurance is not a "work" of man.

Doubt of God's assurance is, simply put, unbelief. About this, Scripture warns us, "Take heed," because doubt is the fruit of an "evil heart" (Heb. 3:12).

Let us, therefore, draw near to God *in* full assurance of faith, not *with* full assurance of faith (Heb. 10:22).

Alan J. Best  
Cardiff, Wales, UK

### ■ More on "Gospel Services"

**A** few things need to be said, I think, about the recent discussion in our *Standard Bearer* concerning "gospel services" (*Standard Bearer*, Nov. 1, 2003, "Mission Preaching in the Established Church: The Gospel Service").

I dislike arguments over terminology, but the term "gospel service" to designate a particular type of service for the particular purpose of engaging in missions strikes me as singularly inappropriate. Every true worship service is a "gospel service."

Nor is the term biblical. While we may claim the right to invent our own vocabulary to express certain ideas, and while we may pour into such terms Reformed connotations, it is not wise to borrow terms from Arminian circles and attempt to give them Reformed meanings. This is confusion.

A "gospel service," intended to be a deviation from the usual worship service in its character and purpose, puts an emphasis on the human side to preaching, which the worship ought not to have. The idea suggests (if not implies) that straight-forward preaching, which brings Scripture in all its force and is the kind of preaching our churches strive to promote, is inadequate to reach unbelievers. For the purpose of reaching unbelievers, we need to adjust our services with a different kind of preaching — a preaching that is preceded by an advertising blitz and by a certain preparation of the members of the congregation; that is adapted to ignorant people who have no knowledge of Scripture; and that uses simple terminology, etc.

What needs to be emphasized in our day of careless preaching is that the gospel is still the power of God unto salvation, and that a profound sermon on sovereign predestination, including the doctrines of both election and reprobation, can be (and frequently is) used by God to bring sinners to repentance and faith in Christ. This is the example set down in Paul's epistle to the

Romans — a letter to a newly formed and profoundly evangelistic congregation. It is the example we are to follow.

But it is the address of the gospel in which I am particularly interested. This, more than anything else, is the point at issue.

The minister in the local congregation addresses the gospel to the local congregation. What is that local congregation? It is the gathering of believers and their seed. The minister is right when he begins the worship service with the words: "Beloved in our Lord Jesus Christ." He does not, as in so many churches, address his audience on Sunday morning with the words: "Esteemed audience," "Worthy hearers," or something similar. The minister addresses the congregation as God's beloved, because that congregation is the object of God's everlasting love. It is the bride of Christ for whom He gave His life. It is the apple of God's eye, a church so profoundly loved by God that God will do anything and everything necessary to save her. It is the church destined to live in glory forever in fellowship with God.

I find a great comfort in hearing these words at the beginning of the worship service. The week has been extraordinarily difficult. Many problems had to be faced and the work was great. I am weary. Sins multiplied and rose up against me prevailing day by day. I almost was staggering (spiritually) when I crept into church on Sunday morning. The question would not be set aside: "Am I worthy to appear before God in His holy temple? Will God receive me after such a disastrous week?" It is with a sense of profound relief that I hear God say — at the outset: "Beloved...!"

It is the example of the apostles (cf. Rom. 1:7; I Cor. 1:2; II Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; and almost all the epistles). It paves the way for the benediction. I personally do not see how the benediction can be

pronounced when the purpose of the service is to speak to the unconverted: "Grace, mercy, and peace be *unto you*." And only the church can respond with the words, "Our help is in the name of the Lord...." What happens to these beautiful parts of our worship when the address is to the unconverted?

The essence of the gospel is Isaiah's instructions for the content of his preaching? "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God..." (Is. 40:1). The church needs to hear that — every Sunday.

Special services for the unconverted must necessarily involve something different: special texts to be used, special vocabulary to be employed, special emphasis on the demand for repentance and conversion. The people of God are temporarily neglected, referred to only indirectly, and not the audience for this particular service. I must express my disagreement with the following: "the danger that a preacher who holds to this clear teaching of the Bible faces is that he may draw a wrong conclusion, that he is to preach to the church as those who are saved and secure in Christ, who do not need to hear a call to repent and believe because they are saved already. If this is his view, he would conclude that there is no need for 'mission preaching'..." (SB April 1, 2003, p. 302).

Nothing could be farther from the mind of a faithful preacher. Conversion, repentance, and the call to faith in Christ must be preached in the church of Christ, God's Beloved (Heid. Cat., LD 31, Q. 84). Carnal seed is present in the church — always. This in no way detracts from the fact that that church, in spite of the wicked hypocrites in her midst, is God's beloved, Christ's bride. A farmer calls his field a wheat field because that is his purpose in laboring in it — even though it has thistles and pigweed. God calls His church His

beloved, for such it is. The presence of carnal seed does not alter that — any more than the presence of wicked in Corinth altered Paul's address.

Further, we live in a world of sin and possess sinful natures. Every child of God is in need of conversion, not only on the Lord's Day, but every day of the week. Every child of God must be called to repentance and faith in Christ. Every child of God must be pointed to his sin, which he must before God forsake. Every child of God must be torn by the power of preaching from his inordinate love of the world to faith in Christ.

But we may not jump from this obvious fact to the need for a special service, directly to the unconverted. The minister must tell the congregation: You are Christ's bride by a wonder of grace. Now become what you already are. Live as Christ's bride!

The church of Christ is a witnessing church. I would even go so far as to say that a church that is not a witnessing church may not expect the blessing of God in the mission labors that that church performs through a called and ordained missionary. I am not, however, inclined to minimize the strong witness of God's people in the world. This witness may not always be in word, and need not always be in word — although when the occasion requires it and God sets someone directly on his path, he must confess the name of his Savior. But the powerful and potent witness of the members of the Protestant Reformed Churches, not to be minimized in its effectiveness, is a witness of our Protestant Reformed Christian schools, the witness of the stability of our family life, the witness of a strong and uncompromising condemnation of divorce and remarriage, the witness of a sacrificial protest against ungodly labor unions, the witness of faithful husbands and fathers who work diligently at their jobs without engaging in the curs-



ing, swearing, and foul language of those with whom they work, the witness of godly covenant mothers who work day and night to establish covenant homes, etc., etc. This is the kind of witness noticed by the world. This is the kind of witness to which Peter refers when in I Peter 3:15 he admonishes us to be ready always to give an answer to those who ask of us a reason for the hope that lies within us. The implication of Peter's admonition is that we are asked! That is the important thing. We are asked why we are ready to support with our taxes the government schools and at the same time pay enormous costs for covenant education. We are asked why we are willing to give up our jobs, when we have children at home that need food and clothing, to escape the sin of membership in wicked labor unions.

America is not composed of unconverted heathen who have never had contact with the gospel. It is a "Christian country"; i.e., a country in which the gospel has been preached for generations. It is a country, therefore, in which God has nearly accomplished His purpose. Let us not underestimate the knowledge of the unbelievers about us. Perhaps ignorance may be the problem with many, but it is an ignorance born out of disinterest in their lives and in the lives of their forbears. God visits the iniquity of the fathers on the children.

But our witness is strong and powerful, and our neighbors, unconverted though they may be, see the parking lots of our churches full twice on the Lord's Day and our pews occupied by adults and children morning and evening. They know why we do this. They know why we have our own schools. Not only the public school on Riverbend Dr., but also the Department of Education in Lansing, responsible for regulating the entire state school system, knows our schools. Not only do

the workers in Keeler Brass know our stand against the union, but the UAW headquarters in Detroit also knows.

This is not to say that God does not save a remnant, brands plucked out of the burning. But God is sovereign in His eternal purpose. Especially in Europe and America God cuts off generations who are unfaithful and reject the gospel. He does not return to those generations. God does not continuously build walls in the erection of His house; He puts a roof on it.

— (Prof.) H. Hanko

### Response:

I have read carefully the contribution of Prof. Hanko to our consideration of "Mission Preaching in the Established Church." Though the brother expresses different ideas and some of them critical, we do appreciate them as it gives us opportunity to develop some of them further and to work towards understanding in the minds of our readers.

The brother makes the following points, which I will attempt to address.

1. The term "gospel service" is inappropriate as it is unbiblical and Arminian.

2. A special service for the purpose of bringing the gospel to invited neighbors is wrong for two reasons: it emphasizes human effort in bringing the gospel, and it conflicts with the unique character of worship, which is Christ's intimate fellowship with His body, the church.

3. He criticizes the occasion for such a "gospel service," which involves the outreach of the members to their neighbors. He offers two criticisms of such an effort: First, the effective witness of the membership is the life and walk of each member, not the speech (as is involved in canvassing the neighborhood, distributing literature, discussing with them the truth, and inviting them to worship). Second, the situation in America is much like that in Europe — people have

had the gospel but spurned it, hence God does not return to them and we cannot expect much results from such effort anyway. There may be the remnant.

