

# THE *May 15, 2004* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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Volume 80 ♦ Number 16



# Imitate That Which Is Good

*Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.*

III John 11

**T**he third epistle of John was a twin to the second. II John was written by the apostle John to the elect lady. This elect lady was one of the churches in or near Ephesus in which John labored. It could have been one of the churches addressed by the Lord in Revelation 2 and 3. III John was written by John to the well beloved Gaius, a prominent and faithful member in the same church to which II John was addressed.

In this third epistle, John made mention of two other members of the church. There was Diotrophes, a very evil man, whose many faults were to be attributed to the fact that he loved to have the preemi-

nence. But there was also Demetrius, who had a good report.

It was in connection with these two figures that John warned Gaius to follow not that which is evil but that which is good. To follow is to mimic, to imitate. Gaius had within the church both the good and the evil that he could imitate. He was charged to imitate the good. We must do the same.

The importance of this is seen in the fact that he that does good is of God: but he that does evil has not seen God. Be careful whom you imitate. Imitate those who are of God and who have seen Him. If you are careless, you will imitate those who are not of God.



The good and the evil!

That which is good is that which is in harmony with the law of God. Goodness has an absolute standard. Ultimately, God is good. He is the source of all good and standard of all good. And He has revealed His goodness to us in His law. That which is good, therefore, is that behavior or lifestyle that conforms to the holy law of God.

But that which is good is also that which is helpful and beneficial. It is the nature of God's goodness revealed in the law that promotes the welfare of the church, the gospel, marriage, the family, and society.

That which is evil is just the opposite. It is that which is contrary to the law and will of God. For that reason it is also destructive. Those practices that conflict with God's good laws always tear down instead of build up. They bring ruin, and with ruin they bring trouble and sorrow.

You will find both the good and the evil in the church!

The contrast here is not the good that is found in the church and the evil that is out in the world. That contrast exists, but it is not the focus here. The good and the evil are both found within the church as well.

You will find good in the church, due to the presence of such men as Gaius and Demetrius. Of Gaius we read that the truth was in him and that he walked in the truth (v. 3). Special mention is made of Gaius' hospitality to missionaries sent out by John to preach to the

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

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

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

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

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pagan Gentiles. The missionaries found shelter at the home of Gaius on the way. Then there was Demetrius. He had a good report of all men (v. 12). There will always be members in the church that are like these two brothers. They do good and even abound in that which is good.

But you will also find evil in the church, due to men such as Diotrophes. Of Diotrophes we are told that he loved to have the pre-eminence. In this evil pursuit to be chief he would receive neither John nor those whom John sent to labor in the gospel. Furthermore, Diotrophes was guilty of speaking malicious words against the apostle and of casting out of the church those who supported John and his work. Yes, there will always be church members like Diotrophes, whose lives are filled with evil and who fill the church with their evil. That is true especially in churches where Christian discipline is not exercised.

Do not imitate that which is evil, but that which is good.

Much of what we do is imitation of others. It is the very nature of a child to imitate what he sees in his parents and older siblings. This is how he learns. But even the behavior of adults is imitation. This is in keeping with the truth of Ecclesiastes 1:9, "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun." Much of what we do is what we have seen others do. This includes our behavior in marriage, the raising of our children, the way we entertain ourselves, our conduct in church.

We are instructed to imitate that which is good and not that which is evil. This means that we must evaluate all that we see around us. This evaluation must be done in light of Scripture. After proper evaluation we must imitate and put into practice only that which is good.

Interestingly, this warning came to a mature believer. We might expect it to come to a child or young person. Certainly this is appropriate also for a weaker member of the church who is struggling with sin. It certainly should come to a Diotrophes, who was living in sin. But instead it comes to Gaius — a mature, faithful member of the church. Because of our sinful nature, we are all vulnerable to the influence of bad examples and evil behavior. We must all be on our guard constantly. Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall (I Cor 10:12).



How important this is!

For he that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.

For one to be of (out of) God, his spiritual source or origin must be in God. One's spiritual source is either God or the devil. If one's source is in God, he bears His image. He reflects in his very being the goodness and perfections of God. If, however, his spiritual source is the devil, he bears the devil's image and reflects in his being the devil's evil. In short, he is totally depraved.

By nature we are all of the devil. This is the result of the fall. To be of God requires the new birth of which John speaks so much in his epistles.

Your spiritual source determines whether you do good or evil. Those who are born of God and thus have their source in Him do the good. Bearing the image of God, they are not only able to do the good, they are also inclined to the good. Their lives are filled with that which is good. And it is all the fruit of their being of God. Those, in turn, who are of the devil do that which is evil. They are just as depraved as the devil himself, incapable of any good and inclined to all evil.

But there is more. He that doeth evil hath not seen God.

We cannot see the essence or being of God. But we can see God with the eye of faith. I John 3:16 connects this spiritual sight to abiding with God and knowing Him. "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him." Notice three elements here. There is the element of abiding with God. This is to live in constant and close fellowship with Him. Then there is knowing God. We live with those whom we know. And the more we live with them, the more intimate our knowledge of them becomes. The same is true with God. Only when we come to know God in faith can we abide with Him in fellowship. The more we fellowship with God, the more intimate our knowledge of Him is. That brings us to the final element, our seeing God. We see those with whom we abide and live. We see them often. So also do those who know and abide with God see God. They see Him in faith as they abide in His presence daily.

This is the fruit of being of God. Those that are of God have received the gift of faith to know Him, abide with Him, and see Him daily. This is how they are enabled to do that which is good.

But those that are of the devil have not seen God. They have not known God, nor do they abide with Him. Neither therefore have they seen God. And that explains why they do that which is evil.

This is all set before us to impress upon us the importance of imitating that which is good and not that which is evil.

By imitating the practices and behavior of others, we are ultimately imitating either God or the devil. When we imitate that which is good, we imitate those who are of God and have seen God. And so we ultimately are imitating God. When, however, we imitate that which is evil, we imitate those who are of the devil and who have never seen God. And ultimately we are imitating the devil.



Our calling is clearly to imitate God by imitating the good of those who are of God. "Be ye followers (imitators) of God as dear children" (Eph. 5:1).

We are to bear this in mind especially with respect to our life in the church.

There were those in the church in John's day who claimed to be of God and to have seen God in fellowship. Yet they did that which was evil. Diotrophes was a case in point. The point that John was making to Gaius was that such claims of evildoers were false. Do not be lured into following their example, lest you become imitators of the devil.

And the same applies to the church also today.

There are many in the church who claim to be of God and to have seen God. Yet they live in sin. They live in adultery by divorcing and remarrying. They profane the Sabbath by their work and entertainment. They dishonor those in authority both in the home and in the workshop. Women usurp authority by intruding on the offices of the church. Many alter the worship that God has ordained for the church, introducing elements that are contrary to the will of God. In many cases false doctrines have led them in this direction. What we believe determines how we live. The church world is awash with false doctrine of every kind. Those who hold these heresies and follow the evil practices inherent in


them also claim to be of God and to be those who have seen Him. But we must not be deceived. Those who do evil are not of God, neither have they seen God. Do not listen to their claim and do not follow their example.



And how is it possible for us to imitate that which is good?

Only if we ourselves are of God and have seen God.

Have you seen God? You see Him in the preaching. You see Him in the sacraments. You see Him in prayer. You see Him in the fellowship of the saints.

In the power of that sight imitate that which is good and not that which is evil. 

## Editorials

# Covenantal Universalism: New Form of an Old Attack on Sovereign Grace (2)

**A** new form of covenant theology takes hold in many of the reputedly conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches in North America. In accordance with its fundamental teaching, this doctrine should be called "covenantal universalism." In the April 15, 2004 issue of the *Standard Bearer*, I showed that covenantal universalism is a bold attack upon all the truths of the gospel of sovereign grace. The attack consists of denying that grace is sovereign in the sphere of the covenant.

Covenantal universalism denies that eternal, sovereign predestination—election and reprobation—applies to the children of godly parents in the sphere of the covenant. In the sphere of the cov-

enant, all the children are elect, including those who eventually perish in unbelief.

Covenantal universalism rejects the doctrine of limited atonement as regards the generations of believers. Christ died for all the physical, baptized children of believers. Indeed, He died for all who receive the sacrament of baptism, those who finally are damned, as well as those who finally are glorified.

Covenantal universalism teaches that grace is resistible in baptized children. Many children in whom God begins the work of salvation, uniting them to Christ, resist this grace and go lost.

Covenantal universalism emphatically repudiates the perseverance of *covenant* saints in *covenant*

holiness. Many who once were truly grafted into Christ and enjoyed the spiritual blessings of the covenant are cut off from Christ, forfeit the blessings of salvation, and perish everlastingly.

In the sphere of the covenant, grace is universal, resistible, and lovable.

Those who teach this covenant theology claim to maintain the doctrines of grace, the "five points of Calvinism." But the doctrines of grace do not apply to the covenant.

Evidently, there is contradiction in the saving work of God. Outside the covenant, on the mission field, God saves by sovereign grace. Within the covenant, grace is powerless. Outside the covenant, grace depends upon the will of God alone. Within the covenant,

grace is dependent upon the will of the baptized child. Outside the covenant, grace is efficacious. Within the covenant, grace can successfully be resisted. Outside the covenant, grace is particular. Within the sphere of the covenant, grace is universal.

The attempt of these teachers to distinguish covenant grace from the grace of God confessed as particular and sovereign by the Canons of Dordt and the Westminster Confession of Faith is futile. The grace of God in the sphere of the covenant is saving grace, grace that has its origin in election, the grace of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, grace that applies the atonement of the cross of Christ, grace that has eternal life in heaven as its purpose. And according to covenantal universalism this grace is not particular and sovereign, but universal and resistible.

Despite the loud protestations of those who teach covenantal universalism that they are orthodox, it becomes plain that they nurse a latent hostility to the Reformed confessions, especially the Canons of Dordt and the Westminster Confession of Faith. They are forced to be cautious, because they are Reformed officebearers, who have sworn to be faithful to the creeds. Nevertheless, they like to stress the inadequacy of the creeds. They present themselves as innovators. They are men who have discovered new truths for the modern Reformed church.

