

# The Comforter in You

*"And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."*

John 14: 16-18

**J**esus is speaking with His disciples in the upper room. He has just instituted His Supper in remembrance of Himself. He will be taken from His disciples in a very short while. He is going to leave them. He knows it. They know it.

Jesus is comforting His disciples by promising them that, though He will leave them, He will not leave them without comfort. He will send another Comforter. This Comforter will abide with them. And He shall be in them.

*Rev. VanOverloop is pastor of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.*

Through this Comforter Jesus will come to them. With these words Jesus is putting into New Testament language the familiar words of Jehovah to His people: I will not leave you, nor forsake you; I am with you.

The Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ was poured out on Pentecost and dwells intimately in every believer. "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" (I Cor. 6:19). The Spirit of Christ is given to be in the believer. The Christian is what he is because the Spirit of Christ has graciously been given to dwell in him. A Christian is what he is, not because of his decision, desire, or deeds, but because the Spirit of the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Lord has been poured out to dwell in every regenerated believer. It is through the gracious indwelling of the Spirit of Christ that each believer is constituted a part of the body of the living Christ.

Jesus speaks of His poured out Spirit as the "Comforter." This

name means literally "called alongside" one. The Spirit is a Comforter because He has been called to be alongside every believer, ready to help. In this last conversation with His disciples, Jesus speaks of His near departure. This serves as the occasion for Him to promise "another Comforter," who is the Spirit of truth abiding with them and in them. When Jesus walked with His disciples they experienced and witnessed His comfort. He comforted the weary, the lost, the sick, the sheep who were without a shepherd. He comforted them by being a perfect Shepherd to them, a Shepherd whose presence assured them that they had no want. As He had been with them, so He would send Another to be with them.

Jesus Christ came, suffered, and died to obtain every blessing of salvation. But these blessings are not given except via the Spirit of Christ. It is the Spirit who regenerates, thereby taking up His abode in every one of the elect (John 3:6). If the Spirit does not dwell in you, then you are not of Christ (Rom. 8:9). It is the Spirit who gives un-

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derstanding of spiritual things (I Cor. 2:12-14). Apart from the Spirit, there is no illumination in the heart concerning sin, no godly sorrow, or faith, or hope, etc. Someone can memorize the Bible, but memorization is only in the head. The truths of Scripture become a part of one's heart and life only by the work of the Spirit. It is the Spirit who seals, so there can be a keeping in the faith – the preservation of the saints (Eph. 1:13). It is by the work of the Spirit that anyone calls on the name of Jesus for salvation (I Cor. 12:3). It is by the power of the Spirit of Christ that there is comfort, holiness, prayer, sorrow for sin, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, faith, goodness, meekness, self-control.

It is a characteristic of the Spirit that He does not call attention to Himself, but to the Lord Christ. Jesus said exactly this in John 16:13: "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself." This is true also of His work within the believer. He calls attention, not to Himself, but to Jesus Christ. The Spirit is like the dew (Hosea 14:5), which does its work unseen and unheard. The Spirit does not work like a noisy thunderstorm, an earthquake, a fire, or a mighty wind (I Kings 19:11,12). God taught Elijah that He works, not with the "loud" fire on Mount Carmel, but via the still voice of the preaching carried by the Spirit, so that the Word is impressed upon a heart in deep godly sorrow and repentance or in conviction of a truth. The pouring out of the Spirit was with a display of power, but that power served only to manifest the presence of the unseen Spirit.

However quiet the Spirit's working may be, His work is not undetectable. The Spirit of Christ

testifies with our spirit, witnessing that we are God's children. His tremendous work in the depths of a heart breaks the bondage of sin and cleanses within. Every believer experiences the effect of His work in the ability to believe, to walk by faith and not by sight, to trust and to obey.

We don't have to point to a powerful emotional experience to prove the Spirit's presence and work. Nor to a head full of knowledge. An emotional experience and a head filled with knowledge can make one twice-fold fit for hell. Rather, the evidence of the work of the Spirit of Jesus Christ is the repeated pricking of one's heart concerning one's own sin. It is the Spirit who made Job loathe himself and repent in dust and ashes. The evidence of the work of the Spirit is found in one's looking to Jesus in order to learn what a pricked heart must produce.

The Spirit of Jesus brings the great treasures of the blessings of salvation. It is the Spirit of Jesus who brings joy of forgiveness and justification. It is the Spirit of the Lord of the covenant who gives the wonderful experience of knowing God as one's sovereign Friend, of Christ living within, of the close bond of love. It is the Spirit who is at work when a sinner is able to turn from sin and to begin to live according to all of God's commandments.

The Spirit of Christ comforts. He is the Comforter because He gives to each elect saint the ability to believe and especially to trust. Trust in Jehovah is evidence that the Spirit is at work. The Spirit comforts by enabling the believer to look away from himself and from circumstances, events, and feelings, and by enabling the believer to look up, to see the Father,

to know the scriptural truth of the Father's infinite wisdom and everlasting love. The Spirit comforts by teaching and re-teaching the truth that it is God who justifies and that nothing can separate the believer from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus the Lord.

The Spirit does His work through the truth of God's Word. This is what Jesus meant when He said that He is the Spirit of truth and that He guides into all truth.

Through the Spirit of Christ the church is led into the knowledge of the truth. The Spirit does His work through the Bible. Instead of being careless about the truth, the Spirit makes the believer love the truth and want to know it more and more, and better and better. Again, this increased knowledge is not just of facts and data, which can be thrown around to impress others. Rather this increased knowledge of the Savior leads to deeper humility and ever greater appreciation for grace and for mercy that endures forever. The Spirit works through the truth of God's Word, so one understands it, believes it, is taken captive to it, loves it, and delights in it. The Comforter whispers God's Word into the heart, encouraging and uplifting.

Let us praise God for the grace to have the Spirit of Christ within us. Instead of grieving the Spirit by improper attitudes toward our fellow-saints (in whom this very same Spirit dwells), let us strive to be kind one to another,

tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven us. Let us walk in the Spirit and live in the comfort that God will never remove Him from those to whom Christ has given Him.

He will abide in you. He will bring Christ to you. And one day He will bring you to Christ, in exceeding great joy! 

*It is the Spirit who is at work when a sinner is able to turn from sin and to begin to live according to all of God's commandments.*

*The Comforter whispers God's Word into the heart, encouraging and uplifting.*

# The Late, Great Pope

Rev. Kenneth Koole

*"Therefore at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of music, all the people, the nations, and the languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up."*

Daniel 3:7

*"Who shall rise up for me against the evildoers? or who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity?"*

Psalms 94:16

**W**ho indeed!

Not that he was not an impressive individual. By almost every standard and according to every report, he was a man of great character, this John Paul II.

But then, so was Nebuchadnezzar.

Not that he did not speak often about God, paying homage to Him, and say many things about the greatness of the one true God and Christ Jesus whom He sent, biblical things, things with which we in various instances could agree, things as true as the Scriptures themselves.

But then, so did Nebuchadnezzar. (Cf. Daniel 2, 3, 4, and their concluding verses in particular.)

It could be said that in the realm of civil righteousness and morality John Paul II stood for things that put to shame many a high ranking liberal Protestant clergy member, things with which we find far more agreement than things promoted by today's apostate sons of the Reformation occupying Protestant podiums, men who apparently have one great

goal in life, namely, to destroy all together any distinctiveness between the Christian faith, with its biblical standards, and the world. I for one would feel far safer in a society governed by the moral standards espoused publicly by the late pope than by those being propagated by Protestant liberals of our day. This to show just how far liberal Protestantism has slipped. At least this pope had some convictions in the realm of morality that accorded with Scripture and was not afraid to call for government officials to uphold the same.

But then, the same could be said about Nebuchadnezzar (cf. Daniel 4 again). In fact, the sad reality was that Daniel could far more readily find room to live according to his Jewish, biblical convictions in Nebuchadnezzar's court and palace than he would have been able to back in the royal court in Jerusalem and David's house towards its very end. Living in Babylon was for God-fearing Jews safer than living back in the apostate Judah of the day. This not in praise of Babylon, but to show how committed to unrighteousness the princes of Judah had become.

And yet all this did not make the King of Babylon one of the righteous of the earth. Nor did it make him the spiritual brother of Daniel and his three friends. And it certainly did not make him worthy of worship and obeisance and being put on a pedestal as if he were close to God. (Just ask Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who refused to join the adoring throngs — and what price they paid as a result).

Nor does it the late, great pope — though one begins to wonder how many are left in Protestantism who would actually agree or dare say so. Precious few, it becomes painfully obvious. The universal acclaim for this towering figure of the late twentieth century has been astonishing to say the least. During the first two weeks of April past, all roads led to Rome. The line-up of the heads of State that passed before his body to pay their 'respects' was impressive; almost everyone that was anyone from the West, and more than a few even from the East.

Even the secular press had almost nothing but good to say. Which is odd, and even startling, in light of his supposed arch-conservatism, and his being at direct odds with so many of the secular press' sacred cows, from his being strongly anti-abortion to his flatly refusing women the right to hold church office and taking part in running of the affairs of Rome's church, and his condemnation of gay unions besides. All those eulogies coming from the notoriously anti-Christian media and press — a remarkable thing. Was it just political expediency, speak no evil of the dead (especially when so many of your reading public are Roman Catholic), or something deeper — a charisma in the man that mesmerized even the anti-spiritual media to a degree? It strikes us, the latter was true.

Read the following carefully, written the day after John Paul II's funeral. And keep in mind that this is lifted from the *Washington Post*, not exactly your average ru-

ral, small town, conservative newspaper.

But to the world John Paul II still signified and spoke of faith and decency. He embodied hope even to the otherwise hopeless. As commentators noted yesterday, the pope's own experience as an actor early in life helped him project the image, not for his own glorification but for that of an embattled church in a warring world.

As NBC's Miller had said, Rome did seem like the center of the universe yesterday. If all roads did not lead there, all TV signals came from there. As it does on only the rarest occasions, cold technology warmed the world. (4/9/05)

Quite a testimonial from the world's press. Center of the universe for a day, no less. His image beamed around the whole world. All worshiped with Rome and paid their homage to the Holy Father. And Rome's music reverberating in its magnificent cathedrals is impressive. I must admit on occasions I have found it so myself (just visiting, of course).

When it came to Protestants of note, effusive in their praise, right on down the line — a servant of God, exemplary to Christianity at large, a true emblem and representative of what the Christian faith is all about to all the world, or as James Dobson put it, his death is "...an immeasurable loss — not only to our friends in the Roman Catholic faith, but to the entire world" (p. 25, *World*, April 16, 2005).