I will begin with the last one because, if true, this method of outreach is ineffective and the entire subject of "special services with a view to bringing the gospel to our neighbors" becomes irrelevant and falls away.

The most important point that I would like to make is that it is the duty and sacred privilege of every member of the congregation to speak of his faith to his neighbors wherever he may be. He must do more than respond when others ask, he must initiate such a conversation as God gives him opportunity. I agree that the foundation of such a witness is the godly life of the believer. The Holy Spirit expresses this in I Peter 3:15, 16: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts and be ready always to give an answer...." Notice, the text does not say, sanctify the Lord God in your *walk*, but it says, sanctify the Lord God in your *hearts*. Out of the heart comes forth the issues of life (Prov. 4:23). This is called our conversation in the New Testament (I Pet. 1:15). Such conversation includes both our speech and our actions — word and deed. If we do this properly, we must be ready with our defense of faith ("answer" in this text can be translated "apology" or "defense"), since our neighbors will both hear and observe us and ask us the reason for it.

The important role of the individual believer in bearing witness of the gospel is repeated throughout the entire New Testament. The so-called Great Commission of Matthew 28:19, 20 includes foremost the task of the church sending forth missionaries and pastors doing the work of an evangelist. The success of such labors includes in a real sense the assistance of the members who give their own witness. The apostles themselves were sur-

rounded with others, who assisted them and reasoned alongside of them, such as Apollos (Acts 18:24-28). This passage also refers to Priscilla and Aquila, who were lay-people, who explained the gospel in greater detail to Apollos. We think of Acts 8:4, which mentions that the persecuted Christians, who were scattered, went everywhere and preached the Word. The Samaritan woman, upon the occasion of her conversion, went and told the men of her city (John 4).

This is important to maintain because this is the prophetic office that Christ gives to every believer. To be sure, much of the expression of this office of prophet is within the domain of the covenant, within the home, church, and school. It is no less important to use it as we speak to our neighbor. We are anointed by the Holy Spirit, trained in the Word of God, motivated by love of God and the neighbor to initiate speech with our neighbors. These neighbors include those who work with us on the job, those who go to school with us in the university, those who live next door or anywhere else. The character of a prophet is irrepressible joy and conviction to speak the truth in love. It is to nurture a godly relationship with a non-Christian with a view to his salvation. This is not only biblical, it is also confessional. The third reason the Heidelberg Catechism cites as to why good works are necessary for the Christian (good works include our proper speech as well as our actions) is that "by our godly conversation, others may be gained to Christ" (Q. 86).

If God blesses such efforts, the goal is to invite others to worship, to hear the voice of Christ Himself. Our witnessing is to speak about Christ to them and to explain to them the reason of our hope as Christians. There is something far better, and that is that they may sit with us at the feet of the Master to hear Him speak.

We are taught by the Word of God that we may never limit our duty of labor because of the unlikely prospect of positive results. We may never despise the day of little things (Zech. 4:10). We must obey Christ, no matter whether we may risk job, friendship, or even life. Even if all we may expect is the saving of a remnant as a brand plucked out of the burning (Zech. 3:2), it is all worth while. The one lost sheep may be living right next door to you or working beside you on the job, and God may have placed him there for you to initiate love and care, to take an interest in him and speak to him of the wonderful works of God. Yes, America and Europe are abominable in their iniquity, and surely all workers of iniquity shall perish, but we do not know who among them may be the elect of God. Maybe our neighbor despises Christ like a Paul, but may yet come under the mercy of Christ unto salvation.

One other thought, America and Europe are changing with respect to who it is that populates the country. In my home town of Holland, Michigan, surrounded by such Dutch enclaves as Overisel, Vriesland, Drenth, and such like, the Dutch are a minority of only 36 percent. America as a melting pot continues; there are peoples of virtually every nation surrounding us. And they take with them their idolatry or philosophies, and more than likely many of them have never heard the gospel. We have a duty to them as well.

Is there a place, then, for a special service in which neighbors, with whom members have diligently shared the gospel, may join the congregation and hear the gospel preached to them? We agree, such inquirers may join the congregation at any time and will hear the Word of God preached by a faithful pastor. This is not a matter of dispute. Our focus of interest is a special service for this purpose. What about the two objections?

Is it an over-emphasis on the human side if we put forth effort to meet special needs for non-Christians who may attend? This may include the choice of passage, simplicity of message, use of illustrations, and such like. The answer to this lies in the examples of Christ and the apostles as they adapted their message to various audiences. Christ used different words when addressing His disciples, Mary and Martha, Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, or the scribes and Pharisees. Paul certainly preached quite differently to the Ephesians than he did to the philosophers on Mars Hill or when standing before King Agrippa. This may be applied to us as we encounter different circumstances, domestic or foreign missions, conversations with individuals, and such like. If the consistory decides to hold a special service because they have encouraged the membership to invite their neighbors to the service, it is not a concession to the human side of preaching to ask the pastor to choose an appropriate text and message for this occasion. Rather, it is following the example of Christ and the apostles to address the gospel to the audience God places before him.

If there is anyone on the face of the earth who champions salvation as God's sovereign work, it has to be missionaries and pastors. If I learned anything in my twelve years in Singapore, it is that we never give up on God and never try to do something without God. The work of saving a soul is exclusively divine (Eph. 2:8-10).

More significant is the objection that if the pastor takes into consideration the presence of such people, he will fail to treat the congregation properly. How can he speak the votum or the concluding blessing if non-Christians are present? It will interfere with his address of the gospel and dilute the intimate and precious relationship that Christ enjoys with His own church.

I do not take this objection



lightly. The concern is well taken and the pastor has to resolve this issue. I proposed a solution in my series of articles. There is no mention made of this. The church may have unconverted members who are walking in sin (this does not mean that I view the congregation as mixed or preach to them as such), who need to hear the gospel of repentance and faith. Also we know from Scripture that not all Israel are the true Israel, there may be reprobates in the congregation who need to hear the word of warning and judgment. Because of their possible presence in the congregation, the pastor must meet such needs on a regular basis. On the occasion of a service to reach non-Christians, the pastor may very well pick a passage that addresses such needs in his own congregation and preach it to them in the presence of the guests. If the text includes a reference to unbelievers or unconverted, the appli-

cation can be made to the church in worship and to those in the audience who may be unconverted, as the pastor may choose to make the application. In this way there is no change in the character of worship, only the adaptation of the gospel to an important occasion, a message that emphasizes the gospel, the need to repent from sin and embrace Christ and His Father as the only way of salvation.

My caution that a Reformed preacher must not assume the salvation of his audience and that he has to put forth effort to call to repentance and faith is to the point. Prof. Hanko seems offended by this caution since every Reformed pastor knows this and will do this. I sincerely hope so, but a caution is never out of place and a reminder may go a long way to help. I did not intend to throw stones. I do not want this aspect of preaching to be neglected.

Finally, there is the terminology. Should we call such a special service "gospel service?"

I have no special axe to grind with its usage. In a certain sense, the good news of the gospel is written on every page of the Bible and permeates every sermon. There is this aspect, which we must not overlook. When the word gospel is used in the New Testament, great emphasis is laid upon the message of conversion, repentance, and faith. A few examples are Mark 1:14, 15; Acts 14:7-15; Romans 1:16; I Corinthians 9:18, 19; Ephesians 1:13. If we use the term "gospel service," the emphasis of this service is that the pastor preaches a gospel message, one that emphasizes a call to repent and believe.

Perhaps we could better call such a special service a service of outreach. Maybe that is a more accurate designation.

— (Rev.) J. Kortering 

## Contribution

# In Favor of the "Vernacular"

**R**ev. Kortering addressed the issue of vernacular language in prayer and Bible translation in his response to Rev. Stewart's letter in the February 1, 2004, *Standard Bearer*. Rev. Kortering suggested that, in the context of its evangelical mission, the PRC should accept the use of vernacular language by "seeking souls." I agree, but maintain the use of vernacular language should not be limited only to "seeking souls."

It is time for the Protestant Reformed Churches to embrace fully the implications of its Reformed heritage as they pertain to the issue of vernacular language in Bible translation and prayer. Luther and

Calvin understood the great importance of speaking and writing in the ordinary language of the people. The Reformation rejected Rome's "high" and "reverent" Latin as the exclusive liturgical language, replacing it with the language used by the common people in day-to-day life. Common people once again heard and understood Scripture when the Reformers translated the Bible into the vernacular. Unquestionably, our Reformed heritage favors the use of vernacular language in prayer and Bible translation.