Not only have they discovered new truths. They have also created a new way of teaching spiritual truth. They are critical of Reformed theologians of the past for their emphasis on propositional truth, for their concern with theological system, for their zeal for doctrinal purity and soundness. All of this is condemned as "scholastic." The men of the "federal vision," as they call their movement, herald a new way of religious thinking and teaching. Theirs is a "biblical" and "covenantal" way of thinking and teaching.

This, of course, is a thinly veiled attack on the systematic theology of the Reformed confessions.

The proof is in the pudding. The message produced by this new, fresh, exciting "biblical" and "covenantal" method of theology is in violent conflict with the Reformed confessions, beginning with the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Not long ago, one of these men gave vent to the attitude that lives in their hearts toward the system of doctrine contained in the Canons of Dordt and in the Westminster Confession of Faith. He publicly railed against the "*solus*" of the Reformation. The "*solus*" of the Reformation are the grand, essential truths of the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ: "by faith alone"; "by grace alone"; "Christ alone"; and "to the glory of God alone."

#### **Development of an Older Doctrine of the Covenant**

Even though covenantal universalism attacks the Reformed confession at its very heart—the sovereignty of God in His grace—most of the reputedly Reformed and Presbyterian churches are open to it. They are wide open to it. They permit the teaching. They tolerate the teachers. Criticism is muted, so oblique that no one could take offense at it, or non-existent. When faithful church members take the heretics and their heresy to the assemblies, the ecclesiastical assemblies exonerate the false teachers. The churches are unwilling or unable to condemn covenantal universalism and to root it out.

The reason is that covenantal universalism is a development of an older doctrine of the covenant, which all these churches have embraced for many years.

The older doctrine of the covenant that the men of the "federal vision" are developing taught that God makes His covenant with all the children of believing parents

alike, by promising salvation to them all at their baptism. In this important respect, the covenant is universal. The older doctrine added that the covenant is conditional. It depends for its realization, that is, for its continuation with the individual child and for its actual saving of any child, upon the child's faith and covenant-obedience.

This doctrine of a universal, conditional covenant was taught by Klaas Schilder and the "liberated" Reformed Churches.

The men who are teaching covenantal universalism openly acknowledge that their covenant doctrine is essentially that of Klaas Schilder and the "liberated" Reformed. Especially when they come under fire, they defend themselves by appealing to the doctrine of the covenant of the "liberated" Reformed. "We are not introducing novelties. Our theology is the covenant doctrine of Schilder and the 'liberated' Reformed."

Covenantal universalism, with its radical denial of the entire gospel of sovereign grace, is a development of the doctrine of the covenant that the Protestant Reformed Churches rejected in their great internal struggle in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

#### **Necessary Development of the Older Doctrine**

The teachings about the covenant and its grace by Shepherd, Barach, Wilkins, Wilson, and the others are *legitimate*, *natural*, and *inevitable*, indeed *necessary*, development of that older doctrine of the conditional covenant. That older doctrine made the covenant and the covenant promise universal—to all the physical children of godly parents alike. But the covenant promise is grace. Its origin is the favorable attitude of God toward those to whom He makes the promise; it is gracious in its very nature and content; it purposes grace and salvation for those to whom God makes it. Therefore, the older cov-

enant doctrine made grace universal in the sphere of the covenant.

The new development of this older doctrine draws the implications: all the children are united to Christ; all receive the saving benefits of the covenant; all are saved—temporarily.

The older doctrine made grace and salvation, *in the covenant*, conditional. The universal, gracious covenant and covenant promise depend upon the faith and obedience of the child. Faith and obedience, even though they may not merit, are the ground, or basis, of salvation in the covenant. They are a certain worthiness of the sinner to be saved.

The new development of this older doctrine draws the implication. Justification in the covenant depends on faith as a man's own work of obedience and on the good works faith performs. In the covenant, justification is by faith and works.

The older doctrine taught that the covenant promise can fail of giving the salvation it promises to someone. It taught that the covenant itself, established with someone personally by promise at his baptism, can be broken, so that the covenant is with him no longer. The result is that he perishes. Failing to fulfill the conditions of the covenant, a child breaks the covenant *in the sense that he nullifies the covenant made with him by promise* and renders the promise of God to him void.

Covenantal universalism draws the implication and teaches the falling away of those who once enjoyed union with Christ, the blessings of salvation, and saving grace.

The older doctrine of the covenant strongly opposed any control over the covenant, the covenant promise, and covenant salvation by the eternal decree of election. How Schilder and the "liberated" Reformed cried out, "The covenant is not identical with election." What they meant was: "Election does not control the covenant. Election does not determine to whom God makes

the covenant promise. Election does not determine with whom God establishes the covenant. Election does not determine whom God saves in and by the covenant."

In the covenant doctrine of the "liberated" Reformed, there always lurked enmity against God's election as eternal, sovereign decree. Sometimes that enmity surfaced. Already in the 1940s, Prof. Benne Holwerda was teaching that election in Scripture, including such passages as Ephesians 1:4, does not refer to an eternal decree, but to a temporal, conditional election in the history of the covenant. A John Barach is merely echoing Benne Holwerda some sixty years later, as Barach himself has observed.

The new form of the older doctrine seizes upon this separation of covenant grace and covenant salvation from the eternal decree of election and runs with it. Universal grace in the sphere of the covenant completely swallows up election as a divine decree. The election permitted to exist in the sphere of the covenant is ruled by universal grace and by the will of the member of the covenant. All the baptized are elect originally. Thus election is determined by universal grace. Many lose their election, however, and become reprobates by failing to fulfill the conditions. Thus election is determined by the will of the members of the covenant.

In short, the older doctrine of a gracious covenant and covenant promise for all, dependent for their efficacy on conditions that the children must fulfill, was implicitly a message of universal, resistible grace.

The new covenant theology is making this explicit. It repudiates outright every one of the doctrines of sovereign grace and openly substitutes the teachings of universal, conditional, resistible grace.

This is the reason why the churches are powerless to combat covenantal universalism. They are committed to the conditional covenant. Sounder theologians oppose

the new developments, especially the gross heresies of justification by faith and faith's works and the falling away of saints. But they cannot, or will not, get at the root of the heresies. They themselves hold the error from which these heresies spring: universal grace in the sphere of the covenant, conditioned by the faith and obedience of the covenant member.

### Covenantal Particularism

In the early 1950s, the Protestant Reformed Churches battled almost to the death—their death—on behalf of the gospel of salvation by sovereign grace *in the sphere of the covenant*. They battled for sovereign grace by contending against the doctrine of a conditional covenant.

Not one Reformed or Presbyterian denomination came to their defense. Not one Reformed or Presbyterian theologian stood with them.

Not one.

Now the Reformed and Presbyterian churches are troubled by the full-blown covenantal universalism that has developed from the doctrine of a conditional covenant. Inasmuch as the truth of justification by faith alone is jeopardized, they themselves must see that their very existence as true churches of Christ is in danger. The entire sixteenth century Reformation was one with Luther in warning that the truth of gracious justification, apart from any and all works of the sinner, is the "article of a standing and a falling church."

In the face of this danger, one of the gravest since Dordt, will the churches at last consider that the only safeguard of the gospel of salvation by sovereign grace is the doctrine of the unconditional covenant of grace with Christ as head of the covenant and with the elect in Him?

The issue is stark.

The loss of the gospel of sovereign grace.

Or, covenantal particularism.

— DJE



# New RFPA Book on Worship

**T**he second volume in the Reformed Free Publishing Association's paperback series, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, has just come out. The title is *Reformed Worship*. The book is a timely treatment of the lively, controversial, and crucially important issue of the public worship of the church.

The book demonstrates from Scripture, the Reformed confessions, and the Reformed tradition that the worship of the church must be regulated by the Word of God. God does not leave the "how" of worship up to the worshipping people. The fundamental issue in the current "worship-wars" is the second commandment of the law of God.

The critique of various expressions of the increasingly popular "progressive" worship points out that "progressive" worship invariably dislodges the preaching of the gospel from its place at the heart of worship.

*Reformed Worship* responds to the charge that "traditional" Reformed worship leaves the congregation passive.

In the course of its examination of biblical, covenantal worship, the book considers such controversial matters among those holding the "regulative principle" of worship as the observance of the Christian holidays, the use of instrumental accompaniment, and exclusive psalmody. It pleads for peace regarding these differences and offers grounds on which this peace may stand.

Three ministers in the Protestant Reformed Churches, Prof. Barrett L. Gritters, Rev. Charles J. Terpstra, and Prof. David J. Engelsma cooperate in this fresh, informative, and provocative study.

The publishing project, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, makes available in book form series of articles on theological, ecclesiastical, and ethical subjects that originally ran in the *Standard Bearer*. In this way, the witness to the truth of the Reformed faith and life spreads. In addition, those who read the series of articles in the *Standard Bearer* have the material in the useful form of a single volume. The books are small—about one hundred pages. All are published in the

same attractive format. The first in the series was David J. Engelsma's *Common Grace Revisited: A Response to Richard J. Mouw's He Shines in All That's Fair*.

The RFPA intends to send *Reformed Worship* to all members of the book club as a gift. The gift expresses appreciation for the support those members give to the work of the RFPA, financial and otherwise. At the same time, the RFPA hopes that members of the book club and readers of the *Standard Bearer* will order copies of the book for family members, friends, and acquaintances. Copies of the book can be ordered from the RFPA at the low price of \$6.95 per copy. The RFPA urges evangelism committees, within the Protestant Reformed Churches and without, to use *Reformed Worship* in their witness. Copies will be available to evangelism committees at cost.

Societies and discussion-groups will find the book an ideal basis for the study of the supreme calling of the church and the individual member: the right worship of the God and Father of Jesus Christ.