Even Jewish rabbis, long critical of Rome and its undeniable collaboration with the Nazi regime in the hour of the Jews' deepest need, had good words to say. And Muslim representatives stood in the funeral crowd with bitter political enemies to say their farewells to this man. A man in his death able to elicit a remarkable show of unity

in a divided world. A remarkable thing. Now to find one able to do the same during his own lifetime! You think it cannot be done?

No, we do not join all the 'estranged brothers' in expressing our heartfelt sympathy to Rome and our own sense of loss. He may have been a most charming and likable man, issuing some papal bulletins on various civil issues that profited the faithful church of Christ yet living in this world. But then, so did Nebuchadnezzar issue such degrees, making life more livable for the Jews in Babylon. And Daniel seemed to be able to get along with His Majesty just fine.

Still, it changed nothing with respect to God's judgment of this fellow. "Thou art this head of gold" (Dan. 2:38).

That Nebuchadnezzar was the "head of gold" meant he was identified with Antichrist. He was part of the image that was ground into pieces by the stone that without hands was cut out of the mountain. That stone was the Christ; and the image with its kingdoms did not represent Christ's kingdom, but Christ's adversary's, Satan's, as every student of Scripture knows.

That the Reformed confessions have put the papacy and its Church in the same category, part of Antichrist's coming kingdom, is plain. Read the Belgic Confession, Article 29, which clearly has Rome in mind when it describes the false church and its history of persecuting the righteous; and then the Westminster Confession of Faith, which states in unequivocal language:

There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ: nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God (XXV, 6).

This was the assessment of the Reformers themselves who came out of Rome, who know firsthand the abuses of Rome and the enormities committed by her popes and all their false claims. One quote from John Calvin will do.

I deny that see [that is, the Bishopric of Rome — kk] to be Apostolic, wherein nought is seen but a shocking apostasy — I deny him to be the vicar of Christ, who in furiously persecuting the gospel, demonstrates by his conduct that he is Antichrist — I deny him to be the successor of Peter, who is doing his utmost to demolish every edifice that Peter built — and I deny him to be the head of the Church, who by his tyranny lacerates and dismembers the Church, after dissevering her from Christ, her true and only Head (*The Necessity of Reforming the Church*).

Keep in mind that this was the universal judgment of those who in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries came out of Rome. And now the professed heirs of these same Reformers eulogize the head of this selfsame church, one who never objected to being called "Holy Father," and talk of him even in terms of being "a brother in Christ." These Protestant brethren had better ask themselves whether the late, great "Papa" changed anything in the Church of Rome and what the Reformed fathers found objectionable in Rome — in particular with respect to the mutilation of the gospel of the true apostles and the Lord Jesus — one iota! We wait to hear!

But note what Calvin's main criticism of the self proclaimed vicar of Christ is — not that he and his henchmen with barbaric cruelty persecuted the righteous (with a malice and cruelty unmatched until the days of Hitler and his "Jewish solution"), though he (they) did — but for his (their) "...furiously persecuting the gospel." Calvin's first and primary criticism was what Rome under the direction of

*We do not join all the 'estranged brothers' in expressing our heartfelt sympathy to Rome and our own sense of loss.*

the so-called successors of Peter *did to Christ's gospel!* Those who would speak well of this late, great pope and speak of him as a brother in the faith had better be able to explain to the Lord of the apostles how this so-called successor of Peter in anyway repented of the doctrinal errors and monstrous teachings of Rome and sought to lead his church back to the true doctrines of Christ Jesus. Where is any evidence of that?

True, he eschewed moral relativism; took a public stand against the appalling evils of abortion, homosexual unions, and the abuse of and trafficking of children; and he even continued to bar women from holding church office in a day and age when it is unpopular to do so. But these are not new stands for Rome. Which of John Paul's predecessors in the last couple of centuries did not maintain precisely the same things.

What about Rome's false doctrines and even its view of itself as the One True Church of Christ?

The simple fact is that within the Vatican itself the acknowledged legacy of John Paul II is that he was the most traditional of popes and made his beloved Church not a less authoritarian institution, but a more authoritarian one. He strengthened the traditions of Rome's Church. This is what he worked with might and main to preserve and bolster, to restore the papacy to its role of supreme and unquestioned authority in the lives of its members, which authority had badly eroded over the decades previous to his rule. He took his appeal to the people, to the laity. In this he was successful. As *U.S. News & World Report* reported,

The pope's supporters, of course, celebrate his strictness, noting it weeded out what his biographer George Wiegel calls the "Lite bri-

gades" within Catholicism. "I think the Church is much stronger now," says Michael Novak, an influential Catholic thinker... (April 11, 2005, pp. 28, 29).

The point is, this pope did not repudiate one of Rome's unbiblical doctrines, doctrines that so mutilate and persecute the gospel of Christ.

This is the man who made it easier for the Romish Church to add to the list of the saints. Now not four verifiable miracles are required for canonization, but only two. This so all the people can have one of their own as a local saint to pray to for intercession and miraculous help. And it will not be long before this 'papa' John Paul II will be added

to the list. He did not discourage it in the least. He was more than willing to have mere men be given the glory and honor that even the angels with horror refused (cf. Rev. 19:10: "...and [the angel] said, see thou do it not: I am thy fellow servant ... worship God...").

This was the man that was infatuated with Mary, the mother of our Lord. She was the one to whom he gave credit for protecting him in the assassination attempt that nearly ended his life. He openly promoted her as Co-redemptrix with her Son. He raised Mariolatry to a whole new level. This needs no demonstration. Next to his coffin as the adoring multitudes came with their homage was a cross. Affixed to it was a large letter M, his final homage to Mother Mary, to whom he prayed every day. By word and example he taught the people to do the same.

And this is Christianity? This is praiseworthy how?

The only words that apply are those of the truly holy apostle Paul in Galatians 1:8, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you,

let him be accursed." Paul is writing here about the gospel of salvation all of grace, grace that is centered wholly and entirely in that one mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus, God's Son. If the apostle Peter himself had proposed the adoration of mother Mary along with her Son, Paul would have anathematized him, demanding his repentance, and the forfeiture of his office as well.

And we as believers are to speak well of the late, great pope?

What he did do was to mend fences with Jews and Muslims, by apologizing to the Jews in particular for past atrocities committed against their communities by members of his Church, and by visiting and worshiping in synagogues and mosques. He was so bold as to say, along with his admirer Rev. Billy Graham, they were all brothers in Christ, going to heaven by different ways. No wonder so many were ready to forgive him so much. In such light, his popularity becomes easier to understand.

He was a most ecumenically-minded pope. In this way he is an advancement beyond his predecessors. But as for Rome's false, unbiblical doctrines that so persecute the true gospel and that, in the end, will lead inevitably to the persecution of those who will not compromise the doctrines that will not give His glory to a mere man, he reflected nothing more than the age-old face of Rome.

Do not imagine that what happened in this springtime of 2005 to honor this Bishop of Rome, labeled "Pastor to the World," is not a portent of things to come, what one religious man at the right time with the right charisma can persuade a divided world, including those whom you would think would oppose him, to do. And for the true friends of Daniel, it is not a portent of good. Not to those who refuse to pay homage to this coming "Vicar of Christ," the spiritual offspring of the late, great Vicar of Rome. ■

# PRC Synod Byron Center, 2005

Prof. Barry Gritters

**M**embers of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) may be very thankful for denominational unity. They may be grateful for the *denomination*. That other denominations may have become hierarchical in their synods is no reason for members of the PRC to reject denominational structure. Cautious of the misuse of authority, the PRC work in these broader gatherings in obedience to Jesus Christ, who calls churches to labor together in the cause of the gospel.

On June 13, 2005, in Byron Center, and at the invitation of Byron Center PRC, the PRC synod will take up her agenda for the sake of the cause of God and truth as she is privileged to be involved in it. Rev. Kenneth Koole, president of last year's synod, will preach at the special worship service called to introduce the convening of synod. All the PRC membership and any friends of the PRC are encouraged to attend this service as well as all the deliberations of synod.

The business is significant. It begins appropriately, every year the same.

Picture in your minds the 20 delegates (5 ministers and 5 elders from each classis), immediately after election of officers on Tuesday morning of the first week, rising in unison to express assent as the new president reads the "Public Declaration of Agreement with the Three Forms of Unity" (please read the "Declaration" printed in the box). With this important beginning, the men take up the churches' work.

The first business of synod this year will be the examination of the PRC's seminary graduate, Mr. John Marcus, member of the Byron Cen-

ter congregation. The other graduate, Mr. Dennis Lee, is a member of the Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore. After the delegates hear Mr. Marcus' sermon on Tuesday morning, they break for committee work and the student returns home to finish preparations for two grueling days of oral examinations on Wednesday and Thursday before he is declared candidate for the ministry of the Word and sacraments in the PRC.

The churches also rejoice that two more sons of the denomination are recommended by the Theo-

logical School Committee for admission to the seminary this fall – Mr. Nathan Dykstra, son of our Hudsonville, MI, congregation; and Mr. Cory Griess, a son of our Loveland, CO, congregation. These will join, D.V., the other four who will continue at various stages in their studies, so that we will have two fourth-year, one third-year, one second-year, and two first-year students. (In the fall, we hope to give more information from the seminary of the activities here.)

The Student Aid Committee (SAC) submits a budget of a little

## PUBLIC DECLARATION OF AGREEMENT WITH THE FORMS OF UNITY

Of all the marks by which the true church distinguishes itself from all human societies, the confession of the truth must be mentioned in the first place. The Savior therefore said, John 8:31: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed." And again: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 10:32). In obedience to the Lord and for the instruction of all, the assembly of elders, delegated by the congregations of the Protestant Reformed Churches, deem it proper that they publicly declare what the confession is of the churches here mentioned and of every one of these churches.

All the congregations of these churches believe all the books of the Old and of the New Testaments to be the Word of God and confess as the true expression of their faith the Thirty-seven Articles of the Confession of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, formulated by the Synod of 1618-'19, together with the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of the Dordrecht Synod against the Remonstrants (Arminians).

In conformity with the belief of all these congregations, we, as members of their synod, declare that from the heart we feel and believe that all articles and expressions of doctrine contained in the three above-named confessions, jointly called the Three Forms of Unity, in all respects agree with the Word of God, whence we reject all doctrines repugnant thereto; that we desire to conform all our actions to them, agreeably to the accepted Church Order of Dordrecht, 1618-'19, and desire to receive into our church communion everyone that agrees to our confession.

May the King of the church work this faith in the hearts of many and increase it, and those that have received a like-precious faith with us show the grace shown them in fellowship to the glory of Him who prayed that all His own shall be one in Him.

over \$52,000 for the upcoming school year. This includes \$11,350 for internship expenses. The committee also proposes a plan for special church offerings to support students whose needs exceed the maximum allowable amount from synodical assessments. The monies would still be governed by the SAC and would be distributed according to need, but the "broader covenant community" would be given the opportunity to "assist with the student's needs by providing an outlet for free-will giving."