However, Rev. Kortering suggests that our use of old-fashioned language protects us from irreverence. To the contrary, it is just as

possible to be irreverent using Elizabethan English. Read some of Shakespeare's more bawdy scenes for examples. Irreverence is not a necessary by-product of modern language, but an attitude of the heart that can be expressed in any language, old or new. Arguments about reverence camouflage the real issue, which is the principle of vernacular language established during the Reformation. The sad irony is that our dogmatic use of old-fashioned English is more Romish than Reformed. By glorifying old-fashioned English as more "reverent" or "spiritual," we create a "religion-speak" that is alien to our everyday lives and the lives of all twenty-first century En-




glish-speaking people. As the years pass, the arcane language of our Bible translation and prayers will only become more disconnected from ordinary experience and operate as an ever growing barrier to Scripture comprehension, prayer-life development, and evan-

gelistic efforts. Again the irony: this dualism and its ill effects are exactly what the Reformers sought to abolish by translating the Bible into the vernacular and replacing Rome's Latin with everyday language.

As Protestant Reformed believ-

ers, we should embrace vernacular English as our own — in our prayers and Bible translation — rather than reserve it only for the uninitiated. To do otherwise is to ignore our Reformed heritage.

Stephen VanderWoude  
Hammond, IN 

## Feature Article

Slabbert Le Cornu

# The Reformed Churches of South Africa: A Reformed Perspective on the History and Current Struggle in the Dopfer Churches of South Africa

## 1. The Current Crisis in the GKSA

"We have currently arrived at the biggest difference of opinion in the 144-year existence of the Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA = *Gereformeerde Kerke van Suid-Afrika*). The difference of opinion is irrefutable, but our prayer is that the Lord will keep us from a church schism."

This is quoted from professor-emeritus JH van Wyk, currently editor of *Die Kerkblad* (*The Church Magazine*), the official church

magazine of the GKSA, in the December 2003 edition of this magazine. This verdict was reached as a result of certain decisions that were made at the GKSA Synod in January 2003. These decisions could lead to a church schism in the GKSA, unless the Lord sees fit to spare us from this. Some of the controversial recommendations and decisions that have been made are the following:

- not recognizing the Sabbath as a creation ordinance anymore, but rather just as something which we follow because of the examples of the early church and the Apostles;
- freedom to use individual glasses ('kelkies') on certain grounds, together with the cup at the Lord's Supper;
- changing the words of the Apostles Creed from "descended into hell," to "who, to death, has undergone the anxiety of hell";
- opening the office of deacon to women; and
- accepting a new non-messianic rhymed psalmbook (2001), to be used alongside the

older messianic rhymed psalmbook (1936).

It was especially the last two decisions that sent stirrings through local congregations. Many local churches were not prepared to accept and implement the above decisions, while others have taken a 'neutral' stance, not accepting or rejecting the decisions, but rather waiting for further developments. Some churches have sent 'open letters' to all churches, in which they openly reject the last two decisions as being against Scripture, the Three Forms of Unity, and the Church Order. One church has declared openly its official grieving (*doleer*), stating that they are now to be known as "The Reformed Church of Waterberg (*Dolerend*)."

The signs of church schism were seen most clearly when in October 2003 two very different kinds of meetings were held in Pretoria. One gathering of Doppers praised and thanked the Lord for the new Psalmbook (which contained the new rhymed 2001 editions of the psalms), while the other gathering of Doppers questioned and rejected the new 2001-rhymed psalms, la-

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menting before the Lord the deformation in the GKSA, which — it was argued — is the consequence of a change in our view of God, Scripture, and the Church. In November 2003, the regional-synods of the GKSA answered negatively to the cry of concerned members and churches to call out a 'special synod' to discuss the doctrinal issues and differences of opinions that are threatening the unity of the churches and could end in a schism in the GKSA.

To understand the current crisis of the GKSA more clearly, we need to go back in history, all the way to 1652.

## 2. The historical background

### a. 1652 - 1800

The Reformed faith in South Africa originated with the arrival of the Dutch settlers on 6 April in the year 1652 of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jan van Riebeeck, as the representative of the Dutch East India Company (DEIC), set foot in the shadow of Table Mountain, to establish a half-way station for the Dutch ships traveling to and fro between Europe and Asia. The DEIC had been founded by dedicated Calvinists, the product of the United Provinces' war against Catholic Spain, fighting for freedom of worship. Seeking freedom of worship, if necessary by 'aggressive commercial expansion,' by force if need be, the Dutch were 'bent on the destruction of Spanish power.'<sup>1</sup> The Catholic Portuguese had already discovered the Cape at the end of the fifteenth century, though by God's sovereign and gracious providence they and their Roman Catholic religion did not settle there. It was to be the Dutch who would start a settlement at the Cape, bringing with them the religion of the Dutch reformation: the Statenvertaling, the Psalmbook, and the Three Forms of Unity as established by the Synod of Dordt 1618/19. Just before landing at the Cape, Jan van Riebeeck prayed an official prayer for the success of his

mission, including the following important words: "...We are here to maintain the law, and, if possible, to propagate and reveal the *reformed Christian faith* amongst these wild and uncivilized people, to the glory of your holy Name...."<sup>2</sup>

The Dutch Calvinists were strengthened by the arrival of the German settlers in the 1660s and the French Huguenots in 1688.<sup>3</sup> For the first thirteen years there were no ordained ministers, but only able laymen, called sick-comforters, who served the Reformed church at the Cape. The first permanent minister was Johan vanArckel in 1665. At the end of the seventeenth century people were beginning to settle further inland, as the so-called free burgers, which would later prove to be to the advantage of the Reformed faith. From these people grew an independent people, who were later known as Boers (*boere* = farmers) and later as Afrikaners. These were God-fearing, hardworking people, who placed high priority on private family devotional gatherings around the Statenvertaling, the Psalmbook, and the confessions. It was not always easy to go to church because of distance and difficulty of traveling. Congregations were started at Stellenbosch (1687), Drakenstein (1691), Roodezand (1743), Zwartland (1744), etc. For the next two centuries Reformed believers formed one church, united by the Scriptures and by the Reformed confessions and liturgy as determined by the Church Order of Dordt 1618/19.

Two factors must, however, be mentioned which had a negative influence on the development of the Reformed church at the Cape.<sup>4</sup> First, the Reformed churches of the Cape fell under Classis Amsterdam according to Article 29 of the Church Order, and for 150 years this classis ordered the church life of South Africa from as far as the Netherlands. This had a negative effect on the independent development of the churches and would

have grave consequences at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Second, at the Cape the state also ruled over the church, so that the Dordt Church Order could not be put into full practice. The church at the Cape was not a free church but a state church, in fact a 'department of the state,' which would also have its disastrous consequences at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It is important, at this point, to mention also the following fact, which would later help explain the church schism of 1859: "So for the majority of the Dutch colonial period in South Africa, Datheen's psalms were sung.... No great change in church music occurred in South Africa until 1814, with the addition of hymns."<sup>5</sup>

At the end of the eighteenth century, however, there was a growing deformation in the churches which paralleled the deformation in the sister Reformed churches in the Netherlands. The influence of Cartesian philosophy on modern science, the humanistic spirit of the French Revolution, the growing rationalistic liberalism, and the pietistic-mystical reaction of the churches with their 'cure,' the introduction of the so-called 'Evangelical hymns,' also arrived at the Cape to give the Reformed church of the Cape its death blow, at least for a while. In this period, more or less the end of the eighteenth century and the first half of

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1. C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire 1600-1800* (London: Penguin, 1990 [1965]), p. xxii.

2. J.D. Vorster, *Die Kerkregtelike ontwikkeling van die Kaapse Kerk onder die Kompanjie* (Potchefstroom: Pro Rege, 1956), p. 12.

3. J.W. Hofmeyr & Gerald J. Pillay (ed.), *A History of Christianity in South Africa, volume 1* (Pretoria: HAUM, 1994), p. 11.

4. V.E. d'Assonville, *Kerkgeskiedenis in 30 lesse* (Potchefstroom: Marnix, 1990), p. 74.

5. J.N. Gerstner, *The Thousand Generation Covenant* (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1991), p. 43.

the nineteenth century, Reformed believers became more and more worried about the spiritual condition of the churches, especially about the doctrine of many preachers. Although they were devout Bible readers, they also read the 'oude schrijvers' of the Dutch Second Reformation, including writers like à Brakel, Smytegelt, and d'Outrein, who taught them of the fall of man, his inability to do good, and "the predestinating grace of God and the absolute sovereignty of God."<sup>6</sup>

The Cape church was growing more worldly, and the Boer Calvinists in the churches of the interior, were growing — by God's grace — more holy. This would lead to an antithetical clash. The big revolution would come in the first half of the nineteenth century, when the one Reformed church of South Africa would split into three separate denominations: the *Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk* (1843), the *Nederduits Hervormde Kerk* (1853), and the *Gereformeerde Kerken* (1859).