— DJE 

## All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

### ■ "Theologians debate God's foreknowledge"

**I**t was the headline in Loveland, Colorado's *Reporter-Herald* of December 6, 2003. (Thanks to one of our "contributors" from Loveland for the article.) The article,

though dated, is really very current. Its report concerning the position of some calling themselves evangelical Christians shows the degree to which "Calvinists" or "conservative" Christians have fallen. The eternal foreknowledge of God represents one of those undebatable subjects for Christians—particularly Reformed Christians. It is surely part of the creeds of Reformed churches. There are also

many scriptural texts that come to mind that set forth this doctrine. Romans 8:29-30 presents the order of our salvation—from foreknowledge to final glorification. There can be such an order only if God eternally knows all things that take place. There is Joseph's statement to his brothers after the death of their father Jacob: "Ye meant it for evil but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20). That could only be

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on the basis of God's foreknowledge. There is Ephesians 1:4, "According as he hath chosen us in him (Christ) before the foundation of the world...." Peter presents the most striking instance of God's foreknowledge on the day of Pentecost. In speaking of the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit, Peter declares it to be from the ascended Lord. Then in Acts 2:23 he states, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."

Both confessionally and scripturally, the truth of God's foreknowledge is clearly set forth.

It is, therefore, unsettling to read of those called "evangelicals" who are proposing that God does not have foreknowledge. The Loveland newspaper, in its religious section, has an article by Bill Broadway of the *Washington Post*. He begins:

John Sanders began to wonder about God's intentions after his brother was killed in a motorcycle accident.

As a 16-year-old high school student, Sanders was a photographer for the local newspaper in Hoopeston, Ill., when he was sent to the accident scene not knowing the victim's identity. After seeing the horror before him, he turned to God and asked, "Why did you kill my brother?"

Sanders, now a professor of philosophy and religion at Huntington College in Indiana, said his confusion increased when well-intentioned friends said that his brother's death was part of God's plan—and that the plan must be to help Sanders accept Jesus as his Savior.

"I asked, 'God killed my brother so I would become a Christian?'"

Thirty-two years later, Sanders, an evangelical Christian, still considers such arguments absurd and, over the years, has developed a view of God that he believes to be more

realistic. He no longer asks whether God does terrible things to people, he said.

Instead, Sanders lays the responsibility directly on humans, arguing that they have the free will to make choices that determine events. God knows everything that happened in the past and is happening now, but God has no foreknowledge of events because the future has not happened, he said.

For promoting this view, called "open theism," Sanders and other evangelical scholars have been challenged through increasingly vehement criticism on the Internet, in seminary trustee meetings and at gatherings of the Evangelical Theological Society, a 54-year-old professional association whose members must affirm biblical inerrancy and the doctrine of the Trinity.

...This dispute among academics reflects a growing debate among evangelicals at large over such issues as the relationship between God and humans, the effectiveness of prayer and the significance of making moral decisions.

Open theists, in essence, say there would be no point in praying for a sick child if God already knew what the outcome of the illness would be. Why struggle over making the right decision, they ask, if God has decided for you in advance? And how can you love anyone, even God, if that love is forced on you or away from you.

"It's a fundamental incoherence to say we're determined, yet I love," Sanders said. If there is no free will, he added, "is God dancing with mannequins?"

The article continues by pointing out other evangelicals, especially Roger Nicole, 87, an internationally known theologian and native of Switzerland who advocates the predestination views of John Calvin. One can rejoice that there are many Reformed Christians who disagree with Sanders and continue to hold to infallible Scriptures. Indeed Sanders "has developed a view of God that he believes to be

more realistic." Sadly, however, it is his own "development" and is not scriptural.

It represents one more instance of the attempt to influence, infiltrate, and ultimately to destroy what is scriptural and Reformed. That we, mere mortals, have questions about the work of God's foreknowledge is understandable. He is God—we are but men. But that does not allow one to "develop" doctrines that do not adhere to and are not derived from Scripture. By grace we must confess the scriptural presentation of God's "foreknowledge." That foreknowledge is not simply an awareness of what shall happen, but an awareness that is determinative at the same time.

## ■ "Marriage amendment and Christian beliefs"

Doubtlessly, all of our readers are aware of the raging debate about homosexual "marriages." The debate really began a number of years ago when homosexuals insisted on "coming out of the closet" and flaunting their homosexuality before all of society. Churches became involved when homosexuals claimed to have the right of full membership though living in their sinful relationships. Then there was the claim that church members practicing homosexuality should have the privilege of functioning in the church offices. Now, sadly, increasingly there are those who claim to be Christian who insist that the right of homosexuals is a constitutional right. The constitution protects the "rights" of all religions—and forbids Congress from establishing a religion.

An instance of this idea was presented in *Letters to the Editor* in the *Grand Rapids Press* of March 15, 2004. There a certain Melanie Glover wrote:

I am writing in response to the Public Pulse letter "Standing up for God" as well as many of the arguments I have listened to



in my conversations with all concerned about the legalization of gay marriage. The main arguments against gay marriage include phrases like "We started off as a Christian nation." "America was founded on Judeo-Christian principles." "What will come next?" And "Marriage is a sacred institution between a man and a woman only." These all stem from religious beliefs held by many, but unfortunately they contradict the U.S. Constitution. If the U.S. Congress were to ban gay marriage, it would in fact violate the First Amendment that prohibits Congress from establishing a religion.

Religion, by definition, consists of a set of beliefs, one that is much too prevalent in the support of a ban on gay marriage that consequently would declare America as the Christian nation traditionalists favor.

This religious justification for the ban comes at the expense of the gay community's right to freedom of expression through its own sexual identities. If the U.S. government gives every American the right to determine his or her own religion, we should not expect every American to choose Jesus as the only way, regardless of founding values.

We should not assume God's laws to be upheld by a Constitution that explicitly states that every American may choose by what values and morals he or she will live. As a believer in Christ, I do not think imposing my Christian beliefs on a man or woman who defines his or her sexual orientation differently than I do will bring them closer to the arms of God. Taking away one's free will undermines that God-given gift and rejects the power of God to change lives through values like acceptance and openness.

One might debate the wisdom of defining constitutionally what marriage is (especially when laws already make this plain). One might debate whether in fact this nation was established on Christian

principles—though indeed the Deity is mentioned by founding fathers. No Reformed Christian would agree that there is a "free will" as a "God-given gift." But what is particularly disquieting, and this letter is but representative of a growing attitude of "Christians" of our day, is that we must, constitutionally, allow all religions to adhere in our country to their own religious convictions—since Congress may not establish (nor condemn) any religion nor its practices.

I say this is disturbing. The letter-writer states, in fact, that one has a constitutional right to define his or her sexual orientation in a way different from the norm. By extension, the Muslim presumably has the right in our land to marry many wives and divorce them arbitrarily by fiat. When government cannot interfere with the "rights" of any religion to define its own forms of marriage—surely the Muslim may marry many wives. The government that may not interfere with religious practices of any religion, must honor the religious laws of the Muslims. If their religious laws demand the cutting off of the hand that steals, surely the government cannot forbid this. The same applies to the religion of the Mormons. The position still held by many of them is that they may have multiple wives—indeed ought to have this. So—what right does the government have to interfere with their religion?


And if one has a constitutional right to practice his own "sexual orientation differently than I do," then what about pedophiles? If it is one's nature to have a sexual relationship with young children, what right has the government to forbid this? One might conclude that whatever one's "orientation," he ought to be given the right to follow it.

We are rapidly approaching the condition of Israel in the days of the Judges when "everyone did what was right in his own eyes." Today, many would maintain, it is one's constitutional right to do according to his own personal convictions.

Yet governments must maintain a certain "ethic" consistently.

If not the "Judeo-Christian" ethic, then what? A combination of the ethics of all religions found in this country? But that would result in anarchy. It is true that the government cannot impose Christianity on all its peoples.

Scripture does not teach that either. Still, marriage between one man and one woman is a creation ordinance. One can violate that ordinance only to his own hurt.

In Romans 2:15 we are told: "Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another." It is the *work* of the law written in their hearts—not the law itself. The law forbids adultery—the wicked, though refusing to hold to God's law, nevertheless know within themselves that adultery is wrong. So it is also with marriage. What we are seeing, then, today is the fact that God is "giving them up unto vile affections" (Rom. 1:24) and that "God gives them over to a reprobate mind" (Rom. 1:28). Our country increasingly wallows in the cesspools of iniquity and increasingly reflects the evils of Sodom and Gomorrah of the Old Testament. It is the judgment of God that we are seeing. It is sad, then, that any Christian should defend all of this as a matter of "constitutional right" because of one's "orientation." 

*We are rapidly approaching the condition of Israel in the days of the Judges when "everyone did what was right in his own eyes."*



# Ecclesiology: The Study of the Church

**W**e now move on to the fifth section of Reformed dogmatics, known as ecclesiology. Ecclesiology is the study of the church. It includes a study of what the church is and of how she grows and is governed. It can be distinguished from soteriology, which we have just considered. Soteriology is the study of how God saves an individual believer; ecclesiology is the study of how God saves the church as a whole.

The church is an object of faith. We confess that we "believe *an* holy, catholic church." The Roman Catholics, and others, confess that we believe *in* a holy catholic church. The Romish church desires the confession to read "in" the church because they insist that everyone must believe, not in God, but in their corrupt institution. It is important, therefore, that we understand that we confess "an" holy catholic church, just as we confess that we believe the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. When we say this we are confessing that we believe that there really is a holy, catholic church, a communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, etc. Although there are times in which it does not clearly appear that there really is one holy church that is being gathered out of all the nations of the world, we believe, on the basis of Scripture, that there really is such

a body of believers, with Christ as her Head.

We grow in our understanding of what the church is and does when we consider what the Scriptures teach over against the many false views that have arisen over the centuries, and that are still maintained today. Roman Catholics and Baptists, postmillennialists and premillennialists, are just some of those who have a very wrong view of what the church of Jesus Christ is and of what she is called to do. Some give the instituted church an authority greater than that of Scripture. Others consider the instituted church to be of little or no importance and reject the idea that the preaching of the gospel by the instituted church is the chief means by which faith is worked in the hearts of His people.

In this section of dogmatics, as with all the others, we will need to set forth the truth distinctively, so that it can be clearly contrasted with that which is not true. We begin with a consideration of what Scripture tells us the church is.

## **The Church: the Body of Christ, not the Body of God**

The main term used for the church in the New Testament is a word that means literally "that which is called out." In the Old Testament, one of the main terms for the church has as its meaning "that which is called together." Putting these ideas together, we can say that the church is a group of people whom God has called out of this world and has gathered together into a new body. By nature we are one with the ungodly

world. So for us to be brought into the church we must be *called out* of this world and *called together* into the body of Christ.