The Theological School Committee presents three ministers to synod for calling a replacement for Prof. D. Engelsma: the Rev. Ronald Cammenga (Faith PRC, Jenison, MI), the Rev. Steven Key (Hull PRC, Hull, IA), and the Rev. Kenneth Koole (Grandville PRC, Grandville, MI). Each of these men is an experienced minister, ranging from nineteen to twenty-seven years in the pastorate. The rule synod follows is that when a faculty member reaches the age of 65, a process begins to replace him so that he can be fully retired by age 70.

The Domestic Mission Committee (DMC) includes reports from the three missionaries and the calling church for each (Loveland and Rev. T. Miersma; Southwest and Rev. J. Mahtani; Hudsonville and Rev. A. Stewart), and includes a summary of the labors in the past year. No major recommendations are brought for any of the fields. There is an optimistic forecast of organization for Northern Ireland next year, God willing, and a report of significant growth of the mission group in Spokane. Rev. Miersma marks 10 years as home missionary this year. Eastern Home missions prospers as well, and Missionary Jai Mahtani says that the answer to the hopeful question about imminent organization for them is, with God's blessings, perhaps in 2-4 years.

The DMC includes a significant

study on administering the Lord's Supper on the mission field. The lengthy report (16 pages) examines the history of the question in the PRC since the 1950s. Among other recommendations in the report, the major issue synod will face is this recommendation: that synod declare that a calling church may, under certain very specific circumstances, administer the Lord's Supper in a mission setting where the group is not yet ready to be organized as a church.

The Foreign Mission Committee (FMC) reports on the labors in two fields—Ghana and the Philippines—and includes reports from both missionaries and their calling consistories. Noteworthy is the long, joint report from Hull PRC (calling church) and the FMC about the mission work in Ghana. After examining the short history of the PRC's work there and past synodical decisions, the report makes extended and sober observations:

- 1) After some six years of labor in Ghana, there is at present no indication that we will be able to establish a congregation in Ashaley Botwe....
- 2) Our Western affluence and various errors in the sending of money to the field and the distribution of money on the field have led to substantial damage on this field....
- 3) Numerous mistakes made in our labors in Ghana have proven to be intractable....
- 4) ... in some cases ... decisions were not executed as originally planned, and ... many ... principles and guidelines were not followed or were not carried out as we had desired.
- 5) [Hull and the FMC] sense a lack of support for the field in the calling church and in the churches....
- 6) ... we are convinced that we are not capable of undertaking [work in another area of Accra].

These observations lead to a grounded recommendation that synod authorize Hull council and the FMC to close the field in an orderly and brotherly manner and

report to Synod 2006. Hull and the FMC recommend hearty thanks be extended to the missionaries and their wives and the volunteer assistants who labored with them.

The FMC relates that the labors in the Philippines are prospering, so that the main group with which Missionary Spriensma works may well be ready for organization by the time of next synod. The group is stable, has about 16 families, includes men qualified for office, and is a "vibrant, committed fellowship." There is even mention in the emissaries' report of the possible need to call another missionary to the Philippines on account of: 1) the large amount of work, 2) the uncertainty of visa extensions with apparently new rules for missionaries from the government, and 3) the health concerns of the missionary's daughter.

The PRC's Committee for Contact with Other Churches reports that the missionary-on-loan to the Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore (ERCS), the Rev. Arie denHartog, has accepted the call to serve as pastor of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI. The churches in Singapore inform the PRC that there is not a need at present for another missionary-on-loan. The Contact Committee has been busy corresponding with the ERCS on the matter of divorce and remarriage. Recently, a divorced and remarried person was allowed to remain a member in good standing in First ERCS. A committee of the ERCS classis has been studying the remarriage issue for some time. The ERCS classis has urged an August 8 deadline for the report, at which time a special classis is to be convened to bring the matter to a conclusion. As this all affects the ability to continue with full sister-church relations between the PRC and the ERCS, synod will deal with this matter in the earnest prayer that our long and rich fellowship with the brethren in Singapore can be maintained.

The Committee for Contact

with Other Churches informs synod that a conference planned with the brethren of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia has been postponed, due to scheduling problems on both sides. Attempts to reschedule are underway. On a different note, the Committee for Contact received a request from the EPC to define a "less complete fraternal relationship" that would allow, under certain circumstances, opening the PRC pulpits to their ministers, as they do for PRC ministers. (The PRC has only one level of formal relations with other churches – "full-sister," in which pulpits are

opened and memberships freely exchanged.) The Contact Committee is also looking into the possibility of allowing the men of the EPC who are enrolled in the PRC seminary to "speak a word of edification" in PRCA pulpits (but will wait until 2006 to bring those recommendations).

Except for the large but temporary spike in the budget for the seminary (replacing two professors at the same time), the costs to the denomination for their labors to denomer appear to remain steady.

Then there are reports from both Classis East and Classis West, from the Board of Trustees (an

estate's bequest of about \$30,000), the Catechism Book committees, the Stated Clerk, the Emeritus Committee, the Finance Committee. The delegates will have a busy couple of weeks.

Please visit the synod. Visitors are welcome. Come to the pre-synodical prayer service Monday evening. Listen in on the student examinations Wednesday and Thursday.

Especially, pray for the labors. May the King be honored by careful deliberations and wise decisions. May they be made on the basis of truth, truth as it is in Him who is full of grace and truth. 

## Letters

### A Hard Doctrine?

I think the issue of divorce and remarriage is a hard one. I believe that, yes, divorce should happen only because of marital unfaithfulness, but the "no remarriage" part I have a hard time with. After reading the article, I think I agree with what is written. But it is not easy for me, because I know a few happily remarried couples, and it is difficult for me to believe that their relationship is wrong. And yet, with the divorce rate so high, something is definitely wrong there. Maybe if remarrying were more strongly discouraged, people would come to see what a serious commitment marriage is, and how it should be a lifelong pledge, and not a trial-and-error process.

*Ashlee Stallinga*  
Lansing, Illinois

### RESPONSE:

I can appreciate your question. There have been any number of 'happy' second marriages, unlike the first ones, so rocky and full of troubles. But do not lose sight of the fact that a 'happier' second marriage does not prove that what somebody is involved in – a marriage to someone else than one's

first and real spouse – is right in God's eyes. On that basis even the Pharisees could in many instances justify their divorces and remarriages – because undoubtedly some of them were married first to nagging, complaining wives who were an embarrassment with their loud, shrill criticisms all the time. But Jesus did not say, "All right, remarry if she or he is such a contentious person. I could not bring myself to make you live with that!" He still spoke against divorce and forbade remarriage (Matt. 5:31, 32).

But also, if what you suggest is true, that the greater happiness of the second marriage (remarriage) is what justifies it, then believers should be allowed to divorce unbelievers who are unhappy with the believers' faith, and should be allowed to remarry fellow believers. But this is exactly what the apostle Paul, in the name of his Lord, would not allow. Read I Corinthians 7:10 and what follows. You may be sure that divorcing an unbelieving spouse and remarrying a believer would have been a 'happier' experience and a 'better' marriage in almost every instance, at least as far as we judge things. In fact, that's exactly what

some of the earlier new converts to the Christian faith wanted permission to do. Living with the unbelieving spouses was a difficult thing. Being married to an interested believer would have been happier all around. And yet, despite what would have made them happier, the apostle said they were not to do this. (Read I Cor. 7:12 and 13.) And in the event that a believing wife did leave an unbelieving husband (because he was cheating on her) the apostle is very clear – "But and if she depart; let her remain unmarried..." Even where the first marriage breaks down, the apostle did not approve of a second marriage. Even then, remain unmarried.

In the end, it is not 'happiness' that determines right from wrong, it is obedience, even in unhappy circumstances. The command is not, "And be ye happy," but "And be ye holy." When a believer does that, even if it means remaining single, he or she will find happiness in obeying the Lord. If the church starts to make 'happiness' the reason remarriages are justified, there will be no end to the divorces and remarriages they would have to approve. The

trouble is, nothing would be any different than what the unhappy circumstances presently are in the church.

You are right, better and bolder instruction concerning marriage as

a lifelong bond is what the members of the church need, especially the youth. It is what has been lacking in too many instances. But then the churches will also have to

maintain what they have taught when marriages begin to unravel, hard as it may be, or all the instruction will soon be seen to be just a matter of empty words.

— Rev K. Koole 

## ■ The Rev. Norman Kansfield Ousted

As a follow-up of my last article concerning the President of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, the *Grand Rapids Press* had the following in its March 26, 2005 edition:

The Rev. Norman Kansfield's presidency at New Brunswick Theological Seminary ends Sunday, after school officials voted to replace him three months before his contract expires.

...Ecclesiastical charges have been filed against him that could lead to a church trial at the RCA General Synod this summer.

Although the board reprimanded Kansfield, 65, when it earlier voted to not renew his contract, a trustee at the New Jersey seminary insisted his early exit was not because of the publicity.

"We were more concerned, and remain most concerned, about what makes New Brunswick good and effective going forward," said Larry Williams, vice moderator of the board of trustees.

...The board also authorized a search for a permanent president and expressed appreciation for Kansfield's 12 years of "faithful service."

Kansfield declined to comment on the board's action. He has said nothing in RCA policy forbids marrying gays and the church calls for pastoral treatment of those born homosexual.

A committee is investigating church leaders' complaints that

Kansfield violated his vows by performing his daughter's wedding. The RCA has no specific rule against such ceremonies, but the General Synod has declared marriage is only between a man and a woman.

Synod President the Rev. Steven VanderMolen said he doesn't know whether the issue will go to trial at the General Synod in June but is confident delegates will uphold the RCA stance that homosexual practice is "contrary to Scripture."

It remains to be seen what effect this will have within the Reformed Church in America. Other denominations are being torn apart on this divisive issue. What will happen in the RCA?

Another issue is the faithfulness of the church in exercising Christian discipline. Will censure and, if necessary, excommunication take place if this minister of the gospel continues to hold to his conviction that the homosexual practice is not "contrary to Scripture"?

## ■ Then: the issue of divorce and remarriage

In most denominations divorce and remarriage no longer is an issue. It comes, therefore, as somewhat a surprise that a denomination as large as the Church of England officially holds the same position as does the PRC. Yes, officially they maintain this scriptural teaching, though millions of divorced Anglicans have managed to get around the restrictions. The question of divorce and remarriage has arisen in England especially

because Prince Charles will marry the divorcee Camilla Parker Bowles. If or when he becomes King of England, he becomes the titular head of the Church of England. The *Grand Rapids Press*, March 31, 2005, reports:

Millions of divorced Anglicans in Britain have done what Prince Charles and Camilla Parker Bowles plan to do next week — remarry in a civil ceremony followed by a blessing from their pastor. But none of them have been heir to the throne and the titular leadership of the Church of England.