#### b. 1800 - 1859

The Reformed Church of the Netherlands was a state church, which meant that the Dordt Church Order could not be implemented effectively. When the French Revolution occurred, the Netherlands, in both state and church, became more liberal and rationalistic. The authority of the Bible and the confessions was rejected, and in 1816 King William of Orange ordered a church regulation for use in the Netherlands State Church. The Dordt Church Order was discarded, and the name of the church was changed to 'Hervormd.' Because of the unbiblical form of church government, liberalism in doctrine and teaching was introduced in the churches. A strong reaction came from a movement called the Revéil (Awakening), with leaders such as Bilderdyk, Da Costa, and Groen van Prinsterer, which laid the foundation for

church reformation in the churches in the Netherlands in the first half of the nineteenth century. The great reformation, called the *Afscheiding* (the Separation), came under the leadership of Rev. H. de Cock of Ulrum, who preached boldly and furiously against the liberalism in the church and also against the liberal evangelical hymns that had been introduced in the churches in 1807. When the *Hervormde Kerk* wanted to remove him, he and others started the "Afseskeie Christelike Gereformeerde Kerk" (Separated Christian Reformed Church). These were the churches that decided at their Synod of 1857 to send the Rev. D. Postma to South Africa, to investigate the church situation. More about him later, however. Let us return to South Africa.

In 1795, after about 150 years of Dutch government, the Cape fell into the hands of the English. According to the Peace of Amiens (between France and England), however, it was decided that the Cape would be returned to the Dutch, under the government of Jansens and De Mist. These men were the French Revolution incarnate. In 1804 De Mist introduced a new church order, which testified to his liberalism. Some of its contents were as follows: all churches were equal; the church should help to foster good citizens; the name of the church was changed to the 'Hervormde Kerkgenootskap' ('The Reformed Church Society,' which meant that the church was an open organization depending on the free will of man to be part of it or not = humanistic Arminianism); the document did not use the Lord's Name, but mentioned a 'Higher Being'; state education was introduced, and the roles of parents and church were undermined; the synod was the highest form of government, and the church fell under the government of the state.

With this, "the Reformed principle (as accepted in the Three Forms of Unity by the Synod of

Dordt, 1618/19) was abandoned, and therefore we could speak of 1804 as the year of the death of the Reformed Church in South Africa."<sup>7</sup>

The church in the Cape was no longer a Reformed church but rather a deformed church, and not much protest was heard. Because the Reformed church had never been allowed to become an independent church in South Africa because of state influence, and because Classis Amsterdam had never allowed it, it could not handle the onslaught by De Mist. In 1806 the Cape once again came under the government of the British Empire, and they did not only bring with them the winds of revolution, but also a foreign culture. Contact between the church of the Cape and that of the Netherlands was reduced. There was a great need for pastors, and governor Somerset used this sad situation to further his political goals: he wanted to anglicize the church at the Cape by bringing in English pastors and missionaries to serve the Dutch-speaking people. The schools were also anglicized. The problem with the new English and Scottish pastors was not only the language and cultural barrier, but most importantly the new spirit that they brought with them, that of Methodism, which was foreign to the Reformed believers who had been fed by annotated notes of the Statenvertaling and the Reformed confessions.<sup>8</sup> These believers rejected the new doctrine and preaching, which said "man has his own will to salvation," and they sorely missed "the pure doctrine of predestination or election."<sup>9</sup>

The first official synod in South Africa was held in 1824, when under the De Mist Church Order, the *Reglement of the Nederlandse Kerkgenootskap* of William I of 1816 was accepted. This was the final blow to the Dordt Church Order. Collegialism was now the official form of church government in South Africa. This Synod also



failed to test the 'evangelical hymns,' the new hymnbook that had already been introduced in the churches in the Cape in 1814.<sup>10</sup>

These hymns promoted the spirit of Rationalism and Enlightenment, which proclaimed a common grace to all people; it was "blunt Pelagian humanism: man must only do his duty and then the 'light' will go on for him; it furthers Romish doctrine; and this hymnbook worked together with Liberalism for the downfall of our Church."<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, "if the Church Order of De Mist was the death of the Reformed Church in South Africa, then the Synod of 1824 was the solemn funeral of it."<sup>12</sup>

From the day that the hymnbook, the product of deformation, was introduced, a great battle was fought in churches in the Cape, and later also in the *Free State* and *Transvaal* (independent countries of the Afrikaner people in the second half of the nineteenth century), after the '*Groot Trek*' ('Great Migration') had taken place, because many citizens of the Cape had decided to trek to the hinterland to start a new country under their own government, free from British rule.

#### c. The Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (1843)

In 1843 another synod was held, which abolished the church order of De Mist, and made certain changes to the Church Law of 1824. The name was changed from '*Hervormde Kerkgenootskap*,' to '*Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerkgenootskap*' (NGK), and so the NGK was officially formed. Unfortunately there was no return to the Dordt Church Order, and their preachers were still trained at the liberal seminaries of the *Hervormde Kerk* in the Netherlands. The liberal pastors of the Cape did not believe in the Trinity, the infallibility of Scripture, miracles, the Godhead of Christ, etc., and one of them even said that he did not believe

question 60 of the Heidelberg Catechism.<sup>13</sup> The reaction against this rationalism came in the form of Methodism, with its emphasis on man and his feelings: revival services, hymns, praying that the Holy Spirit must be poured out again, and so on. But this was still not the Reformed answer to man's sin and tyranny. Reformed believers were still hoping and praying for true biblical reformation of the church in South Africa.

#### d. The Nederduits Hervormde Kerk (1853)

As mentioned above, between 1836 and 1838 the Great Trek took place, when thousands of burghers decided to leave the Cape with their families and belongings and trek farther north into the unknown, to begin a new life as a free people under God, rejecting the tyrannical government of the British empire. The Cape Synod of 1837 accused them of rebellion, and therefore no official pastor was sent to minister unto them. As a direct result of the Great Trek, two independent republics were founded under Afrikaner rule: the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. When the pastors of the *NG Kerk* began serving the people of these republics, the people were afraid that the Cape church would try to bring them under British rule once again. Therefore, Rev. Dirk van der Hoff, a proponent of the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*, was called as pastor, and the *Nederduits Hervormde Kerk* was formed in 1853 as the state church of Transvaal, South Africa. Although understandable in their situation, this was unfortunately more of a politically motivated decision than a church reformation in the biblical sense of the word. The NGK and the NHK were basically one in doctrine, liturgy, and church order. They disagreed politically rather than doctrinally (which is more or less the same situation today). The Reformed people were still waiting for true biblical ref-

ormation in the churches of South Africa.

#### e. The Doppers

The name 'Dopper' is the unofficial nickname of members of the *Gereformeerde Kerken van Suid-Afrika*

6. J.W. Hofmeyr & Gerald J. Pillay (ed.), *ibid.*, p. 12. For a very good overview of the theological development in the Cape, see the important article by A.W.G. Raath, *Volk en Verbond*, in Van Niekerk, E.J. & Hayes, H.J. *Reformerend die Millenium in: Ons Calvinistiese Erfenis en Roeping* (Bloemfontein: VCHO, 2002), pp. 17-83.

7. W.J. de Klerk & J.H. van Wyk, *Woord en Antwoord* (Potchefstroom: Pro Rege, 1977), p. 144.

8. For the development of the liberal influences in the Cape, see T.N. Hanekom, *Die Liberale Rigting in Suid-Afrika: 'n Kerkhistoriese Studie* (Stellenbosch: CSV Boekhandel, 1951).

9. G.C.P. van der Vyver, *Professor Dirk Postma 1818-1890* (Potchefstroom: Pro Rege, 1958), pp. 291, 292.

10. "On Sunday 9 January 1814 the first hymn was sung on the South African soil — Rhijnvis Feith's 'Zingt. Zingt blij te moe.' On Sunday 28 October 2001 a wonderful group of new hymns (altogether 602 of them! — SLC) will be heard in South Africa." — Editors of the new songbook: '*Die Liedboek van die Kerk*' (The Songbook of the Church) of the Dutch Reformed and Hervormde Church, March 2001.

11. G.C.P. van der Vyver, *ibid.*, p. 16.

12. L.S. Kruger, *Waarom is u Lid van die Gereformeerde Kerk?* (Pretoria: Craft Drukkers, 1957), p. 40.

13. Q60: How are you righteous before God? A60: Only by true faith in Jesus Christ: that is, although my conscience accuses me, that I have grievously sinned against all the commandments of God, and have never kept any of them, and am still prone always to all evil; yet God, without any merit of mine, of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ, as if I had never committed nor had any sins, and had myself accomplished all the obedience which Christ has fulfilled for me; if only I accept such benefit with a believing heart.