The church is referred to in Scripture as the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22, 23) and the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:23-32; Rev. 21:9, 10). The church is very really the body of the One who is God in the flesh. His life is her life. His mind is her mind (I Cor. 2:16). His will is her will. His Spirit is poured out into her, so that, although He is in heaven and many members of the church are on earth, Christ and His body are governed by the same Spirit.

There are many who try to pervert this truth by claiming that the human race and the entire creation is the body of God. By applying the theory of evolution to God Himself, they teach that God and the world are evolving together, with God being the soul of this world, and the world being the body of God. God, however, is Spirit, and He is absolutely distinct from His creation. The church is the body of the Son of God in human flesh. Because the Son of God has become a real man, we, the church, can be united to Him as His body.

A true church shows she believes herself to be the body and bride of Christ by the way she lives in devotion to her Husband, and by the way her members commune and live together as one body.

## **The Universal Church and the Church Institute**

A biblical distinction that the Scriptures make is that between the



church universal and the instituted church. The church universal consists of all the elect, including those who have not yet been born. A church institute is a group of believers and their children, who have organized into a church with properly called and installed elders and deacons. A true instituted church is a manifestation upon this earth of the universal body of Christ.

When distinctions are made it is very important that we prove that the Bible makes such a distinction. This distinction between the universal body of Christ and the church institute is a biblical distinction. A passage such as Revelation 21:9 speaks of the universal church, the bride of Christ, descending out of heaven from God. This passage is clearly referring to the complete universal church, consisting of all the elect, and only the elect. But there are other passages of Scripture that undoubtedly refer to the church institute. Christ, through the inspired apostle Paul, said to the congregation of believers in Corinth, "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (I Cor. 12:27). He did not tell this congregation that she was part of the body of Christ, but that she was the body of Christ. This is understood to mean that the instituted church in Corinth was a complete picture of the universal church of Christ.

The instituted church that pictures the universal body of Christ is not the man-made institution known as the Roman Catholic Church. The institute that pictures the universal body must have the same characteristics as the universal body. It must be an institute in which the members are united by a common belief in the truth, since Christ is the truth. Only those instituted churches that preach the truth, and that properly administer and explain the truth concerning the sacraments, and that discipline those who refuse to confess the truth and to walk in the truth,

are true churches of Jesus Christ. Only these churches are manifestations on this earth of the universal body of Christ.

There are many today who reject the truth concerning the church institute. On the Lord's Day they may be found worshiping in their home, claiming that they do not need to join themselves to an instituted church on this earth. I am not, now, talking about those people who, for a time, are having difficulty finding a true church to which they can, with a clear conscience, join themselves. I am talking about those people who see no importance in joining with like-minded believers in the instituted church. Such people claim that they have their Bibles, they can read, sing, and pray on their own, so they do not need to gather for worship with the members of an instituted church. They are members of the universal body, they say, and that is the only church membership that is important.

Sometimes the reason for this attitude is an ignorance concerning what the instituted church is. The instituted church is called the house of God (I Tim. 3:15). This statement makes known the significance of the instituted church, and points out the relationship between the instituted church and the universal body of Christ.

### **The Church: the House of God**


I Timothy 3:15 is clearly referring to the instituted church. Paul is writing to Timothy, who was the pastor of the instituted church at Ephesus. In the middle of the epistle, he states his purpose for writing,

14) These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly:  
15) But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

That Paul is referring to the instituted church when he writes

these words is evident from the fact that the letter contains instruction about life in the church as institute. It begins with an exhortation to make sure that no false doctrine is taught in the church (I Tim. 1:3). It gives instruction concerning prayer in the official worship services of the church (I Tim. 2:1-8). The qualifications for special officebearers are set forth in detail (I Tim. 3:1-13). Thus it is clearly evident that it is the instituted church that Paul is referring to as the house of God.

Obviously the universal body of Christ, consisting of the total number of elect, is the house of God. God is everywhere present; but it is with His people alone that He is present in His grace, causing them to enter into covenant communion with Him. There is an application of this truth, however, also to the church as institute. The instituted church is the one place upon this earth where God dwells with His people, and causes them to enter into close fellowship with Him. If one wants to dwell with God, and to experience covenant friendship with Him, it is of utmost importance that he be a member of a true instituted church. Only there will he find the chief means of grace, the preaching of the gospel, which is the means that God uses to work conscious faith in His people and to draw them into fellowship with Him.

The reference to the instituted church as the house of God clearly shows the importance of the church institute, and also indicates the relationship between the universal body of Christ and the manifestation of that body upon this earth. In studying the church, it is good to start with considering the truth concerning the universal body of Christ, and then to go on to see how this truth applies to the instituted church on this earth. I plan to do that in the articles that follow. 



# The Reformed Churches of South Africa: A Reformed Perspective on the History and Current Struggle in the Dopper Churches of South Africa (3)

## 5. The deformation in the GKSA

**I**n this section, I would like to mention three synods of the GKSA, which in my opinion made decisions that have radically altered the direction of these churches in 1939, 1985, and 2003.

### Synod 1939

As mentioned above, the Reformed church that arrived at the Cape in the seventeenth century was a Psalm-singing church. They followed Article 69 of the Synod of Dordt strictly, which stated that the 150 Psalms must be sung, together with some six other hymns (five scriptural songs and the Apostles' Creed)<sup>1</sup>. Any other hymns were to be abolished. In a

very important and informative article, emeritus-pastor, the Rev. LS Kruger, shows clearly that the Dordt fathers, which included the synods of Dordrecht (1578), Middelburg (1581), and Dordrecht (1618/19), used the name 'hymns' for all songs that were not part of the 150 Psalms. This would then include the scriptural songs like the songs of praise by Mary and Simeon. The scriptural songs were included in Article 69 because of the pressure of the state, and not because the churches felt the need for 'NT songs.' It is also important to mention that the list of six hymns that was given was not given as a justification for introducing as many new songs as possible, but in fact to limit it to only those six hymns. Many believers have forgotten or have never heard of this historical background. When the Rev. Postma helped reestablish the Reformed church here in SA, he himself made this shift when he said that 'songs that find their text in the Bible, are the best and safest.' Later theologians and historians used this shift of Postma away from Dordt to justify the introduction of many other scriptural songs.

Irrespective of that, the GKSA was until 1939 mostly an exclusively psalm-singing church, with the exception of the six hymns. At the Synod of 1939 it was decided that a collection of 'Enige Gesange' ('A Few Hymns') would be added

to the Psalmbook, which also led to the following additional sentence to Article 69: "...Other Hymns (scriptural songs) which the Synod have approved are entrusted to the local churches to decide on."

What was the reason for this sudden urge to sing scriptural songs other than the Psalms? One can only speculate at this point, but a possible clue could be found in the Acts of the Synod of 1939, when the synod asked for scriptural songs 'especially for Christian feast days.' This meant that Article 67 (concerning feast days), which has never been dealt with biblically and was in fact tolerated through the centuries, called for 'scriptural songs' and especially hymns. Intentionally or unintentionally, it was believed that the Psalmbook was not sufficient for "the whole manner of worship which God requires of us ..." (Article 7, Belgic Confession), and by instituting feast days, such as Christmas, which the Scripture does not command (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 96), the churches felt that they had to invent some songs to make up for that which could not be found in Scripture. Hymns were thus needed for Christmas and other festive days.

It is my own opinion that this decision made by great Calvinistic men is part of the reason why the GKSA is currently facing such a crisis. Why would the Psalms not be

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*(Preceding article in this series can be found in the April 15<sup>th</sup> issue, page 322.)*



sufficient for singing about the 'salvation facts' of our Lord Jesus Christ? Could it be that even way back in 1939 theologians and preachers were beginning to doubt whether the Psalms were really Messianic, and, more importantly, if they were, were they not Messianic enough to be sufficient for *all* our worship? The 2001 rhymed Psalmbook openly confesses that the Psalms are not Messianic (it uses footnotes to explain why this is so, mentioning only, for example, that 'Christ uses Ps. 110 in reference to Himself'). At the 2003 Synod, and currently, the foundation has been laid for singing so-called 'dogmatic songs,' such as Lord's Day 1, Q. 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism, etc. If the 150 Psalms are not sufficient, no amount of songs will be sufficient.<sup>2</sup> It is clear that true reformation is needed here, to return consistently to exclusive psalmody, or else the GKSA will end up denying its re-establishment of 1859, and confessing to the NG and NH churches that they were wrong with their church-apartheid of the past 140 years, regarding this matter.

### Synod 1985

In 1933 the Afrikaner church people received the Bible in their own language translated from the original biblical languages, later to be called the *Ou Afrikaanse Vertaling* (OAV = Old Afrikaans Translation). This translation was a concordant translation, in the tradition of the Statenvertaling and the King James Version. In 1983 the Afrikaner people received a second translation, surrounded by much controversy even today, called the *Nuwe Afrikaanse Vertaling* (NAV = New Afrikaans Translation). This translation was the very opposite of the OAV, being a dynamic equivalence translation (some would suggest that it would be more honest to call it a 'paraphrase'), using the critical NA/UBS text tradition. At the 1985 Synod, the GKSA decided that "The Synod

emphasized that the 1983 translation should not replace or phase out the 1933/53 translation in any way. The 1933/53 and the 1983 translations of the Bible can be used alongside each other by the churches."

Local churches and the theological school mostly pay only lip service to these words, because most churches, in practice, do not work with the OAV anymore. Some of the criticisms leveled against the NAV are that the dynamic equivalence translation method is unacceptable in principle because it is not faithful to the original text, it changes the meaning of the original text; the unity of Scripture is attacked; the Messiah was not recognized in the Old Testament; there is no clear distinction between the names of God; many words are left out or added, and so on. Irrespective of the critique, Synod 1988 confirmed their decision of 1985.

If one studies the book by Prof. Jacob van Bruggen, *The Future of the Bible*, it is clear that the dynamic equivalence translation method introduces a new view of God, man, and the world. This translation is centered upon man and modern communication, and not on God and His revelation. This leads me to believe that one of the reasons why, in the GKSA churches of today, members on either side of the battle cannot understand each other, even though they would really like to, is that a generation is divided on the different readings of God's Word, and the old historical reformation-centered terms are not used anymore. A new translation, however, also needed a new songbook.