...The couple's decision to take the well-traveled path around Anglican objections to divorce and remarriage underscores colliding opinions in Britain that could eventually rattle the Church of England, which plays an anchor role for the world's 77 million-strong association of churches known as the Anglican Communion.

The report continues by explaining that liberal Anglicans "appear either indifferent to the marriage or hope it opens the way for greater Anglican tolerance of divorce and remarriage." Some believe that a remarriage is better than living together "in sin" as these two have the past many years. The position of the Anglican Church is stated:

But conservatives feel Charles is trampling on Anglican traditions by marrying his longtime lover. The reason: Her ex-husband, Andrew Parker Bowles, is still alive. According to church tenets, only Charles would be free to remarry

because his former wife, Princess Diana, is dead....

Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England does not grant annulments that would clear the way for a religiously approved remarriage. It also consistently stresses that marriage is a "lifelong covenant" and generally closes the door on a second chance sanctioned by the church.

In 2002, the church's governing body, the General Synod, loosened rules on remarriage in the church and gave parish priests discretion to decide whether the couple meets certain "exceptional circumstances." Among them: The new marriage should not "consecrate the old infidelity" - which, many say, would be the case with Charles and Camilla.

So the position of the Protestant Reformed Churches is not so weird, so unheard-of, so "out-of-step" as so many claim. The Anglican Church, with all of its other many problems, still officially maintains the teaching of Scripture that marriage is a "lifelong covenant." Remarriage is not officially condoned while one of the former partners remains living. They have closed their eyes to the "millions" of their membership who have violated their official position, they have even allowed some "exceptional circumstances" where remarriage is allowed, but officially they maintain the teaching of Scripture.

But there will be some interesting developments perhaps in another week (at the time of this writing) when Charles and Camilla marry.

## ■ TNIV: The Smorgasbord Bible

Newspapers and magazines have reported on a major project of Zondervan publishing company. Having launched the NIV a number of years ago, they have now produced a revision of that translation called the "Today's New International Version of the

Bible." Several years ago Zondervan created a storm among evangelicals when they proposed introducing a new NIV that would be "gender-neutral." The storm was so great that Zondervan backed down (at least in the United States) and promised that they would not go ahead with this project.

Now they have introduced the TNIV. The *Denver Post*, February 20, 2005, introduced it thus:

In what's described as the largest Bible translation launch in history, a modernized version of the standard-bearer of evangelical Protestant Bibles is being hyped to believers and spiritual seekers in the prized 18- to 34-year-old demographic.

A decade in the making, Today's New International Version Bible (TNIV) is the work of Zondervan, a commercial Christian publisher, and the Colorado Springs-based International Bible Society, which is publishing versions for churches geared toward evangelizing.

A team of 15 biblical scholars made some 50,000 changes to the New International Version (NIV) Bible, which debuted in 1978 and accounts for one in three Bible sales.

In all, nine versions of the TNIV have been shipped to bookshelves in the past two weeks, from Bibles for men and women to "The Story," a translation in novel form. By trying to update old language and reflect the latest theological thinking, translators took a risk. After all, evangelical Christians hold the Bible as their guiding authority and the literal word of God.

The riskiest task was choosing which masculine references to pluralize in places the scholars concluded referred to people generally, not just men.

When the TNIV New Testament was released in 2002, more than 100 conservative Protestant scholars blasted the gender changes as theologically dubious and a front on a war against traditional gender roles.

If TNIV's advocates can mini-

mize that damage, they face the challenge of selling a product to members of a hard-to-reach and savvy generation notoriously dismissive of marketing ploys aimed at them.

The article continues by pointing out the various criticisms made against this new translation. It quotes claims made that it is in fact more literal than the old NIV. One would have to study it more carefully to know the facts of the case. It is, however, disturbing to hear that there are nine versions of this TNIV: one called "Strive" designed to appeal to men, another, "True Identity" designed to appeal to women, as well as other versions designed to appeal to youth and the unconverted. All of this is in harmony with the principle guiding translators of the original NIV: "dynamic equivalence." The translators would not translate necessarily literally, but would use the "equivalence" in today's language. These nine versions go quite a step beyond that—a version for each of nine distinct groups. One can only wonder how one version differs from another so as to appeal to a specific category of people. And once again one must face the question: if the original writing of the Bible is inspired, infallible, and inerrant, ought not one translation suffice? Ought not a translation be as close as possible to the originals? Is this Bible being changed in order to attract people? The memorization of scriptural passages will become ever more difficult. Who knows whether a person quotes correctly? From what version is he quoting? It is disturbing, too, that now translations must be repeatedly modernized. Does this in fact help—or does it create increased confusion? One asks: "Which Word of God are you quoting?" And: "Is that one really the very Word of God?" I fear that the TNIV only contributes to the confusion related to multiple translations. 

## Islam (3)

## A Little Politics and Law: Shari'a (concl.)

**Western-Style Shari'a Still Promoted**

**W**ith the abundance of historical evidence demonstrating the failure of the church and state working in concert to achieve positive, God-glorifying results, it would seem the part of wisdom for much of Western Christianity to reconsider its ideas on the kingdom. Current church activity suggests, however, that we are in for still more of the same old attempts to establish unbiblical relationships between church and state.

"Faith-based initiatives" approved by our government and encouraged by many church leaders is one obvious example. The current wisdom seems to be that, since the church is adept at addressing many of society's welfare concerns in a fiscally responsible way, the state will do well to use the church for this purpose. The problem is that along with state money comes the inevitable puppet strings. While the church may think the state's money will help achieve great things for God's kingdom, little does she realize (or care?) that the strings attached will keep her from properly serving her Lord in the dispensing of these government monies. At the same time she will become dependent upon the state.

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Christian Reconstruction has its own postmillennial plan for church and state. Proponent of Christian Reconstruction Gary North expresses their goal as follows:

Christians are called by God to exercise authority in every area of life. God has transferred the ownership of the world to Christians, just as he transferred it to Adam before he rebelled. We now are called to take possession of the world in terms of God's covenantal principles, and by means of God's sovereign grace.<sup>1</sup>

In their view "biblical law is Christianity's tool of dominion."<sup>2</sup> While North insists "that political action is *not* [North's emphasis, ck] primary,"<sup>3</sup> and that they seek to achieve their goals merely by promoting social change, the fact remains, when all is said and done, that they end up with a rule by means of biblical law. One wonders, which biblical laws will be enforced? Just the 10 Commandments, or some of the other Old Testament laws as well? If so, which ones? Who gets to decide which biblical laws apply? If just the 10 Commandments, how will the tenth commandment be enforced? What about the consequences for those who do not obey? Are the Old Testament penalties also to be exercised? (Many supporters of Christian Reconstruction desire public stoning for many sins.) How will this be any different from life under the Shari'a and Iran's Islamic ayatollahs or the Taliban who formerly ruled in Afghanistan?

"Focus on the Family's" James Dobson seems to be promoting a similar program as he works to bring the Bush administration under the influence of the Association of Evangelicals. With "about 90 denominations under the evangelical umbrella"<sup>4</sup> and a voting block of about 30 million members, Dobson and his supporters obviously wield significant political clout. As further reported in *Time*:

Dobson has never been so baldly political. Before the election, he stepped down from the presidency of Focus (he's still chairman) to launch Focus on the Family Action, a fundraising and grassroots organizing engine free of the political spending limits imposed on the nonprofit Focus. The move allowed Dobson to make his first presidential endorsement (for President Bush), to write to hundreds of thousands of Focus constituents in states with tight Senate races with political advice, and to appear in ads to unseat then Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle in South Dakota. Last fall, Dobson hosted huge "stand for family" rallies—widely seen as supportive of Republican candidates—in close Senate race states, while Focus helped distribute an eye-popping 8 million voting guides. "I can't think of anybody who had more impact than Dr. Dobson" on social conservatives this election, says Richard Viguerie, the GOP direct-mail pioneer. "He was the 800-pound gorilla."<sup>5</sup>

While believers can agree with many of the causes that Dobson supports, by employing churches

as a means to pressure the government he makes it clear that "The Dobson Way" is not the biblical way.

Closer to home, some in the *Reformed* camp also seem to be promoting an unbiblical role of the church with respect to the state because of a faulty view of the kingdom. In his review of the book *Light for the City: Calvin's Preaching, Source of Life and Liberty* by Lester DeKoster, Prof. Barrett L. Gritters writes:

The thinking [of DeKoster, ck] runs like this: God's ultimate goal in the world *in human history* is not the gathering of His church but the reformation of the world. The cities of the world will become the "city of God." Politically, culturally, socially, they must (and will) be transformed.... The instrument by which this transformation will take place is the church.<sup>6</sup>

#### The Non-Shari'a Way

Will the church never learn?

Examples from her own history in ancient times under Emperor Constantine, in medieval times under Pope Innocent III, and in modern times under a state-church in the Netherlands should be warning enough. Today Islamic Shari'a shouts out its own warning to the church: "Beware, this can happen to you too!"

Those who would be tempted to promote such relationships between church and state would do well to consider the biblical and confessional alternative:

The state is separate from, and independent of, the church. A strong doctrine of the separation of church and state is not an American theory. It is the plain teaching of the Bible in both testaments....

As an institution of providence, rather than grace, as an institution based on God's revelation in creation, rather than the revelation of Scripture, and as an institution separate from and independent of the church, the state has its own

peculiar calling. This calling is radically different from the calling of the church. The calling of the state is to maintain earthly peace and order in the life of the nation. By carrying out this calling, the state proves itself the servant of God.<sup>7</sup>

By submitting herself to the God-ordained order of things, modern-day Israel demonstrates her faithfulness to her Lord and experiences His blessing. 

1. Gary De Mar and Gary North, *Christian Reconstruction: What It Is, What It Isn't* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), p. 57.

2. De Mar, p. 160.

3. De Mar, p. 161.

4. Dan Gilgoff, "The Dobson Way," *Time* 17 Jan. 2005: p. 69.

5. Gilgoff, p. 65.

6. Barrett L. Gritters, "Book Review," *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, vol. 38, Nov. 2004:105

7. David J. Engelsma, "Messianic Kingdom and Civil Government," *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, vol. 37, April 2004:31 & 34.

Ministering to the Saints

Rev. Doug Kuiper

## The Fundamental Work of the Deacons (9) Caring for the Poor Who Move Away from the Congregation

**T**he Christian, godly care of the poor is the fundamental work of deacons in the church of Jesus Christ. To guide deacons of Reformed churches in doing this work, the Church Order

approved by the Synod of Dordrecht (1618-1619) spells out the work of deacons in three articles – 25, 26, and 83.