(GKSA), even today. This name was given to a group of believers who had existed long before the Reformed church was reestablished in 1859. The origin of this name is uncertain, but the following two suggestions seem most probable:

- 'dorpeling' ('townspeople' — 'dorp' is the Afrikaans name for 'town');<sup>14</sup>

- 'domper' (an instrument that was used to extinguish a candle). The Doppers were accused of extinguishing the 'new light' of the new times at the Cape. The Doppers themselves see this, in fact, as their calling!<sup>15</sup>

These were common farm and townsfolk who daily worshiped, lived, and worked under the instruction of the Statenvertaling and the Reformed confessions on a daily basis, as established by the Synod of Dordt 1618-19. They lived mostly on the outskirts of the Cape Colony, near the Orange River, on the frontiers. They vehemently rejected the 'new light' of theological liberalism and emotional methodism. These were not revolutionary people, because for many years, even decades, during the first half of the nineteenth century, they had prayed and worked for reformation in the churches. They were patient, but in the end they had to be obedient to God rather than to man, and were left with no other option than to reestablish in 1859 the Reformed church of 1652. Their whole battle against humanism and liberalism culminated in a battle to decide what should be sung in the churches to the glory of God? The battle for true doctrine and true church government was most clearly revealed in the battle between the Psalms and the evangelical hymns. As mentioned previously, in 1814 the hymns were first introduced in the churches of South Africa without any testing or church decision. In 1833 in Cradock voices of protest were heard against the hymns, and the

Ring of Graaff Reinet drew first blood when in a so-called 'Pastor's Letter' they accused the pro-Psalms believers of 'heresy,' that they 'pierce the body of Christ,' and that they were guilty of 'church schism,' because they did not want to sing the hymns. The Ring said that the hymns were acceptable, because the pastors had said so!<sup>16</sup> The years and decades following were years of great struggle concerning the confessions and church government.

The Doppers wanted a church run according to the principles of the Synod of Dordt 1618/19. In 1858 SJ Kruger, P Venter, and JJ Venter, as leaders of the concerned members in the NHK, tried to convince the NHK to call a minister who did not sing the hymns for them from the Netherlands. The NHK of Rustenburg gave permission for this. Meanwhile, without knowing of each other, the *Christelike Gereformeerde Kerken van die Nederland* had decided to send Rev. Dirk Postma to investigate the situation in South Africa and to offer help to the Transvaal government via pastors and teachers. When the Transvaal government heard about this, they told the concerned members of Rustenburg that if Postma fulfilled their demands, they could call him as their pastor.

#### f. The Gereformeerde Kerken (1859)

Dirk Postma was born in 1818 in Dokkum, Netherlands. In 1840 he became the pastor of the *Christelike Gereformeerde Kerk* of Minnertsga and a leading figure in the church. When he arrived in the Transvaal, he and Rev. van der Hoff of the NHK at first had good relationships. At the General Church Meeting of 10 January 1859, Postma's doctrine was examined and the Meeting was satisfied. This Meeting also decided that the evangelical hymns must and should be maintained in the NGK. Just as in the case of the Ring of

Graaf Reinet (1841) and the Cape Synod (1847), this was 'a binding of consciences' ('*gewetensbinding*'), because they wanted to force the concerned members to sing the hymns. The concerned members had to choose between bowing before men and bowing before God. Therefore fifteen men, including men like PJW Schutte, Ph. Snyman, SJ Kruger and Paul Kruger (who would later become the famous State President of the South African Republic) according to the above decision, were forced to leave the NH Church, to form the 'Free Reformed Church, according to the doctrine, service, and discipline of the Dordt fathers.'

From this act, the Reformed church would be reestablished on 11 February 1859, on the basis of the confessions and Church Order of Dordt 1618/19, with Rev. Dirk Postma as their first pastor. This was the fruit of decades of struggle against false doctrine, service, and discipline, which were incorporated into the churches by the humanistic spirit of the enlightenment age, and the mystic methodism that was the reaction to it. For Postma, after the reestablishment, the Reformed people "could serve God once again according to his Word. God's Word as the final source of authority, knowledge and the standard for the church in all its service, doctrine, church government, liturgy, and life, must not be 'lost'; on the contrary, 'according to article 7 of our Confession (Belgic Confession — SLC), the Word of God above all else' must be the ruling principle of the Church of the Lord and not our 'own opinion.' The Church of Christ must submit in doctrine and life to the discipline of this Word."<sup>17</sup> One of the first members, HJJ Kruger, stated as follows:

After a long struggle, of which the tracks could be followed back to the 1830's; after years of resistance against false doctrine which had been tolerated in the



churches; after years of sighing 'because the church wants to force the people's consciences to accept human ordinances and teachings contrary to the Word,' relief has finally come.<sup>18</sup>


The rejection of the Word of God, the confessions, and the Church Order of Dordt, the deformation in doctrine, liturgy, and discipline, especially concerning the hymns, could not but lead to a church schism, which was actually a church reformation, by the sovereign and gracious providence of God.

This is how it came to be, that from the Reformed church of the Cape, three different denominations for the Afrikaans-speaking people emerged, of which the GKSA is — or at least was — the continuation of the original Reformed church of the Cape, established in 1662. Even today, these three different denominations exist alongside each other, with a number of smaller schisms that have taken place since their formation.

The GKSA grew rapidly over the next 100 years or so, being blessed by God in many ways, even during the worst of times in the history of South Africa.<sup>19</sup> In 1869 the Theological School of the Reformed Churches was begun, and from this theological school grew the "Potchefstroom University for

Christian Higher Education" (PU for CHE), more or less on the model of the Free University of Amsterdam, which had been established by Abraham Kuyper. One of the most influential men in the history, not only of the GKSA, but of the Afrikaner people and the Reformed churches in South Africa, was Prof. Dr. JD Du Toit (1877-1953), better known by his nickname 'Totius.' Totius, who was very much influenced and formed by Kuyper, was the first Afrikaner to receive his doctorate at the Free University, on the topic of *Het Methodisme*. He was to become the embodiment of the Doppe Reforme faith and culture in SA in the twentieth century, together with the Calvinist president, Paul Kruger (1825-1904), who was the best political leader the Afrikaners ever had. Totius would also become the leading theologian and poet, who would help translate the Bible into the Afrikaner language (1933), together with the rhymed Psalmbook in Afrikaans (1936). Another Doppe Reforme leader who had a great influence on the GKSA, especially in the area of education and philosophy, was Prof. Dr. HG Stoker. In order to understand the Reformed worldview of the Afrikaner of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, one needs to understand these

three men of God: theologian, statesman, and philosopher to the glory of God, in Africa. These men, Totius and Stoker, together with other Calvinistic leaders in South Africa like JD Kestell, FJM Potgieter, EE van Rooyen, BB Keet, LJ Du Plessis, JD Vorster, and so forth, were also part of the bigger Calvinistic movement over the world in the mid-twentieth century. Three volumes were published under the title *Koers in die Krisis* (*Direction in the Crisis*), containing articles by Calvinists from all over the world, dealing with all kinds of theological, historical, church, and cultural topics from a Reformed perspective.<sup>20</sup> Calvinism thus had a great influence and impact on South African society from about the 1930s to the 1970s.

(to be continued...) 

14. B. Spoelstra, *Die 'Doppers' in Suid-Afrika, 1760 - 1899* (Kaapstad: Nasionale Boekhandel Bpk., 1963), p. 16.

15. V.E. d'Assonville, *ibid.*, p. 88.

16. V.E. d'Assonville, *ibid.*, p. 89.

17. G.C.P. van der Vyver, *ibid.*, p. 307.

18. G.C.P. van der Vyver, *ibid.*, p. 294.

19. The GKSA grew from one congregation with about 300 members in 1859, to 295 congregations with about 97,000 members in 2004.

20. *Koers in die Krisis*, vol. 1-3 (Stellenbosch: Pro-Ecclesia-Drukkery, 1935-1941).

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

## Working Mothers

"She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. She girdeth her loins with

strength, and strengtheneth her arms. She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night."

Proverbs 31:15-18

**T**he term "working mothers" is really a misnomer. Every wife and mother with a household to care for is a

working mother. She probably puts in more hours of work a day than anyone else in her household. But what is most often meant by the term "working mother" is that mother who pursues a career outside of the home and family. The last article we wrote addressed the principle of Scripture that a mother's calling toward her family

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is that she must “look well to the ways of her household” (Prov. 31:27). On that basis, a debate swirls around the question of whether a mother can indeed look *well* to the ways of her household while also pursuing a career. Is there such a thing as a supermom, as some claim, who is able to spend enough time with her children plus caring for the needs of the home and coordinate that with a career?