### Synod 2003

At the January 2003 Synod of the GKSA, under the cloud of many complaints against many decisions,<sup>3</sup> it was nevertheless decided to accept the controversial new psalmbook. In effect this caused another church schism in South Af-

rica. The criticisms against the new psalmbook were many (more or less the same biblical and theological reasons as those against the NAV), but the most devastating and important critique was the self-confession of the main poet of the new psalms, Prof. T.T. Cloete, an NG Church member, who himself stated that "Ps. 110 is ... according to my theological advisers, according to the NAV ... not a Messianic Psalm" (*Algemene Kerkbode*, 11-13 April, 2002). Elsewhere he stated that 'based on new (theological — SLC) research' he removed messianic references from certain Psalms (*The Rapport* — News Paper, 4 November, 2001). I bumped into the professor himself one day, doing banking here in Potchefstroom, and he verbally confirmed the above views to me in person.

Synod 2003 was a watershed synod in the history of the Reformed Churches of South Africa. Maybe it was the offshoot or fruit of different theologies — even of many non-Reformed ones — being tolerated and accommodated over the years and decades, that at this synod the decision to allow women in office, specifically in the office of deacons, was also pushed through. Ironically (and I was a witness at this session of the synod), the members of the synod

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1. For the purpose of this article, I define 'scriptural songs' (*Skrifberymings*) as those songs of which the text can be found directly in Scripture, for instance the Lord's Prayer, Ten Commandments, songs of praise by Mary and Simeon, etc. 'Hymns' are those songs of which the text could not be found directly in Scripture, but are based on the broad truths of Scripture.

2. This could mean that the GKSA could end up with a songbook like the NG and NH Church, that has more than 600 songs to sing from. Only 150 of those 602 are the Psalms, which means that the Psalms will be sung very rarely, and if they are sung, they would be non-Messianic Psalms!

3. See the introduction to this series of articles (April 1, p. 300).

acknowledged that 'we' are not clear on what Scripture teaches on the office of women deacons and that more studies should be done. But then the brothers went on and voted by a two-thirds majority to accept women in church office!

In the very first issue of the *Kerkblad* after the synod (29-01-2003), the previous (outgoing) editor, Prof. G.J.C. Jordaan (professor in NT, at the GKSA theological school) warned against the possible new direction of the GKSA. He correctly mentioned that we must work from Scripture to practice, and not from practice to Scripture. By this he clearly implied that the current crisis in the GKSA could be traced back to different views of Scripture. Historically the GKSA has been a strong adherent and promoter of what is called *openbaringshistoriese* of *heilshistoriese prediking* ('revelational-historical or redemptive-historical preaching'), and it seems that a 'new hermeneutic' is busy replacing it, or at least is taking a stand alongside it, which could be called 'socio-historical' kind of preaching and understanding of Scripture.

Prof. Jordaan also then warned about the possible ecumenical implications of the decisions of Synod 2003. These decisions could lead back to the NG Church in SA, the Christian Reformed Church in North America, and even right back to the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (with which the GKSA broke ties in the 1970s because of their liberalism). In a negative sense, this could also mean that the GKSA could then move away from the Reformed Church of New Zealand, *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerke* in the Netherlands, and the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (Vrijgemaakt)*.

## 6. Today

At the beginning of this series I mentioned Prof. J.H. vanWyk's summary of the current situation after he had attended two gather-

ings of church members of the GKSA, on 26 and 27 October 2003. Just to bring it to mind again, he said that "We have currently arrived at the biggest difference of opinion in the 144-year existence of the Reformed Churches in South Africa. The difference of opinion is irrefutable, but our prayer is that the Lord will keep us from a church schism."

To confirm his words, let me give you a few quotations from the speakers who were present at the first meeting on that Saturday, who were against the new psalmbook and many other issues of concern:<sup>4</sup>

The time has come to recognize that there is irrefutable evidence that we are working with two different theologies in one denomination.

Rejection of the authority of the New Testament (especially in relation to the OT, and specifically the Psalms — SLC) already propagandizes another view of God and another "theology."

The GKSA has, consciously or unconsciously, with the introduction of the new 2001 psalmbook, formally accepted a view of Scripture which radically deviates from the Reformed confessions.

The acceptance of the 2001 psalmbook is the one big official deed of deformation in the history of the GKSA. The synod made a decision for a foreign view of Scripture and an unreformed hermeneutic.

As church song of 1814 led to the re-establishment of the GKSA in 1859, so did the acceptance of the 2001 psalmbook lead to the abolishment of the Reformed churches as the spreaders of the Calvinistic faith (here in South Africa).

The result of Synod 2003 is chaos and disillusionment on local church level. Many churches obey the synod's decisions and implement them; others totally reject them; and still others do nothing, neither rejecting nor implementing them. It would not be

wrong to say that currently, in the GKSA, "everyone (does) what (is) right in his own eyes" (Judg. 21:25).

## 7. The Future

In the light of the above, it is very clear that the "difference of opinion" is not a difference merely of personal opinions, but differences concerning doctrine, worship, and discipline (see Church Order, Article 1). These are differences related to our view of God, Scripture, and the church. They are differences that touch the heart of Articles 27 to 29, *Belgic Confession*. Prof. vanWyk, in his mentioned article, correctly states that both truth and unity are important, stating with urgency that: "If a separation of ways must take place, it has to be said with great openness and firmness that: *There is the false church* (NGB, Article 28)!"

The next synod will be, God willing, in 2006. We can presume that a lot of 'texts of complaints' will serve on this synod's table, because of the reckless decisions of Synod 2003 — decisions that were made, according to some, with one eye on the world, and not both eyes on God and His Word alone. Meanwhile, one could say that a lot of 'member movement' is taking place, since members are positioning themselves around different preachers and local churches. Not a very healthy situation for a denomination which confesses 'I believe in one, holy apostolic church' every Sunday.

## 8. Do I think things will turn around?

Of course God can do anything according to His will, but unfortunately, in sadness, I must be honest and say: I really do not think so. Together with Prof. vanWyk, all true Doppers pray for unity and not schism. But we pray also for repentance and a turnaround, back to God's Word in both doctrine and practice in our



churches. Our unity in Christ is built on the truth of God's Word and must be maintained on that basis (John 17:17; 1 Tim. 3:16). Synod 2003, in the face of a very clear warning of faithful brothers, still hardened and chose a way of deformation and will, if God does not give repentance, continue in it. Some concerned brothers suggest that the opening of all offices for women will be the next step, and after that, who knows? The fact that the regional (part) synods rejected any further discussions through a special synod (Article 47) on the current crisis in the GKSA last November (2003) confirms my opinion.

What is the solution? Nothing new. Only a heartfelt repentance and call to the triune God for His mercy and salvation in these times. We must pray that the Lord, by His grace, will send preachers 'after His heart' again (Jer. 3:15); preachers who lead the flock back to God's Word, salvation in Christ alone, worshiping God according to His Word, discipline in love, the education of the elders in the Scriptures, confession, and church order, proclaiming the gospel to the people in SA, missions, and so on. Our comfort is the comfort of the elect church, that "this holy Church is preserved or supported by God against the rage of the whole world; though it sometimes for a while appears very small, and in the eyes of men to be reduced to nothing; as during the perilous reign of Ahab, the Lord reserved unto Him seven thousand men who had not bowed their knees to Baal" (Art. 27, Belgic Confession).

We must learn the lesson of the past. As far back as the 1950s, the Rev. L.S. Kruger gave the following warning for us Reformed believers:

It helps nothing if the Synod of a church says it accepts the Three Forms of Unity, but its preachers do not accept it fully. It also helps

nothing if you call out in the streets that you are Reformed, but in practice the essential doctrines of the confessions, for example the doctrine of predestination and the covenant, are rejected, and the preaching in the church becomes a storybook; the sacraments are served in a self-willed fashion and not according to the covenant; that instead of proclaiming the Covenant, sectarian revival meetings are held as if there were no Covenant and no grace of the Covenant.<sup>5</sup>

### 9. Is there then any hope?

For us who believe in the absolutely sovereign and gracious God of the covenant, there is always hope, because Christ said, "...on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). Our hope is in Him, and not in Arminian self-worshiping man. Together we pray the petition of the Lord's Prayer "Thy Kingdom come," as explained in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 48, also for the Reformed churches here in SA:

Q. 123: What is the second petition? A. 123: Thy kingdom come; that is, so govern us by Thy Word and Spirit, that we submit ourselves to Thee always more and more; preserve and increase Thy Church; destroy the works of the devil, every power that exalts itself against Thee, and all wicked devices formed against Thy Holy Word, until the fullness of Thy kingdom come, wherein Thou shalt be all in all.


Prof. Dr. H.G. Stoker made the following plea in the middle of the twentieth century:

I believe a time will come wherein God will shake our people awake towards a battle which will bring the antithesis to the fore again ... which would uncover the double-faced character of the (current) syncretism and thereby destroy it — a battle which must be started

on the ecclesiastical and religious terrain....<sup>6</sup>

And this is possible only by the faithful preaching and teaching of the gospel of God, through Jesus Christ, acknowledging that there is only one sovereign grace for His people, and no such thing as a 'common grace' for all, because it is this theory that helped create a bridge from the world to the church, to bring liberalism and methodism in the churches, becoming more worldly and less holy.<sup>7</sup>

May He, by His irresistible grace, also gather, and keep on gathering, His church from "every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9b), through the Reformed Churches of South Africa, remembering its original calling, which are firmly built upon Scripture (Hand. 1: 6; Matt. 28:16-20):

...We are here to maintain the law, and, if possible, to propagate and reveal the reformed Christian faith under these wild and uncivilized people, to the glory of your holy Name....<sup>8</sup> 

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4. *Waarheid en Dwaling* tydskrif (*Truth and Error magazine*), Nov.-Dec. 2003.

5. LS Kruger, *Waarom is u Lid van die Gereformeerde Kerk?* (Pretoria: Craft Drukkers, 1957), p. 17.

6. *Oorsprong en Rigting*, deel 1 (Kaapstad: Tafelberg Uitgewers, 1967), p. 335.