With one exception, we have explained fully the requirements of Article 25. That exception, to be treated later if the Lord wills, is the requirement that deacons render an account of their work to the consistory. We have seen that deacons must gather the alms, evaluate the needs of the poor, distribute the alms, and visit and comfort

the distressed. We have also argued that deacons must show their Christian, godly care not only to the poor within their congregation, but also to Christian poor of other congregations, and to unbelieving poor of whose need the deacons become aware.

Several points in Article 26 remain to be treated, although we have already touched on this point, that diaconates must assist and consult with each other.

For the moment, we examine

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Article 83, which reads: "Furthermore, to the poor, removing for sufficient reasons, so much money for traveling shall be given by the deacons as they deem adequate. The consistory and deacons shall, however, see to it that they be not too much inclined to relieve their churches of the poor, with whom they would without necessity burden other churches."<sup>1</sup>



The Synod of Dordrecht did not adopt Article 83 as worded above. The original wording, translated into English, is this: "Furthermore, the poor, leaving for sufficient reasons, shall be given help from the deacons, according to discretion, provided that there is notification on the back of their attestation [papers] of the places where they intend to go and the help which one shall have given them."<sup>2</sup>

Knowing the historical context in which this article was written will explain the original wording of the article.

In the early days of the Reformed churches, many Reformed believers fled their homes because of persecution, or left to look for work in other areas. These sought and received food, shelter, and money from Reformed diaconates in the communities through which they journeyed. As often happens, lazy people in the community heard of the possibility of free handouts and pretended to be Reformed believers in need of help.

To discourage these lazy people from asking for help, and better to help those who were truly Reformed and truly needy, the Synod of Emden in 1571 made provision for traveling Reformed believers to carry attestations, or certificates, which "should indicate the full name of the holder, his native country, trade, reason for moving, time spent in the Church giving the attestation, conduct, date of departure, destination, etc."<sup>3</sup> Such attestations were given only to

those who, in their consistory's judgment, had good reason to move. Those not producing such an attestation would not receive help from Reformed diaconates. Those who did have such attestations could receive enough money to care for them while they were in that city, and enough money to bring them to the next Reformed church on their journey. When finally they reached their destination, the Reformed church of that city would destroy the attestation.

In light of the different times and circumstances in which we live, two changes have been made to the article's original wording. First, the reference to attestations has been removed. Second, a warning to consistories and deacons was added, reminding them not to be eager to relieve themselves of their poor. These changes were made by the Reformed churches in the Netherlands in 1905, and by the Christian Reformed Church in North America in 1914 – which change the Protestant Reformed Churches retained when they began in 1924.<sup>4</sup>



Article 83 regulates the deacons' activity toward the poor who move away from the congregation of which they are members. When this happens, the deacons are to provide those poor with enough money as the deacons consider sufficient.

Notice, first, that this applies to those who are poor. The article does not suggest that anyone who moves away from the congregation may ask the deacons for monetary support. Only the poor may do so. In this particular instance, we may define the poor as those who have been dependent on the deacons for financial help for some time. In other words, the article is not speaking to the case of one who has never needed diaconal help before, but now decides that the costs of his move are so great that he needs help.

Secondly, the article applies only to those poor who move for sufficient reasons. Not the poor man moving, but the deacons, are permitted to make the judgment whether these reasons are sufficient. In making this decision, the deacons are permitted to ask whether the church that the family plans to join is a true manifestation of the body of Christ. If the family relocates to a place in which there is no soundly Reformed church, the deacons may refuse to help. Rev. G. VandenBerg writes in this connection:

Also here the deacons must remember that the spiritual supersedes the material. It could certainly not be judged a sufficient reason to remove from the church if one simply could advance economic reasons. A man could conceivably want to go to a place where there is no manifestation of the true church but where he could obtain a job. He would then deprive himself and his family of the means of grace.... But it is better to starve or be poor with the people of God than to possess the riches of this world without God.<sup>5</sup>

This is not to say that a better paying job would always be an insufficient reason to move. It might be a very good reason, particularly considering the family's current poverty. But it must not place one's spiritual life in jeopardy.

My intent, however, is not to give a list of reasons that deacons might consider sufficient in this instance. They, with sanctified wisdom from God, will be able to make that decision on the basis of their knowledge of every individual case.

Thirdly, in such an instance the deacons are to give the poor enough money for traveling as they think adequate. The deacons will follow the principles of Article 25 of the Church Order in determining what amount is adequate. But Article 83 is very specific as to the purpose for which the money may

be used: traveling. The deacons are not to give money for travel *and* enough money to support the family for a month after reaching their destination, but are to give just enough for travel. The implication is that, upon arriving at one's destination, the poor will join a true church of Jesus Christ, and, if need be, seek help from the deacons of that church.



Having explained the various requirements of the article, we note that our deacons seldom face this circumstance today. Partly this is due to the affluent age in which we live, which means that our churches do not have many poor; and partly to the fact that few poor make the choice to move.

But the article is not irrelevant. Though seldom, deacons are confronted with such cases at times. And very possibly, deacons will face such circumstances even more in the future. Before Christ comes, His church on earth will endure such tribulation as she has never before endured (Matt. 24:10). The time may again come when many Reformed Christians flee their homes because of persecution, and the requirements of this article must be implemented often.

Even more, this article is important because of other principles that lie behind it. None of these principles are new to us; but the article does reinforce them.

One principle is that the church must care for her poor. This is so obvious, and has been defended sufficiently in past articles, that for now we simply state it.

Another is that the church must care for her poor in all circumstances. Poor families, poor widows, poor sick, and also the poor who move for sufficient reason, must be cared for. It is conceivable that deacons say they will care for the poor only in certain circumstances of poverty — but Scripture and the Church Order do not allow that thinking.

A third is that the church must be discerning in her care for the poor. That is, she must care for those who are truly poor, those of whom she is convinced that they need financial assistance. The article allows the deacons to make determinations in this matter.

Yet another principle is that the deacons are permitted to treat the poor of their own congregation differently than the poor outside their congregation. In light of the subject matter of our last two articles, that the deacons must assist other congregations in caring for their poor, and must care for some of the unbelieving poor in the community, it is now worth observing that the deacons must care for the poor in the congregation to an even greater extent than the poor outside the congregation. Article 83 applies only to Reformed believers, members of a certain congregation, who are in need. It does not permit the deacons to pay for travel of poor outside the congregation.

A fifth principle is that deacons may limit the amount of help they give even to those within the congregation. Perhaps some who have sought diaconal help have wished that the deacons would have given more than they did. Surely deacons must not be stingy. But neither ought those who receive assistance have the attitude, "If I ask the deacons for money, they should give me as much as I want." By stating for what cause the deacons are permitted to give (that is, for travel), this article shows such an attitude to be wrong.



If the article contains important principles for diaconal work, so does the warning added to it: "The consistory and the deacons shall, however, see to it that they be not too much inclined to relieve their churches of the poor, with whom they would without necessity burden other churches."

A congregation, its consistory, and its diaconate are all capable of

having a wrong attitude toward the poor, or toward its funds. Toward the poor, this attitude might be: "They are a nuisance." Or, "We have so many of them, a few less would be nice." And toward its funds, the attitude might be one of stinginess, or a desire to amass church wealth, and therefore a sense of reluctance when the funds of the church must be given to the poor.

The first principle underscored by this warning, therefore, is that the church must have a right view of her poor and of giving for their relief. The poor are a blessing, and to give for their relief is a blessing! Jesus reminded us that the church will always have the poor with her (Matt. 26:11), and that in the way of giving for their relief, and being His disciples, we will have treasure in heaven (Matt. 19:21). Paul also taught that the sacrifice required of us in caring for the poor is small in comparison to Christ's sacrifice on our behalf — and that, in gratitude for the salvation Christ bestows upon us, we must give willingly for the needs of others (II Cor. 8).

A second principle is that deacons must never suggest that the poor move away from their congregation. Of course, the deacons will rejoice in a godly, spiritual way when they hear that a family that had relied on them for help needed that help no longer. But that godly rejoicing is far different

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1. *The Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*, 2002 edition, p. 31.

2. The translation is that of David Engelsma, translated from the Dutch as it is found in J. DeJong, *Verklaring van de Kerkenordening van de Nationale Synode van Dordrecht van 1618-1619* (Rotterdam, 1918), p. 146.

3. Idzerd VanDellen and Martin Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Co, 1941), p. 339.

4. VanDellen and Monsma, p. 339.

5. Gerald VandenBerg, *Standard Bearer*, vol. 40, p. 20.

from a sigh of relief that they need not deal with a particular benevolent case any longer. Nothing that the deacons do must ever suggest that they would breathe such a sigh of relief if the poor moved.

By implication, deacons must be very slow even to suggest ways in which the poor could improve their financial standing. Deacons must not quickly tell the poor to get another job, for example. They must *never* tell the poor such, if the

deacons' motive is to relieve themselves of the responsibility of caring for this individual or family. The deacons ought to limit their advice on personal matters to giving scriptural admonitions and instructions when the family is using its resources sinfully.

Finally, notice that the warning is also directed against consistories. The elders have oversight of the deacons. Consistories must never encourage diaconates

to take a wrong attitude or approach in this matter; in fact, consistories whose diaconates are busy must warn their diaconates against this attitude, and must encourage their deacons in their good work. And if the deacons' attitude is not right, the elders must rebuke the deacons for it.

Being graciously guided by these principles, congregations, diaconates, and the poor alike will experience the blessing of God! 

*Go Ye Into All the World*

## Foreign Missions in Ghana and the Philippines

*Rev. Daniel Kleyn*

**T**he Foreign Mission Committee of the Protestant Reformed Churches hereby presents a brief annual overview of the foreign mission work being done by our churches. Specifically we provide you with information on and an update concerning the work being done on our mission fields in Ghana and in the Philippines. Although the FMC has also corresponded with various contacts in other countries (e.g., Nigeria and Haiti), the focus of our work has definitely been upon the above named mission fields. It has been especially in these places that the Lord has given us opportunity in the past year to be busy in the work of preaching the gospel.

### **The Committee**

The Foreign Mission Committee meets at least once every month. The committee is made up of three

ministers and six elders (or ex-elders) from our churches in Doon and Hull, IA, and Edgerton, MN. The current members are James Andringa, Allen Brummel, Andrew Brummel, Gerald Brummel, Rev. Steven Key, Rev. Daniel Kleyn, James Regnerus, and Gene Van Bommel.