It is not the intent of this article to lay down a law that will forever dictate to mothers what they must do in every given circumstance of life. There are those who try to do this. A mother working outside the home, they say, is a sin. A stay-at-home mom is holier than a mother that works outside of the home. It does not matter if she is that woman described by Paul in I Timothy 5:13, “And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things they ought not.” The mother may be busy volunteering for all kinds of things that take her outside the home, she may be out socializing with other mothers every day. All this seems not to matter, so long as a mother does not occupy herself in a job outside the home. There is that eleventh commandment, you know, that we must abide by in every instance: “Mothers, thou shalt not work outside the home.”

The Bible does not say that. God does not lay down such a law. His Word tells us that a wife and mother must be one who is a “keeper of the home” and one who “guides the house.” It does not dictate every circumstance that may arise in a household and family. Certainly the Word of God speaks of those areas of our lives that belong to our Christian liberty. In these areas we must work out our salvation with fear and trembling. We must not allow our flesh to dictate for us what we are to do, but we must determine what God

desires of us in life. We must pray diligently and search God’s Word to determine what God would have us to do as a mother and father who are called to care for our children “to the utmost of our power” (baptism vows). There are conceivably times when a mother will work outside of the home and family.

There are times when families face financial hardships. Perhaps father has become disabled. Maybe he is laid off for a time. Perhaps mother can find a little something to do that will help supplement the income of her husband enough to make life a little less arduous, yet will not require her to be away from the children when they are home. Maybe the wife can earn some income while the children are there with her earning it too. There are all kinds of possible scenarios that can be found. The mother is not always and ever required to be in her home. Even the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 bought a field and worked it. She made fine linens and went to the marketplace and sold them. But none of this interfered with the fulfilling of her calling to look to the ways of her family.

By now there are probably some readers who do not like the direction that I seem to be heading. What is this, they may ask, is this article actually going to give its approval on “working mothers”? How can a mother look well to the ways of her household and work full time outside of the home and family? Impossible!

Agreed! There are those women who, sometimes even before they have children, are bent on pursuing a career. Children, they think, must not get in the way of that career. I have talents and abilities in the career choice I made before I was married, and I will not allow a home and family to stand in the way of pursuing that career. And there are many excuses that are made — such as, but we cannot afford to live as a family with-

out a double income. Smaller home maybe? One less vehicle? No boat or snowmobile? The excuse is also heard, it is not the quantity of time I spend with my children, it is the quality of time. Is it? That sounds rather mechanical, does it not? “Okay, kids, I now have an hour or two to spend with you. What do you want to talk about. Got any soul-searching questions you want to discuss right now?” A child’s life is shaped and molded not simply by means of quality time but by means of simply being there for the child so he can ask the question when it comes to him and not need to save it for the “quality time.” Besides, nurturing and disciplining is a full-time job. This cannot be done in a few hours. It needs to be done regularly.

Neither is there such a thing as a supermom. No doubt some women are well disciplined and run a “tight ship” in their own lives and in the lives of their children. But there simply is no replacement for mom being there with her children. No babysitter, no nanny, no daycare is a replacement for a mother or a father. A parent needs to be with the children. This role is given in Scripture primarily to mother.

Now I have addressed both extremes. So no one is happy!

But this is not the end of the matter. Consider what the Bible teaches us. It does not need to set down a law to dictate every little instance that arises in the life of a family. It does not rob God’s people of their liberty to make decisions that may vary from one family to the next. But the Bible does set forth the way of *wisdom*. God’s Word addresses mother and father as *covenant* parents. God has established His friendship and fellowship with us. We cherish that! We need to know that God loves us and will care for us each day of our lives. In the midst of our struggles and hardships in life there is nothing dearer to us than



to hear God say to us, "Fear not, I will not leave you or forsake you!" The truth of God's covenant is so precious to us in our lives!


Well, God tells us that He establishes that covenant with us *and with our children in our generations*. God promises us that the covenant friendship He shares with us He will also share with our children. Every covenant parent clings to that promise of God. But such friendship with us in our generations does not just fall from the sky! God establishes that covenant in those families where father and mother are careful to spend time with their children in the home and family instructing them diligently in the fear of the Lord. This does not mean to say, of course, that our children are saved on the basis of father and mother and what they do. But it does mean that God uses the godly instruction of father and mother as a means to carry on His covenant in the next generation.

The urgent calling of a mother then is this: do not let anything deter you from spending time with those children in the home teaching them God's ways! So much ought we to be concerned with the spiritual welfare of our children that no career or desire for extra money may stand in the way of being there for them! Spiritually

weak homes produce, for the most part, spiritually weak children. And what we must not forget is that this has profound implications also for the *church*. For the children in the church today will be the leaders (the ministers, the elders, the deacons, the fathers, the mothers) of the church tomorrow. When fathers, therefore, do not today walk in their calling, and when mothers are out pursuing careers rather than looking well to the ways of their households, this touches not only the *home* but also the *church*. Spiritually weak homes will eventually make for a spiritually weak church.

Here is the principle of Scripture: a mother must look well to the ways of her household. Yes, there is liberty as to how that is fulfilled. But, in those young women who marry in the church, there must be a desire to be a keeper of the home. Why? Because being a mother in Zion is the best, the most glorious, the highest calling a woman of the church can fulfill. Yet remember, too, it is also the most time-consuming, difficult, and challenging work a woman can do. But then, look at the rewards! Look at the payment! "Thou shalt see thy children's children and peace upon Israel" (Ps. 128:6).

There has to be added to this one additional bit of instruction. This comes to husbands and children. Sometimes the work of a mother in the home can be a thankless position. Mother certainly does not see any monetary reward for what she does in the home. For that reason husbands and children must pay her. No, not money! They must pay her their love and their praise. Husbands and children must rise up and call her blessed. They must thank her and praise her for expending herself on their behalf. Not only husbands are to thank their wives and speak of their love for them, but children must too. This is the reward of a godly mother in Zion. And more, mothers ought to be remembered in our family prayers. Husbands and children ought to thank God for that wife and mother who is concerned with the spiritual welfare of her family.

Mothers? "Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised!" (Prov. 31:30). Your work in the home and family may be despised by the unbelieving world. It may be belittled and scorned! But you are a blessing to our families and to the church of Jesus Christ in this world. We thank God for you! 

*That They May Teach Them to Their Children*

*Prof. Russell Dykstra*

## Two Covenants, Two Schools (3)

**G**od's covenant of grace not only determines how God deals with His people, but by it God forms a real relationship with His people. This same covenant determines the place of children in the church and

in the homes of believers. It is evident, then, that the particular view of the covenant held by parents and teachers will regulate the instruction, yes, even the character of the Christian school.

The theology of the conditional covenant is that God establishes His covenant with every baptized child unilaterally, but the maintenance of the covenant is bilateral,

for the child must believe and obey, else the covenant is null and void. God promises to each child at baptism that all the blessings of salvation are his, objectively, but for the child to possess them subjectively he must fulfill the conditions and believe the promises. The implications of the conditional covenant for the Christian school were explored in the last article.

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The Protestant Reformed Churches maintain that God establishes His covenant unconditionally with His chosen people in Christ. God's covenant with His people is a bond of friendship established with believers and their seed in the line of continued generations. The theology of the unconditional covenant is radically different. It is our contention that the schools based on this covenant doctrine not only ought to be, but are in reality, different.

Let it be established that the covenant of grace is the foundation of Protestant Reformed schools. That can be documented. The constitution of the Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, MI, is representative. It states it plainly in Article I — BASIS:

This organization is based on the following principles:

A. The Bible is the infallibly inspired, written Word of God, the doctrine of which is contained in the Three Forms of Unity, and as such forms the basis for administration, instruction and discipline in the school.

B. Our Sovereign, Triune, Covenant God has from eternity chosen and in time forms a people unto Himself that they may stand in covenant relationship to Him, and live to His praise in friendship and loving service in all spheres of life, in the midst of a sinful world.

C. The training of the covenant children in the school as well as in the home and in the church must serve to prepare them to follow their life-long calling to reveal the glory of their God in a life lived from the principle of regeneration by grace.

The fact that God establishes His covenant of friendship with believers and their elect children demands Christian education for the youth of the covenant. These children are *God's*, and He wills that they live with Him and love Him. Children who will live with God in loving fellowship *must know*

Him! They must be reared in the fear of His name. They must be trained to live as covenant people in the midst of a hostile, ungodly world. Christian education is therefore required.

In addition, because the covenant is not with the individual, but with the body, the entire body of the church unites to provide Christian education for all the covenant children. Love for God's covenant draws unmarried men and grandpas to the school society meetings. The joy of covenant life with God leads believers of all ages to give cheerfully to the cause of covenant schools.

The covenant is the heart and foundation of the Reformed school. If it is not the compelling motivation of the founders and supporters, then other, non-Reformed principles will direct the schools. Perhaps it will be fear of world contamination — world flight, in the spirit of the medieval monasteries. Perhaps the Christian school will be considered a missions endeavor — first for the children of believers, and then for the neighborhood. Others would establish the school as a kingdom-service training center, preparing the youth to take over the world for Christ's (earthly) kingdom. Or, motivated by the hope of earthly success, parents might establish an exclusive academy for the gifted to help their students excel academically.