7. A study needs to be done on how much the common grace theory influenced the theologians, pastors, and churches in South Africa.

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

# Foreign Missions: Through the Eyes of Our Missionaries

Rev. R. Smit

**I**n years past, it has been common for the secretary of the FMC to give, for the SB, an annual review of our denominational mission work in our foreign fields by summarizing a year's worth of foreign mission work from his own perspective. This time we will instead give you a window on the work through the eyes of our missionaries themselves, by means of their newsletters, monthly reports, and their annual reports for synod.

We are taking this approach because it is certainly our experience that the missionaries are "the eyes" of the calling church and the mission committee. These "eyes" observe constantly the day-to-day struggles and joys of the work of the mission field. The burden that weighs most heavily upon their hearts and minds is the care of their respective mission labors. In recognition of that fact, we will review briefly a year's worth of foreign mission activity through the eyes of our foreign missionaries: Rev. Wayne Bekkering and Rev. Rodney Miersma in Ghana, and Rev. Audred Spriensma in the Philippines.

## Mission Labors

Rev. Spriensma summarized his work with the Bereans in Manila this way:

In the Manila area, most of my time is taken up with pastoring the Berean Church of God (Reformed). We have two worship services every Sunday, preaching from the Heidelberg Catechism in the first worship service. We have gone through the Catechism completely once together and are starting through a second time. The Psalter is being used exclusively for our singing. In between the two worship services, we have a short lunch and then a catechism class. We have covered Old Testament History, Essentials, and now have started New Testament History. All the church members sit in on the discussion, and work at the memory work each week. Attendance at the two worship services remains steady with mostly the same members and occasional visitors. Once a month, on a Saturday morning, the men of the group meet for four hours to study Reformed church government in order to train future officebearers.

Rev. Spriensma reported work with two separate groups, which he teaches on alternating Mondays. He wrote,

I continue to meet twice a month with pastors south of Manila who desire continued instruction in our Protestant Reformed distinctives. One is an Independent Reformed pastor, the other is a dean in the Christian Reformed Bible College. Through a conference that we held at that Reformed Bible College, there is interest by 5-7 students for classes in Reformed Dogmatics and Bible

Interpretation. We hope to start this class on February 16, 2004. Please pray that this class will better prepare men for the ministry here and pave the way for the formation of truly Reformed congregations. This coming Thursday I will again meet also with some students and pastors from Antipolo, which is quite close to us. They are very interested in our Reformed material. They were ostracized by the Reformed Baptists for being rigid Calvinists.

Every other month, Rev. Spriensma travels to Bacolod to attend to the needs of a very small group and develop the work there.

I have been making trips to Bacolod every other month for the purpose of holding conferences concerning the Reformed truth



*The Spriensmas*

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



and leading worship services. These trips are very much appreciated.... There is a very great desire for the preaching and shepherding of a missionary in their midst, with the goal of an instituted church. Rey Decierdo has been a very hard worker to this end, and very appreciative of our Reformed materials. Presently, Rey Decierdo leads worship services in his back yard.... Rey Decierdo leads the group in worship with singing from the Psalter, prayers, and reading sermons that he downloads from the Internet.... He plans to begin in March also teaching a Heidelberg Catechism class. The conferences are held in venues selected by Rey Decierdo and approved by your missionary. This means that they are sometimes held right in Bacolod in restaurants or the hotel, or sometimes south of Bacolod in Inayuan. This church is located approximately 154 km (92 miles) south of Bacolod.... Church libraries with our materials have been set up in Bacolod and in Inayuan.

The missionaries in Ghana wrote recently that their labors on the field in Ghana included the following:

The preaching is conducted twice on Sunday. That is an experience in itself. The whole sermon is interpreted into the TWI language while one is preaching.... On Tuesday evening, one of the two sermons is broadcast on the radio.

Weekday activities include Bible study on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, and catechism on Friday evening and Saturday morning. The preaching, the catechisms, and the Bible studies are shared by the two missionaries. Every other Thursday evening and on Saturday evenings, there is also a Bible study for the young adults led by Justin [Kooles]. On Monday evening, Phyllis [Bekkerings] leads the ladies in Bible Study. In addition, the fellowship has a small library which is open several times a week, during which time one can come and read for awhile.

In response to this regular diet of preaching and weekly instruction, the mission groups appear to be growing spiritually. Rev. Spriensma reported in October 2003, "It has been another busy and rather productive month. The saints appear to be growing in their understanding and love for the Reformed faith...."

Rev. Bekkerings has reported the same response in November 2003, "The preaching of the gospel is being carried out faithfully from Sabbath to Sabbath. The fellowship receives the preaching well." Again, he wrote a month later,

We continue to have visitors in our worship services, which is encouraging. The visitors have usually come through the invitation of someone in the fellowship. In one case recently, one of our members had persistently invited someone for two years. Just recently, the person came to visit in the worship. The preaching is well received for those that hunger and thirst for righteousness.

### Goal of the Work

All of the work in the preaching, catechism instruction, Bible studies, lectures, and conferences is put forth with a goal in mind.

Rev. Spriensma stated the goal of his work in November 2003. He wrote:

In the last several months, the Lord has continued to bless our labors here in the Philippines. In addition to the continued growth in understanding and appreciating the Reformed faith by the members of the Berean Church of God (Reformed), there have been numerous contacts. The importance of these contacts lies in the fact that we hope, the Lord willing, not only to assist one church here to be truly Reformed, but to help several churches to mature in the doctrines and government so that in the future these churches may work together as a denomination.

Similarly, the missionaries in Ghana work to a goal of the establishment of a Reformed congregation with trained officebearers. With that in mind, they wrote in their annual report to synod that

The needs for the future of this fellowship are great. A "seminary" to instruct men for the office of minister, elder, and deacon is needed. There are many churches here in Ghana, but most of their "ministers" have no long-term formal training. The first priority is a "seminary." Rev.



*The Miersmas, Bekkerings, and Kooles*

Bekkering and Rev. Miersma have begun to lay the groundwork for such a training program.

This direction is in harmony with one of the grounds upon which Synod 2002 decided to add a second missionary on the field in Ghana.

The second missionary is needed for training the men of the mission field to be officebearers, including pastors, in order to work towards the goal of establishing independent, indigenous churches on the mission field (Art. 42, B, 4, c, Acts of Synod 2002).

Hence, it is evident that our missionaries labor patiently towards the goal of establishing Reformed congregations that are both independent and indigenous, and also one with us in the truth of the Reformed faith.

### Problems and Challenges

Does the work to that goal always go smoothly? Is the preaching always well received? Is the mission work always rosy? The hard reality of missions also on our foreign fields is that there are problems, concerns, struggles, and disappointments.

There are the day-to-day challenges. Our missionaries must deal with cockroaches, lizards, rats, and mice, frequent power outages, no telephone hookup, computer failures, and cultures in which they must learn the people's concept of time and timeliness. There is the reality of changing to a different level and way of living in a different culture.

As far as the mission work is concerned, there is the reality that not everyone receives the preaching. This is true in Ghana according to the missionaries: "We have others who come infrequently and show little zeal for the life and walk of the Kingdom."

This fruit of the preaching was also reported in March 2004 by the

missionaries in Ghana. They wrote:

The preaching and teaching is being carried out to the best of our ability and is appreciated by those who love the Lord. The attendance is down from six months ago, but that is due no doubt to the fact that some are beginning to realize that we are not here to establish an earthly kingdom with earthly goods.... Unto that end, the Word cuts as a two-edged sword.

The missionaries in Ghana face problems. Concerning that they wrote in their annual report to synod:

The marriage issue within our fellowship continues to be a problem. ...those who have not made their marriages right before God and before the government have little motivation to stop living in sin. Satan has a stronghold here in Ghana with respect to the legalized adultery that passes for marriage. We preach the need to have proper marriages, we teach the young people and the young adults about godly marriages, but many do not want to spend the time, money, and effort to make their marriages right.... We must persevere in our calling to uphold the truth of God's Word concerning marriage. That we will do until we see Satan's stronghold break and fall.

The fact that many couples do not have their marriages completed gives us very few men who are officebearer material. Currently, there is less than a handful of men who would be qualified to serve as officebearers....

The language and culture barrier continues to be a problem. The necessity to learn the language is evident. We are slowly becoming more knowledgeable of the culture, but we have a long way to go and much to learn. We have seen how the pagan culture and superstitions affect much of the lives of our people. Even the churches in Ghana have made efforts to do away with these pagan ideas.... These ideas will die only

through the power of the Word and the work of the Spirit.

The covenant family relationship is not very strong here. The culture and tribal traditions have much to do with that. The fathers usually do not take the headship role as they ought. The women usually do most of the disciplining and training. It is evident in the children that proper discipline is not done at home....

Rev. Spriensma wrote in his annual report to synod concerning a difficulty among the Berean Church of God (Reformed), which has been resolved.

Because of a perceived challenge to the past Board of Trustees, there was a snap election held last August. These snap elections are a carryover from Philippine politics, a sort of confidence vote. At that meeting, the Board went from seven members to five, with the board making me their honorary chairman. In January, at the assembly meeting of all the heads of households, these five men were again appointed, but to staggered terms to allow for new members to come in each year, but also keeping consistency. While the group had been deeply divided, there has been some healing taking place. The Board of Trustees is working on setting up a web page and printing literature for handing out to family and friends and interested parties.

### Joy in the Work

The missionaries have shown that they have joy in their work and that in the labors there are occasions for thanksgiving to God.

Rev. Bekkering wrote about that in September 2003.

Finally, brethren, as I consider the question [of] what gives me joy in my work, I give a two-fold answer. First, it is a joy for me to see our God preserving this feeble fellowship in and through the storms that we have gone through. Second, it is a joy to see the fruits of faithful church discipline coming to manifestation. I



see that in the change of character of the group as the Lord prunes dead branches, and we see new growth.

He wrote similar comments a month later in October 2003.

First, is the joy of having helpers coming. [Second], is receiving the grace and strength for us to do the work required. Third, is the work of Doug and the Young Adults in the planning and preparation of the Reformation Day Lectures. We were all very busy with all the activity, but we enjoyed the messages and the visitors. We had 90 visitors on Friday evening, not counting children, and 70 on Saturday morning, not counting the children.