Rev. Richard Smit was also a member of the FMC in the past several years. However, in May of 2004 he accepted the call to be pastor of Immanuel (Lacombe) PRC and thus resigned from the committee. We acknowledge, with thanks to God, the many years of faithful work Rev. Smit did for foreign missions, especially during his years as FMC secretary from 1998 to 2004.

The Lord willing, Rev. David Overway, who has now been installed as minister in Doon PRC, will join the FMC after synod gives approval for this in June.

### **The Calling Churches**

As Foreign Mission Committee, we acknowledge at the outset that

the major share of the work on the two mission fields falls on the shoulders of the two calling churches – Doon PRC for the Philippines, and Hull PRC for Ghana.

The councils of both Doon and Hull are kept busy from month to month and from week to week in the constant work of supervising the fields. This is especially true of their mission field sub-committees, which must consider all the reports and correspondence from the fields, and present recommendations each month to their respective councils. The councils then send on their decisions to the FMC for our review and concurrence.

We are thankful for the faithful labors of both calling churches, for that has helped us immensely in our duty to oversee the work of foreign missions.

### **Ghana**

Presently our missionary in Ghana is Rev. Rodney Miersma, who, with his wife Sharon, has been on the field since January 2004. Their arrival in Ghana meant

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*Rev. Kleyn is secretary of the Foreign Mission Committee.*

that we had two missionaries who could labor together. But in the providence of God, the other missionary, Rev. Wayne Bekkering, retired early due to health reasons. This was a sad event, and both Rev. Bekkering and his wife Phyllis are greatly missed on the field. We commend them to the Lord's care and keeping in the years ahead.

Ablly assisting the Miersmas in Ghana are John and Judy Bouma, members of Grandville PRC. Earlier in the past year, Justin and Cathie Koole, members of Faith PRC, were our missionary assistants. We are grateful for the work of the assistants, and thankful that God has continued to provide us with assistants who not only help immensely in the day-to-day running of things on the field, but also provide valued companionship to the missionary and his wife. We also thank all who have given and continue to give for the support of the missionary assistants.

Rev. Miersma is busy especially with the work of preaching the gospel. The sermons are translated each time into the Twi language, with one of them being aired each Tuesday evening on a local radio station. In addition to this, the missionary leads a number of Bible studies, teaches various catechism classes each week, and gives public lectures now and then (e.g., for Reformation Day). Also keeping him busy is his pastoral work, which includes especially the work of benevolence.

When time has allowed, Rev. and Sharon Miersma have taken classes to learn the Twi language. This has been helpful, for they are now able to understand most conversation. When necessary, Rev. Miersma is also able to read the Scriptures in the native language during pastoral visits.

As part of the oversight and care of our work in Ghana, a delegation visited the field in November 2004. This delegation consisted of Gerald Brummel (representing the FMC) and Alvin Bylsma (rep-

resenting Hull PRC). Their wives also accompanied them on this visit. The men were kept busy during their time in Ghana and presented to the FMC and Hull Council a detailed report of their many labors.

The major item of news concerning our mission work in Ghana is the recommendation that will be coming to Synod 2005 that the mission field in Ghana be closed. After careful deliberation, the FMC and Hull Council came to a joint decision to bring this recommendation to synod. We do so especially on the ground that we do not see, after some six years of preaching of the Word in Ghana, positive fruit toward the establishment of an indigenous church there. The details and many different aspects of our recommendation will be published, the Lord willing, in the 2005 Acts of Synod.

Having presented this recommendation, we now wait to see what the Lord's will is through the decision of synod. May He give us the grace to know that will, and the wisdom to be faithful in carrying it out.

### **The Philippines**

The work in the Philippines appears to be progressing well. Our missionary, Rev. Aud Spriensma, and his wife Alva and daughter Jessica have been in the Philippines since 2002. The Spriensmas live in Manila and labor especially among the saints in the Berean Church of God Reformed (BCGR) there. In addition to preaching, Rev. Spriensma also teaches catechism, does pastoral work, and gives instruction to the men of the BCGR in Reformed church government.

The BCGR consists of some sixteen families who faithfully attend the worship services each Sunday. Quite often visitors are present as well. A great encouragement in the work is the fact that the BCGR is composed of families. They are a vibrant and committed fellowship. By the grace of God we continue

to see spiritual growth in and enthusiasm for the Reformed truth.

We also see the Lord's blessing upon the work through His providing a goodly number of men who could serve as officebearers. The men are receiving instruction from Rev. Spriensma by means of a thorough study of the Church Order. They give evidence of a good knowledge of the Scriptures and of being well grounded in the Reformed faith.

Doon's Council, Rev. Spriensma, and the FMC are all very thankful for the positive fruit we see upon our labors. It has led us to begin considering the possibility of the organization of the BCGR into a church. Although no specific plans are yet in place, we hope to labor toward recommending this to Synod 2006, the Lord willing.

Rev. Spriensma is also involved in mission labors in especially two other places. One is in the Batassan Hills area of Manila. Rev. Spriensma meets with and gives instruction in the Reformed faith to a group of pastors whose churches recently came out of Pentecostalism. These men, too, show a keen interest in the truth. Rev. Spriensma also reports that the men are eager to instruct the members of their congregations in the truths they learn.

Another area of labor is in Bacolod City. Rev. Spriensma travels, usually every other month, to the island of Negros Occidental in order to conduct conferences and to lead worship services for the Reformed Covenant Fellowship there. The group is small, but has given evidence of a firm commitment to the Reformed faith. Every Sunday they meet for two worship services. When Rev. Spriensma is not there, the fellowship makes use of sermons that they receive on DVD from a number of our churches in the States.

In addition to the direct labors of the missionary, the truths of the Reformed faith are also propagated in the Philippines by means of ra-

dio. The Reformed Witness Hour is broadcast every week, both in Manila and in Bacolod City. From time to time we receive responses to these broadcasts. The FMC appreciates very much the work of Rev. Haak and of the RWH Committee, which enables the gospel truths to be proclaimed through radio in the Philippines.

Another aspect of the work is the distribution of Reformed literature. One way in which this is done is through giving gift subscriptions to the *Standard Bearer*. But it also involves distribution of books. Rev. Spriensma has a supply of good Reformed books, some of which were provided by members of our churches who collected them specifically for the saints in the Philippines. The literature is carefully distributed by our missionary, and we have found this to be a very beneficial way to spread the truth.

A delegation of Andrew Brummel (representing the FMC) and Warren Boon (representing Doon's council) visited the field for two weeks in late January 2005. Andrew's wife also accompanied them on this visit. The delegates stayed with the Spriensmas and were kept busy with visits to the families and members of the BCGR, a weekend trip to Bacolod City,

and attending the various instruction classes that Rev. Spriensma leads.

The safety of our missionary and his family remains a conscious concern of the calling church and the FMC. The Spriensmas, as well as Doon's Council and the FMC, are kept informed by the US Embassy and the US State Department of any safety concerns. The Spriensmas live in a safe area of Manila, near to the school (Faith Academy) that Jessica attends. They feel safe where they live, as well as when they travel within Manila or elsewhere. We are thankful to our heavenly Father for His care and safekeeping.

There is obviously much work to be done in the Philippines. We thank the Lord for the opportunity He has given us to be busy in this work. We thank Him also for our missionary, for the faithful and energetic work the missionary does, and for His blessing upon the labors that are being performed.

### Conclusion

As you know, the mission work of our churches is carried out and performed especially by the missionaries, the calling churches, and the FMC. But these men and bodies, though they are indeed the

ones who are directly involved in the work, do what they do on behalf of the churches as a whole. This means that all who are members of our churches are part of this important work. The Lord gives all of us the opportunity and privilege to be involved in the spread of His truth to the four corners of the earth. We hope and pray, therefore, that both the missionaries' newsletters and this annual review help to keep you informed of your work in foreign missions.

We thank you for your support, both through prayers and financial gifts. We ask that you continue to remember the missionaries and their families, the assistants, the calling churches, and the FMC in your prayers. We would also encourage you to write the missionaries, their families, and the assistants. They make a great sacrifice in order to do the work of foreign missions. Please take the time to send them a letter or e-mail. They enjoy any and all correspondence, and have specifically stated that this provides encouragement for them in the great task the Lord has set before them.

May it please the Lord to continue to use us as instruments in His hands in Christ's great work of gathering, defending, and preserving His church. ■

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## Domestic Missions

*Mr. Don Doezeema*

### Northern Ireland

In his most recent newsletter to the churches, Rev. Stewart took note of the fact that membership in the Covenant Protestant Reformed Fellowship (CPRF)

in Northern Ireland is higher now than it has been at any other time during his ministry there — including, he said, during the time before the CPRC disbanded. Membership stands now at eight families and six individuals — with a good number of regular visitors who are prospective members.

As gratifying as those numbers may be, we are pleased to report

that numerical growth is not the only evidence of the blessing of our God on the work in Ballymena. After taking full advantage of an opportunity to become better acquainted with the people of the Fellowship, a delegation to Northern Ireland earlier this year reported back to the calling church and the Mission Committee that “the members freely told us that they enjoy

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

unity and peace with one another. There is a doctrinal unity, and an interest in growing in knowledge. They receive Rev. Stewart's ministry and preaching readily. The fellowship is extremely busy promoting the gospel and, for their size, have a large amount of exposure in the U.K."

In large measure, of course, that exposure is due to the seemingly tireless efforts of the missionary. He has a ready pen and has used it frequently and effectively in the *Ballymena Guardian*, the *Belfast Churchman*, and the *British Church Newspaper*. Not only do his letters and articles generate response in the periodicals themselves, but they lead to requests for live interviews on radio, appearances on television, and public speeches. These, along with periodic lectures in Limerick (Republic of Ireland) and in Porthcawl (South Wales), have kept Rev. Stewart well occupied over the past year, and the response has been a source of encouragement to the missionary, to the Fellowship, and to Hudsonville Church and the Mission Committee.

The energy of the missionary, however, is not the sole measure of the vitality of a mission. Were the members of a mission ever to conclude that their role in it was nothing more than to be present to be ministered unto, that mission could never prosper. We have been more than pleased therefore to note Rev. Stewart's repeated reference, in his bimonthly reports to the calling church and the Mission Committee, to the work of the members of the mission. Prominent among them are the bookstore manager, the webmaster, and the tape manager. That these special activities, which figure large in the outreach of the mission, are handled efficiently and warmly by three members of the Fellowship is a huge benefit to the cause. Of no less importance, however, is the witness of every member of the mission, as each one, every day,

lives before and testifies to others of the hope that is in him. That's what we have reason to believe is happening in our mission in Northern Ireland — as it is also in Spokane and Pittsburgh. We thank the Lord for that.