None of those capture the reason that Reformed parents had historically for establishing Christian schools. Nor are they the foundation for Protestant Reformed schools. These are rather covenant schools, preparing covenant children to live with their God in a life of love and friendship, both in this life and into eternity.

In such a school, the students are rightly viewed as covenant children. They are born into the sphere of the covenant. They are part of the organism of the tree of the church — children born to believing parents who have God's prom-

ises that He shall gather His church from their children. In harmony with that promise, and in obedience to God's command, parents baptized these children.

Are they elect? We know not. Do we presuppose they are regenerate? No. Do we presuppose they are unregenerate? Absolutely not. Rather, Protestant Reformed parents and teachers follow the principle of the judgment of love as the Canons describe it in III/IV, Art. 15. "With respect to those who make an external profession of faith and live regular lives, we are bound, after the example of the apostle, to judge and speak of them in the most favorable manner. For the secret recesses of the heart are unknown to us."\* This judgment of charity is warranted also with regard to the children born to believing parents, since God promises that He does establish His covenant with believers and their seed.

Teachers treat their students as regenerated children, that is, as believers. When students sin, even grievously, teachers are not quickly driven to the conclusion that the children are not saved. Teachers are keenly aware that believers do sin grievously against their God. Applying Scripture in all circumstances, teachers look for and demand repentance, believing that the Spirit will work sorrow for sin and the daily conversion described in the Heidelberg Catechism. To be sure, they warn students of the dreadful wrath of God against sin. Teachers also walk with the students to the cross of Christ and give them the assurance of free — not conditional — forgiveness in His blood.

It is the solid conviction of the Protestant Reformed teacher that God ordinarily does regenerate the elect covenant child in infancy. There is certainly no impediment to that thinking in the unconditional covenant, since salvation does not depend on any condition placed before the covenant child. In harmony with that, immediate



regeneration is taught in the Protestant Reformed Churches, specifically, that the Holy Spirit regenerates not by means of the preaching, but directly (immediate, not with means). That God regenerates elect children in the sphere of the covenant at a very young age, even at conception, is perfectly in harmony with the covenant as a relationship of friendship, because God desires that His children learn to know Him from all the instruction of a parent and a Christian teacher, and that from a young age.

The teachers instruct in harmony with that principle, that is, that their students are regenerated. They gear their instruction to young believers who have the new life in Christ planted in their hearts. What confidence an instructor can have that his labor—that hard, spiritual work of planning and teaching every lesson from the unique viewpoint of Scripture—is not in vain!

The doctrine of the unconditional covenant has other implications for the Christian school. Is Christ the center of the school based on the unconditional covenant? Most emphatically. He is the heart of the covenant. Without Christ, there is no covenant. God established the covenant with Christ eternally, and in Him with all the elect. If the instruction is covenantal, it must be Christ-centered, for rich covenant life is the goal of God in revealing Himself to His people. Such instruction will be always pointing to Christ as the revelation of God in salvation, in history, indeed, in all things. Truly all things were created by Him and for Him, and are upheld and governed by His mighty power.

As noted earlier, the goal of the school is to prepare the students to live with God in covenant fellowship, and to do so already in this life. Teachers endeavor to equip their students to stand as representatives of God's cause in this world. Students are being

groomed to live out of the covenant life in whatever calling God gives to them.

It follows, then, that the instruction framed according to the unconditional covenant of friendship with God will maintain the antithesis. Friendship with God is so powerful that it draws the covenant member to live unto Him. That, in turn, inevitably results in enmity with the world (James 4:4). Friendship with God demands rejecting any and all sinful activity, even if it is suggested or promoted by a fellow baptized member of the covenant. The antithetical life mandated by the covenant of grace draws the line between sin and obedience, not merely between baptized and unbaptized.

The covenantal basis of the school also determines the character or atmosphere of the school: godly fellowship. This fellowship exists between teachers and students (no, they are not buddies, but they are friends). Fellowship is manifest among students—they live as friends, for Jesus' sake, who has made us to be His friends. The faithful Protestant Reformed teacher has this as a proper goal for his classroom and the school. It is put before the students, and demanded of them, that they leave none out, but seek proper Christian fellowship with all their classmates.

What of the discipline in such a school? It emphatically is exercised in the Christian school. The goal of such discipline is to draw the erring student away from sin. Sin is offence against God and disrupts that blessed fellowship between God and the believer.

Thus, also, obedience is set before the students as a *covenantal* obligation. The distinct instruction of the Christian school is this: Obedience is your obligation as covenant children—your part in the covenant (see the Form for the Administration of Baptism). Obedience is not required in order to earn your place in the covenant.

Rather is it required of you out of gratitude to God for taking you into the covenant, and giving you concretely, personally, the blessings of salvation. Students are exhorted to live out of the power of that covenant life.

Thus the motive for obedience flows out of the covenant, namely, gratitude for the real, experienced blessing of the covenant, namely, life with God.

### Concluding Comments

The Protestant Reformed schools we have are the fruit of the covenant. Fathers and grandfathers built them deeply conscious of their covenant obligations. If the present generation loses sight of that, these schools will be lost in the next generation. For a generation, perhaps, Christian schools can be maintained on the basis of tradition. But the next generation will soon conclude that the endeavor is not worth the expense.

There are already too many schools, originally founded on the covenant, that have caved in to the financial pressures and accepted government aid. Some receive as much as 50% of their support from the government. Such compromise with the principles of covenant education spells disaster. The end of such capitulation was manifest a few years ago in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, where one entire Christian school system gave itself over to the government—buildings and all!

The Protestant Reformed


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\* This agrees with the teaching of John Calvin, who insisted that God wants us to know who are His elect church members, yet we need not know this with absolute certainty. Calvin writes, "But as here full certainty was not necessary, he has in its place substituted the judgment of charity, by which we acknowledge all as members of the Church who by confession of faith, regularity of conduct, and participation in the sacraments, unite with us in acknowledging the same God and Christ" (*Institutes*, IV, 1, 8).

schools are based on God's unconditional covenant of grace with us, though in this sinful world the principles of the covenant are not always rightly manifest. However, these schools shall slip off the foundation if parents and teachers fail to labor consciously and deliberately out of that truth. We have no reason to boast, for what do we

have that we have not been given? Rather, we give thanks for God's faithfulness.

To whom much is given, much is required. We have a system of schools handed to us by our grandparents and parents. We have the glorious Reformed, biblical understanding of the covenant that rightly understands the place of

children in the covenant. What shall we do with these blessings? Let us see to it that these are covenantal schools — in basis, in the content of the instruction, in discipline, in atmosphere, in goal. Then, indeed, we may expect God's blessing, a blessing that comes not *because of*, but *in the way of* faithfulness. 

## Report of Classis West

Rev. Daniel Kleyn

March 3, 2004  
**C**lassis West met for its regular March meeting in Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California on Wednesday, March 3.

An officebearers' conference was held on Tuesday, the day before classis. The theme of the conference was "The Divine Work of Sanctification." The keynote address was given by Rev. Doug Kuiper. Papers were then presented on various related topics by Rev. G. Eriks, Rev. D. Kleyn, and Rev. M. VanderWal. Many members of Hope (Redlands) PRC also attended the conference. In the evening, all were invited back to church for a time of fellowship — an enjoyable way to end an enjoyable day.

Classis met in session all day Wednesday, and into Wednesday evening. Rev. Richard Smit chaired the meeting. The 4<sup>th</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> grades of Hope Christian School of Redlands attended and observed part of the meeting of classis.

Much time was spent treating a lengthy appeal in which a member objected to a consistory's disciplinary action against that member. After careful consideration of this case, classis upheld the consistory in its discipline. Classis also treated five requests from consistories who, in accordance with Article 76 of the Church Order, sought classis' approval to

proceed with discipline. Four asked for approval to proceed to the 2<sup>nd</sup> public announcement, and one for erasure of a baptized member. Each case was carefully treated. The faithful labors of the elders were noted, and approval was given to each of the consistories. All of the above was dealt with in closed session. Although these matters are often difficult and grievous, we are thankful that God is pleased to preserve the mark of Christian discipline in our churches.

The church visitors gave their report, in which they spoke of the evidence of God's continued faithfulness to our churches. They mentioned that God continues to preserve each of the congregations in the truth and to bless them with unity, peace, and love.

Subsidy requests from three of our churches (First, Edmonton; Immanuel, Lacombe; and Lynden) were approved and forwarded to synod.