Rev. Spriensma mentioned occasions for rejoicing. He is especially grateful for the eagerness of the groups and contacts to learn the doctrines of the Reformed faith. Concerning the Bereans, he wrote in his annual report to synod that

The Berean Church of God (Reformed) continues to worship and grow in the Reformed faith.

There is a genuine appreciation for the truths that we bring. The membership of the group remains constant.

Regarding the work in Bacolod, we get a sense of his enthusiasm and joy as he looks ahead to future plans.

I am working with Rey Decierdo to set up another conference for later March or early April, to take place in either Bacolod or Inayuan. The response from these conferences has been very good. Our literature has been greatly appreciated.

We with our missionaries give thanks to the Lord for the evidence of His blessing upon our mission labors in many ways.



Jessica and friend

### Remember Them

Please continue to uphold in prayer before the Lord our missionaries, their wives, and their families. It is especially important that our missionaries know that they have not been forgotten and that we faithfully intercede for them before the Lord's throne of grace. This is especially necessary as they face the day-to-day struggles, and the real opposition to their faithful labors.

They do appreciate our support very much. One of the missionaries recently wrote in a newsletter,

Thanks also for remembering our family in your prayers.... Thank you for taking an interest in and keeping us and the field in your prayers.

May the Lord grant our missionaries His grace for continued faithfulness in their labors. Our prayer concerning them is

...that utterance may be given unto [them], that [they] may open [their] mouths boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel (Eph. 6:19). ■

## Domestic Missions Update

Don Doezenia

**A**t our most recent regular monthly meeting, Rev. Bruinsma remarked that it's not always so easy for him to look objectively at questions that arise about the work in "his" area because he is so personally involved in it. He appreciated, therefore, he said, the more balanced approach that could be taken with the input of other members of the

committee. We find repeatedly that that kind of balance has served us well. The work of the Domestic Mission Committee has been structured accordingly. We have three main sub-committees — one for the British Isles, another for Western Home Missions, and the third for Eastern Home Missions. Each sub-committee is responsible for maintaining some kind of regular contact with the missionary; meeting occasionally with the mission committee of the calling church; mak-

ing an annual visit to the field; and bringing, to the committee of the whole, advice regarding matters that require action to be taken. Each field is, therefore, well represented at our monthly meetings. And that, we say, has over the years served us well.

It occurred to us, therefore, that it might be appropriate for each of our sub-committees to have a hand in this our annual home-missions update in the *Standard Bearer*. The three chairmen obliged by writing

*Mr. Doezenia is secretary of the Domestic Mission Committee.*

up something for their respective fields. The first of the three that follow was written by Rev. James Slopsema, chairman of our British Isles Committee. It happened that he had recently prepared, for his own congregation (First Church, G.R.), a first-person account of his visit to the field in late January/early February 2004. That was an informative report that could, with little modification, appear also here.

### British Isles

Elder Jim Jansma from Hudsonville PRC and I were delegated by the Hudsonville Consistory (the calling church) and the Domestic Mission Committee (DMC) to visit our missionary and the Covenant Protestant Reformed Fellowship (CPRF) in Northern Ireland. This kind of trip is made annually and has proven to be invaluable in dealing with the field.

We left on January 29 and returned February 9. Our stay in Northern Ireland was a very enjoyable and profitable one. Rev. and Mary Stewart hosted us the entire time. They are gracious hosts. We enjoyed their hospitality greatly and appreciated this opportunity to become better acquainted with them.

The mandate given us by the Hudsonville Consistory and the DMC kept us busy, yet allowed for a of couple days to do some sightseeing. Our work included

preaching on the Lord's Day, leading the midweek Bible Study, conducting family visitation with the Stewarts, meeting with the Steering Committee of the CPRF, discussing with our missionary various aspects of the work, accompanying him to Wales, and visiting with as many of the Fellowship as we could. We also witnessed the baptism of William Graham, who had been instructed by our missionary for several months.

The CPRF is comprised of eight families and eight single adults. They number 32 souls. They have eight children ranging from infants to 17 years old. We visited with all the families of the Fellowship in their homes and with many of the singles as they gathered in various homes after church and the midweek Bible class. We also attended their annual "congregational dinner," at which were present two families (with children) that are very interested in our work but live too far away to attend with any regularity.

The CPRF is flourishing. Several members volunteered that they enjoy a unity that they had not experienced for some time before the disbanding of the church. Once again they are doctrinally one. This is also the testimony of our missionary. Our observation is that they are a close-knit group that appreciates one another and seeks each other's company. The fellowship is blessed under the preaching of the Word and delights in their missionary pastor, Rev. Stewart. They are busy in promoting the gospel with a bookstore, a website, a monthly newsletter, and personal witnessing. They also broadcast our Reformed Witness Hour radio program.

When Rev. R. Hanko was our missionary in Northern Ireland, he worked with a group of interested people in Wales. This work stopped with Rev. Hanko's departure from the field. Last December Prof. Hanko and Rev. Stewart

returned to Wales to see if another work could be started there. A group of about 40 people (for the most part different from those with whom Rev. R. Hanko labored) turned out to hear Prof. Hanko speak. Prof. Hanko was a familiar figure there. We were eager, therefore, to learn whether there would be as many who would turn out to hear our missionary. So, in February, we went to Wales to find out. The group this time numbered 20. Nevertheless, there was a lively discussion after Rev. Stewart's lecture, with some very good questions. We were encouraged. Rev. Stewart intends to speak in Wales on a monthly basis for a time, in order to determine if this interest can be sustained and the numbers increased.

The CPRF is very appreciative to the PRC for sending Rev. Stewart to be their missionary pastor and for all the effort we have made to bring the gospel to the UK. They look forward eagerly to organize again as a church of Christ in Northern Ireland.

— Rev. James Slopsema

### Western Home Missions

It was a year ago that the Domestic Mission Committee of the Protestant Reformed Churches submitted a general report of its labors for publication in the *Standard Bearer*. We do so again and we do so with great joy. It is, of course, always a joy to report what God has done, but this is especially the case when we can report positive fruits upon labors.

This report concerns the western branch of the work of the DMC. During the past year our attention, in the west, has been focused on Spokane, Washington, where our missionary, Rev. Tom Miersma, has centered his labors.

The past year has been a very good year for the Covenant of Grace Protestant Reformed Fellowship of Spokane, Washington. In his reports to the DMC and Loveland PRC Consistory, Rev.



Rev. Angus and Mary Stewart





*The Miersma Family*

Miersma testifies to the many rich blessings experienced by the CGPRF during the past year. And his positive assessment of the labors in Spokane have been confirmed by the reports of the visiting delegations from the calling church and from the Mission Committee. The blessings of the past year center in the reestablishment of the work, the strengthening of relationships among those who faithfully attend the services and studies, and the response to the witness to the riches of the truth of the glorious gospel.

Just under two years ago the work in Spokane was experiencing a grievous division. The outcome of it all was that the congregation in which our missionary had been laboring disbanded, the members were scattered, and deep hurts were experienced by all.

But God has been good. Some of the members asked for the missionary to continue to work with them. They had learned to appreciate the Reformed faith as taught them by the missionary, and with the disbanding of the congregation they knew not where to turn. Because of their love for the truth, a few young couples and some individuals gathered with the missionary and his family in the walk-out basement of his home. The preaching services were restored, the catechism classes began again, and a Bible study was held weekly. The hurts were slowly being healed by the gospel of sovereign grace. And

grace has brought again a spirit of unity.

Efforts to advertise and do some outreach work began anew. These efforts escalated last July when a place of worship was secured — a storefront in a strip mall on a main road, rented for

their exclusive use. This was a first for the work in Spokane, as formerly they had rented other churches. The empty store provided an opportunity for the saints to give both of their time and of their money to the furnishing of the rooms. From every report of those who have visited the field, the members of the group did an excellent job. Chairs were set up in rows, a pulpit was constructed, a good used organ with large speakers was transported and installed, and a pamphlet rack and a book table were permanently set up.

Now that they had their own place of worship, they could proceed also to post signs, both on the building itself and in front of the building, to give increasing visibility in the community. The sign on the building is a well-lit board with movable type, which allows them to advertise special events, their regular services, and the Reformed Witness Hour. God has been pleased to use the signs to bring visitors and contacts.

The people have all participated in posting and distributing flyers of special lectures or the special days of worship. They are greatly encouraged that the Lord has used every advertised meeting to bring new or old visitors.

Rev. Miersma reports that they see new visitors almost every other week. Sometimes this has been through the direct contact of the core group members, and other times it has been via the various

advertising efforts. This is a great encouragement to the members of the mission, since they view it as an indication that the Lord has given an open door for our preaching of the gospel in Spokane. This is a wonder of God's grace.

During times of trouble, the focus of attention turns inward. It is worthy of note that this no longer characterizes the CGPRF. Along with a healthy emphasis on the spiritual growth of each member and of the group as a whole, there is a fervent desire to publish the good news in the surrounding area. And God is blessing these desires. After a year of continued faithful labor, some re-organizing, and the leasing of their own public place of worship, the group is witnessing the blessing of the Lord on the spiritual development of those faithfully attending, and in the presence of regular visitors. A spirit of unity and zeal has been restored. God is good! May He continue to bless.

— Rev. Ronald VanOverloop

### **Eastern Home Missions**

The Domestic Mission Committee has been busy with its labors in the eastern United States this past year. Much of this work has centered in the labors of Rev. Mahtani and the Pittsburgh Protestant Reformed Mission. Attendance at the worship services of the mission numbers between 40 and 50 each Sunday. These make up, for the most part, the regular membership of the group there. Rev. Mahtani also conducts four catechism classes, an Adult Bible Study, a Young Adults Bible Study, a Ladies' Fellowship, and a Leadership Training Class.

Those are just a few of his labors in the mission. There is also the continued effort on his part, with the members of the mission, to conduct the work of missions. They maintain a mailing list of some 1,300 names, distribute pamphlets, invite friends and acquaintances to the mission, and correspond with those who contact the

group for information. The life of this mission is very active and enthusiastic. We thank God for the saints in Pittsburgh and for their zeal in spreading the gospel to others.