Thankful we are because both the activity and the fruit of it are gifts. And in this instance the latter is, as it were, tangible. The missionary can speak of ... reorganization. The calling church can report to synod that it anticipates that their energy and focus for the next year will be the preparation for that possible eventuality. And the DMC can plan to recommend it to Synod 2006. The Lord is good.

### **Pittsburgh**

Increase in numbers of those who can be called the "core group" has been modest in our Pittsburgh Mission. There are four families (not counting our missionary's) and an individual, with half a dozen other individuals attending pre-confession class. But there are 40 to 50 regularly in attendance at worship services, including a good number of children of various ages — requiring no fewer than five separate catechism classes. Not so much the numbers therefore, but the makeup of the mission and what appears to be potential for slow but steady growth are the reasons for the continued optimism of our eastern home missionary and his calling church.

Throughout the years, Rev. Mahtani, by his comprehensive bimonthly reports, keeps Southwest Council and the DMC well informed concerning every aspect of his labor in Pittsburgh. In his annual summary for synod, he can report that there is "a stability of conviction among the members of the mission that makes the work of the missionary not only a little easier but also a lot more enjoyable." He can report, too, that the men of the mission are becoming more and more active as leaders of the various committees that have

been formed to do the work of the mission. This is encouraging. Every member of a mission should be ready to participate, in one way or another, in its activities. And when some of the men begin also to assume effective leadership roles in those activities, we can well understand why Rev. Mahtani speaks now confidently of potential officebearer material.

Activities of the mission include servicing contacts on a mailing list of more than 1,400 names; creating and maintaining a website that within the first few months of its appearance received a thousand hits; creative use of radio, including live interviews and the current investigation into the possibility of a "Monday Minute with Mahtani," a weekly broadcast giving, each time, a distinctive statement regarding Christian doctrine and life. And personal witnessing — without which, writes our Eastern Home Missionary, "mission work is mission impossible."

A good work is being done in Pittsburgh. We can say that with confidence. The missionary and the mission are taking good advantage of many and varied opportunities to put before others the truth as it is in Jesus. And what does the future hold? "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me." That's what we must be. That's all we *can* be. And being faithful in that, we can do no better than leave the fruit of it to *Him*. Rev. Mahtani, we think, is right when he says that, though we "might want the work to go at a faster pace, the fruit of mission labors often times is slow and gradual. We have learned, and continue to learn, that we need the patience [and, we might add, the persistence] of a farmer...."

Eastern Home Missions is *mainly* Pittsburgh — but not entirely so. Rev. Mahtani continues to maintain contact (four visits during the past year) with a little group in Allentown, PA. Just a couple of families — but by regular use of videos of Protestant Re-

formed worship services, they have come to love PR distinctives and have been willing to promote them in their area. The same can be said of Fayetteville, NC. There, too, just a couple of families – the Protestant Reformed Fellowship of Fayetteville. Because they can find no other church where they can be content doctrinally, they continue to meet together on the Lord's Days, using videos of the worship services in Grace PRC. They advertise their worship services, as well as the broadcast of the Reformed Witness Hour over WFNC in Fayetteville. Thus there continues to be a witness to the Reformed truth in a part of the country that hears little of it.

### Spokane

Last summer a family of seven left the Covenant of Grace Protestant Reformed Fellowship of Spokane and moved to Grand Rapids – in order to join a Protestant Reformed Church near a Protestant Reformed Christian day-school. Even with that 'loss' to the Fellowship, however, Rev. Miersma could report a gain in membership since a year ago. There are now six families and seven individuals that constitute the core group of this mission. Not, surely, a large number, but a spiritually vibrant group full of good hope for the future. "While there is much yet to be

done," writes Rev. Miersma, "looking forward to the possibility of a church here is not an unrealistic aspiration."

The missionary and the mission have been active. A three-part seminar on worship last June. A Reformation Day lecture. Regular catechism classes and special essentials/pre-confession classes for new members and for those in the group working toward confession. For the men, classes on the offices of elders and deacons. A Bible Study for the women, chaired by Mrs. Miersma. Advertising of special services in the *Good News* paper. Creation of a new website. Gathering of books for a church library in their Mission Office.

And the missionary is encouraged. In his annual report he testifies that "the field is knit together in a spirit of unity in the faith and common purpose in the mission work, which is a rich blessing after the trials of the past. All of this makes for a very lively mission field and a busy missionary, but it is a blessed kind of activity as we see the Lord's fruit upon the labor."

A delegation from Loveland consistory last year confirmed that assessment of the missionary after what was a nine-day visit to the field. "We left Spokane," they said, "very excited at and thankful for what God is doing in Spokane."

They reported that "there is peace and unity in the group like they have never had ... the group is able to focus on outreach like they should. Everyone in the group is eager to witness to the truth to contacts and friends. They are working together in evangelism." And then this: "All the homes we visited are strong Christian homes. We can be assured that Jehovah will bless this in the line of generations."

"Brethren, pray for us." Those were the final words of Rev. Stewart's annual report. From Rev. Mahtani's: "We thank you so much for your prayers and ask that you continue to pray for us." So also Rev. Miersma: "We are especially grateful for your prayers for the work. We rest in the Lord in His purpose for the work in the coming year, as the one who gathers and builds His church."

The apostle Paul did the same – repeatedly (cf., e.g., Rom. 15:30).

At the time of this writing, Wes and Glenda Kooops, of our Holland congregation, have just returned from serving three weeks as missionary assistants in Pittsburgh. By all accounts, their work served a very useful purpose. And they were glad for the opportunity.

So ... sometimes we can do more – than pray – for the cause of missions. Never ought we to do less. 

## René Descartes and Rationalism (2)

### Introduction

**R**ené Descartes was born and educated in France, but he lived in the Netherlands for twenty years. He was a brilliant mathematician and philosopher, generally considered to

be the father of modern philosophy. His ideas were so novel that he was cordially hated by his own church – particularly by the Jesuits, who had trained him in his early years, but also by the Calvinists in the Netherlands, who rightly, saw in his thinking a seri-

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ous threat to the Reformed faith. Forced to flee France and finding the Netherlands a most uncongenial place of residence, he accepted an invitation from Christiana, Queen of Sweden, to come to Stockholm to teach and work. After four months there, he caught a cold and died of pneumonia.

In the decline of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, the philosophy of René Descartes played a major role. It is this relationship, between what became known as Cartesianism and the Reformed faith, that I intend to explore in this article.

### Descartes' Thought

There is a Latin expression that most people have come across at one time or another in their life. The expression is *Cogito ergo sum*. It means simply, "I know, therefore I am." This was the fundamental premise of Descartes' philosophy.

Descartes decided that the only way to come to know what is true is to begin by doubting everything, absolutely everything. Sometimes, for this reason, his fundamental principle is said to be, not *Cogito ergo sum*, but *Dubito ergo sum*: "I doubt, therefore I am." The only way we can really be sure about anything is to doubt everything. And then, when we have begun by doubting everything, we can proceed to ask ourselves whether there is anything at all that we cannot doubt.

Having doubted everything in order to find anything he could not doubt, Descartes discovered that he could not doubt, no matter how hard he tried, that *he was thinking*. He could not even say "I doubt everything" without establishing the one thing that could not be doubted: He was the one doubting. So, after all, he existed, because he was the one doubting and thinking. His own existence was proved.

It was from that one certain truth, which could not be disproved that Descartes proceeded to prove everything else. He claimed to be able to prove that God ex-

isted, that the world existed, that God had created it, that mankind was created by God, and that everything else followed logically from this one fact that he existed.

### The Implications

I am not now very interested in how Descartes went about all that. It is more important that we understand what Descartes is doing here. He is doing things that are inimical to the Christian faith. He is, in a somewhat subtle way, undermining everything for which the believer stands. A few points will make that clear.

Descartes wanted to doubt everything but what could not be doubted. He did not find much which could not be doubted, except his own existence. Why was his own existence beyond doubt? There was only one reason in Descartes' mind: His own existence could be proved rationally and logically! Descartes, therefore, accepted as true only that which can be proved logically with a man's mind. That is rationalism.

In other words, we are obliged to doubt everything that belongs to the Christian faith as well; and we finally accept only that of the Christian faith which can be logically and rationally proved. We are to doubt that God exists, and that all that God does in creation and providence is true – unless we can prove it with logical argumentation. God's existence is dependent upon our ability to prove it with our minds. All that our minds cannot prove must be rejected.

Descartes in fact accepted most if not all the truths of the faith, at least as taught in the Roman Catholic Church. But he accepted them because he thought he could prove them logically. In this he was terribly wrong. The truths of the faith cannot be proved by human logic.

### Criticism of Descartes

Descartes was a rationalist, influenced by the Renaissance. He fathered all of modern rationalis-

tic philosophy, which is at such enmity with Christian thought.

His rationalistic approach fails for many reasons. First of all, and most importantly, God Himself cannot be proved. His existence is not subject to rational argumentation. Many attempts have been made through the ages, and many proofs were tried before Descartes constructed his philosophy. But they are, without even testing them, doomed to failure. If it were possible to prove the existence of God, then God is no greater than the human mind. If the mind of man can, by logical argument, reach out and arrive at the living God, then God is no greater than the human mind. We cannot ascend to God on the ladder of our logic; if we are to know God, He must come down to us and speak in a way we can understand. Even then, God's speech must be adapted to our feeble intellects, for He is the infinite One, and we are less than specks of dust. He must speak to us in "baby talk."

But that is not even the whole problem. A rationalist is one who denies total depravity. Total depravity teaches that man is so corrupt that his mind is darkened so that he *cannot* know the truth. The human mind is darkened by hatred of God. He will not believe God, and no man is so blind as he who *will* not see. This hatred of God so completely blinds man's mind that he will employ his whole intellect and all the powers of logic to repudiate God and deny His existence. Descartes did the same. The God that Descartes "proved" to exist is not the God of the Scriptures, but a God of Descartes' invention, and, therefore, an idol.

### Descartes' Influence in the Netherlands

Strangely enough, Descartes' influence in the Netherlands was very strong. Professors, especially in the University of Utrecht, were delighted with his philosophy and introduced it into their teaching.

And, although what became known as Cartesianism was temporarily stopped in its tracks, especially due to the opposition of Voetius, in time it won out.

In 1685 a preacher in the Dutch Reformed Churches by the name of H. A. Roell, a follower of Cocceius and a Cartesian, accepted a position of professor of philosophy and theology in the University of Franeker. In keeping with the teaching of Descartes, he ascribed great powers to human intellect apart from faith. But, while professing faith in the basics of Reformed doctrine, he denied the generation of the Son within the Trinity and interpreted generation to mean nothing more than that God gave Christ a mission to redeem mankind. Eternal generation cannot be satisfactorily proved.

In 1666 a work appeared in which L. Meijer claimed that Descartes had proved that all the truths of Scripture had to be judged and could be proved by means of philosophy and had to be accepted as true on philosophical grounds. Such a position undermines completely the Reformed faith.