Classis approved classical appointments for two vacant churches. The congregation in Wingham, Ontario will be supplied by Rev. M. VanderWal on April 9, 11, and 18, and by Rev. S. Key on May 9 and 16. And Immanuel (Lacombe) will be supplied by Rev. R. Hanko on August 22 and 29, and by Rev. G. Eriks on September 5 and 12.


Annual elections were also

held. Ministers elected as delegates to Synod 2004 were Revs. A. Brummel, C. Haak, S. Key, D. Kleyn, and R. Smit. Alternates are Revs. M. DeVries, G. Eriks, S. Houck, and M. VanderWal. Elders elected as delegates to synod were Allen Brummel (Edgerton), Alvin Bylsma (Hull), George DeJong (South Holland), Jack Regnerus (Randolph), and James Regnerus (Doon). Alternates are Gary Buteyn (Randolph), Henry Ferguson (Edmonton), Fred Hanko (Lynden), Alvin Kooiker (Hull), and Robert Vermeer (Peace).

In other elections, Rev. S. Key was reappointed to a three-year term on the Classical Committee; Rev. C. Haak was elected to a three-year term as a synodical deputy of Classis West, with Rev. R. Smit elected as an alternate; and Revs. M. DeVries, C. Haak, S. Houck, and S. Key were elected as church visitors, with Revs. A. Brummel and D. Kleyn as alternates.

The expenses for classis totaled \$7,757.47.

The Lord willing, classis will hold its next meeting in September 2004 in Randolph PRC, WI. The March 2005 meeting is scheduled to be held in Bethel PRC, IL.

Rev. Daniel Kleyn,  
Stated Clerk 



### Congregation Activities

**T**he Cornerstone PRC in St. John, IN hosted a conference on "Depression" Friday and Saturday, February 27 and 28, at the Spring House Inn in Porter, IN. Rev. Jai Mahtani, our churches' missionary to Pittsburgh, PA; Mr. Steve Hoekstra, a Christian counselor; and Mrs. Ellen Bruinooge, a counselor at Pine Rest Hospital in Grand Rapids, MI, either spoke or led sectionals at this conference.

Preceding the spring meeting of Classis West on March 3 in the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA, there was an officebearers' conference hosted by the Hope congregation with the theme, "The Divine Work of Sanctification." There were four speeches scheduled: "Sanctification: The Justified Sinner Delivered from Sin's Dominion," by Rev. Doug Kuiper; "The Christian: A New Man in an Old Nature," by Rev. Daniel Kleyn; "Perfectionism: The Mark of a True Christian?" by Rev. Martin VanderWal; and "The Church: The Holy Spirit's Instrument for Sanctification," by Rev. Garrett Eriks.

The Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI held their annual Family Conference this year at Camp Geneva on the shore of Lake Michigan, between Holland and Grand Haven, on February 20 and 21. This year's featured speaker was Rev. Jason Kortering, who spoke to the group on the theme, "What on Earth Are We Doing Here?"

The Grace PRC in Standale, MI now has a choir. In early February, more than twenty-five members of Grace attended an organizational meeting, with a number of others expressing interest. Practice

began later that month, with a view to giving two programs this year, one in the spring and one in the fall.

A group from the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI visited our seminary on Tuesday morning, February 24. Plans called for a tour of the seminary and an opportunity to sit in on a church history class and a dogmatics class, as well as enjoying lunch with the professors and students.

Sunday evening, February 22, a nice crowd gathered at the Hudsonville, MI PRC to enjoy a piano concert entitled, "Praise with the Piano III." Those in attendance delighted in fourhanded piano duets from various members of local PR churches. Religious and classical music was performed by nine fourhanded duos.

The consistory of the First PRC in Edgerton, MN presented a proposal to their congregation to remodel the upstairs bathroom in their parsonage. This was approved at a congregational meeting in February, with necessary funds coming from a collection taken at the meeting and through funds from Edgerton's Building Fund.

Good progress continues to be made on the church renovation project at Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI. In late February the carpet was laid and worship services were scheduled to be held there again, the Lord willing, on Sunday, March 7.

### Mission Activities

**R**ev. Wilbur Bruinsma and Mr. Dave Moelker, both members of our churches' Domestic Mission Committee, spent the weekend of February 27-March 1 visiting with the PR Fellowship of Fayetteville, N.C. Rev. Brunisma preached twice on Sunday and the men were also able to visit with each family

and encourage them in their witness in the Fayetteville area.

Our eastern home missionary, Rev. Jai Mahtani, and Mr. Gary Boverhof from the Domestic Mission Committee visited with the saints in the Allentown, PA area February 13-16. Plans for the visit included meeting on Friday evening with the heads of households to discuss possible mission labors in the area, a couple of house visits on Saturday, and finally two worship services on Sunday.

### School Activities

**S**tudents attending our Christian schools typically enjoy a field trip or two each school year. One such trip caught our attention recently when the students of Hope Christian School in Redlands, CA invited parents to join them on a Whale Watching Field Trip on February 27. The children left school around 7:30 in the morning and set out for Balboa to watch whales in their annual migration up the coast of California. A field trip like that certainly makes the yearly visit to an area museum seem rather ordinary.

### Young People's Activities

**A**s this summer's young people's convention looms closer and closer, we notice an increase in the level of fundraisers by the young people's societies of our churches. Each society is busy raising the necessary money to make this summer's convention a reality.

The young people of the Doon, Iowa PRC sponsored a taco supper on March 1.

The South Holland, IL young people invited their congregation to a soup supper on February 27.

Hudsonville's young people sponsored a breakfast fundraiser on March 6, while the young people of Trinity PRC in Hud-

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



sonville hosted a hamburg fry on February 28.

The young people of Southwest PRC sponsored a Bean Bag Toss Tournament on February 28 at Adams Christian School.

## Minister Activities


The PRC in Wingham, Ontario has formed a trio of Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, Rev. Mike DeVries, and Rev. James Slopsema.

They will call one of these men to be their pastor on March 9. At that meeting they will also select a name for their congregation.

Rev. Charles Terpstra has declined the call he was considering to serve as the next pastor of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada.

Rev. Ronald VanOverloop declined the call that had been extended to him to serve as pastor of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI.

The Byron Center, MI PRC has extended a call to Rev. Ronald VanOverloop to serve as their next pastor.

On March 4, the council of the Hudsonville, MI PRC formed a trio of the Revs. Garrett Eriks, James Slopsema, and Ronald Van Overloop. Their congregational meeting to call one of these men was scheduled for Sunday morning, March 28. 

## Announcements

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Hull PRC express their Christian sympathy to Ron and Deb Hoksbergen and family, Sharon VanDenTop and daughter, and Paul and Cheryl DeRoon and family in the death of their father and grandfather,

#### MR. ALBERT VANDENTOP.

May their comfort come from God's Word in Psalm 23:6, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Rev. Steven Key, President  
Brian Kroese, Assistant Clerk

### NOTICE

The Lord willing, a spring lecture on the subject, *"Is The King James Version Still The Best Translation Available?"*, will be given by Prof. Hanko. The lecture is sponsored by the Evangelism Committee of Peace PRC of Lansing, Illinois located at 18423 Stony Island Ave., Lansing, Illinois. Plan to attend this timely lecture on Friday, April 16 at 8:00 P.M. at Peace PRC.

### NOTICE!!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 12, 2004 at the Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church. Material to be treated at this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk by April 12, 2004.

Jon J. Huisken, Stated Clerk

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On March 30, 2004, our parents and grandparents,

**GARY and MARILYN BYLSMA**, celebrated their 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.

We, their children and grandchildren, give thanks to our heavenly Father for the blessing of godly parents. We thank them for their guidance, love, and the godly example they have given us, and continue to give. We pray that God continue to bless them in their marriage in the years to come.

"Those who His gracious covenant keep The Lord will ever bless. Their children's children shall rejoice To see His righteousness" (Psalter # 278).

- \* David and Chris Linker  
Jessica (in glory), Kathryn,  
Alexander
- \* Steve and Rosie Bylsma  
Joel
- \* Dan and Jean Bylsma  
Brittany, Nickolas
- \* David and Amy Brands
- \* Andy and Shannon Bylsma
- \* Ryan Bylsma
- \* Brett Bylsma

Jenison, Michigan

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Adult Bible Society of Doon Protestant Reformed Church expresses its Christian sympathy to fellow member Jean Wynia in the passing of Jean's father,

#### ALBERT VANDENTOP.

May she and the entire VanDenTop family be comforted with the promise: "Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:1, 2).

Rev. R. Smit, pres.  
Vi DeBoer, sec'y.

## Reformed Witness Hour

### Topics for April

Date	Topic	Text
April 4	"Jesus Abandoned by God"	Mark 15:33, 34
April 11	"Jesus' Empty Tomb"	Mark 16:1-8
April 18	"Knowing Christ Is in Us"	II Corinthians 13:5
April 25	"Assuring Our Hearts Before Him"	I John 3:9