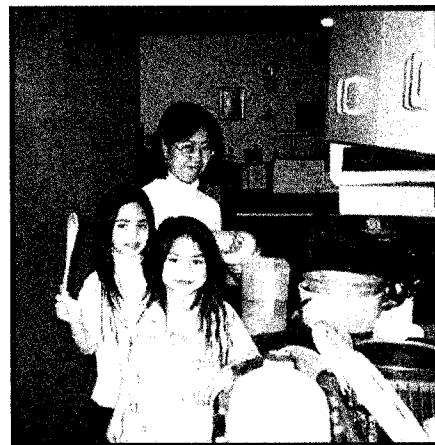
In a developing mission field such as Pittsburgh, it is quite natural that questions or issues arise that must be dealt with by the calling church and by the DMC. We have dealt with such issues as confession of faith on the mission field and the pronouncement of the benediction in the worship services in a mission setting. We are even now confronting another issue: that of the possibility of administering the Lord's Supper on the mission field, among those who are now, through their confessions of faith, members of Southwest Church. Because we understand the weightiness of such questions we devote to them a good deal of study and deliberation, endeavoring always to make decisions that are in keeping with the Word of God.

A word of thanks must be expressed to Southwest Church for their faithful labors. This church has taken its call to work in missions seriously and has put out

much effort in maintaining and developing the mission work in Pittsburgh.

Another matter in which our sub-committee is particularly involved affects our mission work in general: a re-studying of the Policy of 1965. In light of that policy we are at present reviewing especially our methods of entering into a mission work and developing it methodically in order that contacts might grow in their knowledge of the truth. While maintaining the general principles laid down some 40 years ago, we try to incorporate into our methodology the modern technology, of which the policy of 1965 knew nothing.

On three occasions Rev. Mahtani visited the Allentown/Hazleton area in Pennsylvania. There is a small group of about five families here that have expressed a commitment to the Reformed truths that we hold dear. Although our work in Allentown/Hazleton is still preliminary, we are optimistic. These saints have been encouraged to work together and study God's Word together. We are thankful that we are able to give a witness in this area of the east as well.



*Helpers in the Mahtani kitchen.*

One last matter that has helped keep the DMC busy in eastern missions is the continued support of the saints in Fayetteville, NC. Since we are limited as churches in our ability to fill the pulpit there we have committed ourselves to visiting the group on a quarterly basis, to encourage and support the few families who still cling to the work. We were pleased that Grace PRC agreed to maintain special contact with these saints and to assist them in whatever way they can. With this in mind, Grace has recently purchased video equipment to record their own worship services, in order to provide tapes to the saints in Fayetteville that will make it possible for them to feel that they are a part of the fellowship of Grace congregation. These tapes are received with great appreciation.

May we not, in our own congregations, take for granted the great privilege that is ours in being able to enjoy the regular, lively preaching of the Word, in the fellowship of many other like-minded families. And may our fervent prayers continue to ascend to God on behalf of the saints in the Pittsburghs and Spokes and Fayettevilles throughout our land and beyond, that they may have the strength and courage to persevere in the gospel.

— Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma



*The Mahtani Family*





*When Thou Sittest in Thine House: Meditations on Home Life*, by Abraham Kuyper. Wyoming, MI: Credo Books, 2004. Pp. x + 408. \$39 (paper). [Reviewed by the editor.]


What the *Standard Bearer* thinks of Abraham Kuyper's *When Thou Sittest in Thine House* is plain from the fact that we are publishing most of it in installments.

The book is a compilation of a series of Kuyper's meditations on the family and home life. Kuyper views the many aspects of family life in the light of Scripture and from the Reformed perspective. Because the work was originally Kuyper's famed "meditations," the chapters are brief, vivid, and clear.

One of Kuyper's purposes with the book was that it be "suitable at the beginnings of new homes to be

placed in the hands of those newly married" (p. vi).

The English translation of the book has long been out-of-print and hard to acquire. This facsimile edition of the English translation makes the book available once again. Since this publication is a limited edition, the price is steep.

The publisher, Credo Books, 1540 Pinnacle East SW, Wyoming, MI 49509, is Mr. Gary VanDer Schaaf. 

## News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Mission Activities

Everyone in and around the Grand Rapids, MI area was cordially invited to an open house and presentation by our denomination's eastern home missionary, Rev. Jai Mahtani, at Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI on Sunday evening, April 11. Rev. Mahtani gave an update on the labors in Pittsburgh, as well as throughout the eastern United States. There was an opportunity for questions and there was a time of fellowship and refreshments after the presentation.

Rev. Angus Stewart, our churches' missionary to the Covenant PR Fellowship in Northern Ireland, appeared on the TV program "Hearts and Minds" on April 1. He was interviewed by the program's host, Noel Thompson, arguing against the film *The Passion of the Christ* as idolatry, while a church of Ireland cleric, Canon Walters Lewis, argued for the film. The interview appeared twice, one on BBC 2 in Northern Ireland, and again later that same evening on BBC in Great Britain. We can be thankful and grateful to God for this opportunity to witness to the true Christ.

### Evangelism Activities

The Reformed Witness Hour can now be heard in the Chicago,

IL area on Sunday mornings at 8:30 AM on radio station WAUR 930. Pray that the RWH program will be used of God to spread the truth we love, not only in Chicago, but in all the other areas in which it can be heard.

A spring lecture sponsored by the Evangelism Committee of Peace PRC in Lansing, IL was held on Friday, April 16. Prof. H. Hanko spoke on "Is the King James Version Still the Best Translation Available?"

### Congregation Activities

Congregations in West Michigan were invited to celebrate Christ's resurrection by listening to uplifting music performed by the Majestic Brass at First Church in Grand Rapids on Easter Sunday, April 11. In addition to the music of Majestic Brass there were special numbers performed on a bassoon, violins, and cello.

Friday evening, April 16, the congregation of Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI celebrated a rededication and upgrading of their church facilities and balcony with a brief program and open house with refreshments following.

The combined voices of the Doon and Hull, Iowa PRC choirs presented two programs this spring. The first was in Doon on April 18 and the second, one week later, April 25, in Hull.

The Choral Society of the Hudsonville, MI PRC presented their annual spring concert the evening of April 18.

The Trinity Men Singers, from the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville PRC in Hudsonville, MI, invited everyone in their community to join them for their 2nd annual Good Friday evening concert and hymn sing on April 9. The concert took place at Trinity following their service.

Parents, grandparents, and friends of Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL were welcomed at Bethel's end-of-the-catechism-season evening on April 6. The students were involved in a brief program, in which memorization awards were presented, followed by pizza and games.

Two of our churches, the South Holland, IL PRC in March and the Randolph, WI PRC in early May, have approved an additional special collection for the RFPA building fund. The RFPA, publisher of this magazine, has outgrown the space it currently uses in the basement of the PRC Seminary and is considering the acquisition of its own building. These collections will help provide funds for a new building.

### Young People's Activities

The young people of Grace PRC in Standale, MI once again this year sponsored their annual Ice Cream Social after their Good Friday service. Donations received

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



benefited this year's young people's convention.

The annual Spring Break Skating Party sponsored by the young people of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI was held April 5 at Standard Federal Ice Center in Grand Rapids. There was ice-skating on one rink and broomball on the other. Refreshments and viewing areas were also available for those young at heart.

The young people of Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB hosted a potluck supper and gym night on April 2 at the Lacombe Christian School.

#### School Activities

**T**he choir of Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids,

MI made a trip to Iowa in mid-April. During that two-day visit they were able to perform two concerts, the first at the Hull PRC on Thursday afternoon for students of our various Christian schools, and then again Friday evening, April 16, at Dordt College, along with other local high school choirs.


#### Minister Activities

**R**ev. G. Eriks, pastor of the Loveland, CO PRC, declined the call extended to him to serve as pastor of the Hudsonville, MI PRC.

On Sunday morning, April 18, Rev. A. Brummel, pastor of the South Holland, IL PRC, informed

the congregation of Faith PRC in Jenison, MI that he was led by God to decline their call to him to serve as their next pastor.

Rev. J. Slopsema declined the call extended to him from the Wingham, Ontario, Canada PRC to serve as their first pastor. Wingham has since extended a call to Rev. M. DeVries of the First PRC in Edmonton, Alberta to become their pastor. With Rev. DeVries on trio at Wingham were the Revs. W. Bruinsma and A. Brummel.

The Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI was to call a pastor on Sunday, May 2, from a trio of the Revs. G. Eriks, S. Key, and J. Slopsema. 

## Announcements

#### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With praise and thanks to our covenant God, the nieces and nephews announce the 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary of our

#### UNCLE HENRY and AUNT GLADYS.

We are thankful to our heavenly Father for the many years they have experienced as husband and wife. Our humble prayer is that God will continue to sustain them and bless them in their marriage in the years to come. "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh. Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matthew 19:5, 6).

The Lubbers' nieces and nephews.

Holland, Michigan

Check out the  
RFPA web page at  
[www.rfpa.org](http://www.rfpa.org).

#### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Hull PRC express their Christian sympathy to Shane and Tamara Davelaar in the death of Shane's sister,

#### MRS. SHAWN ROZEBOOM.

Our sympathies also go out to Mr. and Mrs. Daryl and Gretta VanMaanen in the loss of her niece. May their comfort come from God's Word in Psalm 121:1, 2, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth."

Rev. Steven Key, President  
Brian Kroese, Assistant Clerk

#### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Southeast PRC express their Christian sympathy to Clarice Newhof in the death of her father,

#### TOM NEWHOF.

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you" (John 14:27).

Rev. William Langerak, Pastor  
Tim Pipe, Clerk

#### CALL TO SYNOD!!

Synod 2003 appointed Hull Protestant Reformed Church, Hull, IA the calling church for the 2004 Synod.

The consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2004 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 8, 2004 at 9:00 A.M. in the Hull Protestant Reformed Church, Hull, Iowa.

The Pre-Synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 7, at 7:30 P.M. Rev. VanOverloop, president of the 2003 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Alvin Bylsma, 3280 310th St., Hull, IA. Phone: (712) 439-2569.

Consistory of  
Hull Protestant Reformed Church  
Alvin Bylsma, Clerk.

#### YEARBOOK UPDATE:

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