Another minister, B. Bekker by name, denied, on the basis of Cartesian principles, that spirits such as angels and demons had any effect on man's life, because their existence could not be proved. From there he went on to deny the infinite value of Christ's sacrifice, justification by faith without works, and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer. He was followed in this by others.

More and more doctrines were denied because they were contrary to reason. Some denied the Trinity; others denied the vicarious atonement of our Lord; still others denied eternal punishment.

Perhaps the extreme was reached in 1745, when a book appeared in which the author accused the Bible of confusion, its authors of dishonesty, and Christians with being mentally defective. One by one the articles of the Christian

faith fell under the scrutiny of reason. It was the death of the National Church, which had won such a mighty victory at Dordt.

### Today's Rationalism

Although Cartesianism has long since come and gone the way of all worldly philosophy, the rationalism of it remains. I am not speaking of outright modernism and its rejection of all the truths of Scripture. I am not even speaking of those within the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition who gradually deny all biblical truth in the interests of supporting an evolutionism developed by rationalistic scientists. Even conservative scholars are prone to defend Scripture as the Word of God on the basis of rational argument.

This is serious. Today it is *inductive* logic that is ordinarily used to prove Scripture, not the *deductive* logic of Descartes. But it makes no difference. Proof for Scripture's inspiration is based on "evidences" outside of Scripture itself, outside of Scripture's own claims.

The same is done with various proofs of Scripture's teaching, such as the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Pauline authorship of I & II Timothy, etc. Evidence in support of Scripture's claims for itself is gleaned by logic and external proof, secular writings, the church fathers, internal consistency, etc. When, for example, Scripture claims in Galatians 1:1 that Paul wrote that epistle, such testimony of Scripture is thought to be insufficient. By other types of proof this assertion concerning authorship has to be established. Basically and fundamentally this is the same as happened in Dutch Reformed circles when Cartesianism took the church in its icy grip and squeezed the life out of it.

There is something very tempting about all those efforts of Descartes to prove religious truth by human logic. It is very tempting to try to prove biblical truth by external evidence or logical proof.

Sometimes it is done because the argument is raised that this is the scholarly approach to biblical studies. In fact, so it is argued, scholars will not pay attention to the arguments raised in defense of the Scriptures unless the arguments are gleaned from sources other than Scripture itself.

Sometimes scholars are embarrassed when one does come with Scripture alone for proof of Scripture's divine inspiration and Scripture's other claims for itself. One is, when using Scripture to prove Scripture's own claims, accused of arguing in a circle: using the very premise that has to be proved to prove the same premise. The argument goes something like this.

"Why do you believe that Scripture is the infallibly inspired Word of God?"

"I believe this truth because Scripture itself says that it is infallibly inspired."

"But how can you know that what Scripture itself says is true?"

"Because what Scripture says is infallibly inspired."

That is supposed to be arguing in a circle. And I suppose that in a sense this is true.

But consider: Even if the argument were a valid objection, it would not bother me in the least. Scripture stands on its own claims, and no amount of rational argumentation is going to change that.

But the argument happens to be as invalid as anything can be. When I pick up a copy of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, and the frontispiece says that this book was written by John Calvin, then I do not try to bolster what is plainly written at large in the book itself by all sorts of arguments that I pick up here and there. And if someone challenges what the frontispiece clearly states, then my response is: Prove that the claim of the book itself is wrong. The burden of proof lies on you.

When we follow this dreadful concession to those who want the

Christian faith supported by reason, we forget one fundamental fact. Sin is so blinding that no one, absolutely no one, will ever confess anything about the truth under any circumstances and in the face of absolute iron-clad proof. He cannot and will not, because the sinner hates God and hates whatever God does. Only grace can change this. And along with grace comes faith. And only faith will accept the truth and confess it. The sole object of faith is the Holy Scriptures.

By faith the Bible becomes the

source and fountain of all truth. Faith lays hold on the Bible because the Bible says of itself that it was written by God. The Authorship is not only on the frontispiece, but on every page of the Scriptures. Faith believes this.

To want rational proof is to make the defense of truth an intellectual battle to be waged by rational arguments. This is the world's way. If we adopt the strategies of the world, we permit the enemy to choose the battlefield and we exchange our weapons of warfare, far

superior to anything the world has, for their dull and broken swords, their shields made of rags, and their armor full of holes. Letting them determine the battlefield and the weapons will guarantee failure and defeat — even in earthly warfare. The battle in defense of the truth is a battle of faith, faith in Scripture as the Word of God, and faith in the Christ of the Scriptures. A church that does not maintain this fundamental principle is a church doomed to defeat.

This is the lesson of Cartesianism. 

## News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Minister Activities

Rev. A. Brummel, pastor of the South Holland, IL PRC, declined the call he had been considering to serve as the next pastor of the Hudsonville, MI PRC.

At a congregational meeting Sunday evening, April 17, the congregation of the First PRC in Holland, MI extended a call to Rev. W. Bruinsma, presently serving our Kalamazoo, MI PRC, to serve as their next pastor.

Rev. D. Overway was installed as the 13<sup>th</sup> pastor of the Doon, IA PRC on Friday evening, April 15. Rev. S. Key spoke from Revelation 1:20, 21 under the theme, "To the Angel of the Church in Doon." There was a time of refreshment and fellowship with the Overways after the installation, and a formal welcome is planned for April 29 D.V. The following Lord's Day, April 17, Rev. Overway preached his inaugural sermon from John 15:4, 5 under the theme, "Called to Abide in Christ."

### Mission Activities

On Sunday evening, April 10, the congregation of the Hull,

IA PRC sponsored a farewell program for Rev. Wayne and Phyllis Bekkering, who have served our denomination faithfully for the past 33 years, and since 2001 as Foreign Missionary to Ghana, West Africa under the direction of Hull. You may remember that Rev. Bekkering's request for emeritation was approved at the March 2 meeting of Classis West. Hull's Council also granted Rev. and Mrs. Bekkering's request for a transfer of membership and the transfer of his ministerial credentials to the Georgetown PRC of Hudsonville, MI.

With all the media attention recently focused on the death of Pope John Paul II, it was interesting to read a recent short article written by our churches' missionary to the Covenant PR Fellowship in Northern Ireland, Rev. A. Stewart. In the article Rev. Stewart answers the question, "Is Pope John Paul II in Heaven?" If you care to read the article for yourself you can find it on their web site at [www.cprf.co.uk](http://www.cprf.co.uk).

On April 14 Rev. and Mrs. Spriensma and their daughter Jessica returned to the Philippines. Surgery was performed several weeks ago and the diagnosis of a parathyroid problem was inconclusive. Jessica's symptoms improved somewhat, and so they returned to their work. There will be a follow-

up visit to Ann Arbor, MI later this spring. We commend them to the Lord's care.

### Evangelism Activities

In mid-April the Evangelism Committee of the South Holland, IL PRC planned to insert a full-color, 4-page, newspaper-size edition of their Reformed Perspectives into the Shoppers in South Holland and Thornton. Copies of the newsletter were also available for families of the congregation to use in their outreach with neighbors, co-workers, or family members. These newsletters were also mailed to everyone on their Reformed Perspectives mailing list.

### Young People's Activities

Friday evening, April 15, the Sr. Young People's Society of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI hosted their fifth "Special Needs Program." What a wonderful hour of praise in song and word from the 19 or so young men and women who participated. These members of our various congregations are a very special part of our church family, and they teach us daily that we do need to depend on the Lord for everything. A special thank-you to the young people of Faith. This program has become a labor of love for them and we do appre-

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

ciate it more than we will ever be able to tell them.

The congregation of Grace PRC in Standale, MI was invited to attend their annual Ice Cream Social, sponsored by their Young People's Society, following their Good Friday evening service. Donations were gladly accepted to benefit the YP Convention.

Everyone in the congregation of First PRC in Edmonton was invited to their church for a Family Potluck Dinner on April 19. Proceeds were going to aid some of the young people going to this year's convention.

The Young People of Hope PRC in Redlands, CA hosted a Pancake Breakfast on April 23 as a fundraiser for this year's convention.

### Congregation Activities

Through the generous donation of a member at Grace PRC in Standale, MI, a new First Aid Box has been added to their church nursery cupboard. It contains a blood pressure cuff, stethoscope, blood-sugar monitor, various bandages, etc. Also added were CPR/Choking posters on the walls in the nursery and in the kitchen for quick reference in case of an emergency.

The Trinity Men Singers of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI, presented their annual Spring Concert on Good Friday evening after their worship service.

The month of April also saw many of our congregations enjoy

concerts of sacred music presented by their choral societies. The Choral Society of Faith PRC in Jenison, MI presented a program Sunday evening, April 10. The Choir of the Hudsonville, MI PRC presented a program April 17, and the Psalm Choir presented two concerts in April – April 17 at First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI and April 24 at the Grandville, MI PRC.

The Doon/Hull, Iowa Choir invited everyone to their two programs – April 17 in the Hull, IA PRC, followed on April 24 in the Doon PRC.

Members of the Adult Fellowship of Hope PRC in Redlands, CA were invited for a night of fellowship and dinner on April 15. Games and dessert followed. 

## Announcements

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With praise and thanks to our heavenly Father, we announce that our parents and grandparents,

**PERRY and CHARLENE  
VAN EGDOM,**

will celebrate their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary on May 28, 2005.

We give thanks to God for the years He has graciously given them together. Their faithful example and covenant instruction have been a great blessing to us. Our prayer is that the Lord will continue to bless them in their marriage in the years to come.

"He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations" (Psalm 104:8).

\* Paul and Erin DeJong  
Jenna

\* B.J. and Sarah Mowery  
Leah

\* Joel, Bethany, Sherry, Valen,  
Anna, Emily (in glory),  
and Jerron VanEgdom

Doon, Iowa

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of the First PRC of Edgerton express their Christian sympathy to Rev. Daniel and Sharon Kleyn in the passing of her grandfather,

**REV. CORNELIUS HANKO.**

With them, we rest in the promise of God that the death of His saints is precious in His sight. "...Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them" (Revelation 14:13b).

Al Brummel, Clerk

### CALL TO SYNOD!!

Synod 2004 appointed Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church, Byron Center, Michigan the calling church for the 2005 Synod.

The consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2005 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 14, 2005 at 8:30 A.M. in the Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church, Byron Center, Michigan.

The Pre-Synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 13, at 7:00 P.M. Rev. Koole, president of the 2004 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. Leroy DeVries, 2090 72nd St. SW, Byron Center, MI 49315. Phone: (616) 878-0075.

Consistory of  
Byron Center PRC  
Leroy DeVries, Clerk