

## QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

Among the responses to our recently completed campaign to distribute Reformed Polemics (RP) throughout the Canadian / American Reformed church federation some questions were raised by several people. The two questions most frequently received are: Why another paper; and why so much about the topics on Synod's agenda, especially about the OPC, and then just before Synod?

Although these two questions have generally been addressed in the early issues of Reformed Polemics (about four years ago), we have subsequently gained a considerable block of new readers, and since these questions are being raised again, it might be good to once more address them.

### *Why Another Paper?*

A number of years before the first issue of RP appeared the editors were involved in a paper called Information. At that time there was already the recognition of a lack of knowledge and reading among church members. Elders would often, after some family visits, comment about the lack of knowledge, especially knowledge of what was happening in the church, locally and federally. In many places there was an obvious lack of Reformed reading material in the homes. There were also complaints about those magazines that were already available. Often articles were too long and academic. There appeared to be a real need for short and simple articles that deal with current issues and concerns. There was also a concern among some that not every aspect of an issue was sufficiently exposed or dealt with in the church press.

After leaving the Information paper (local to the Fraser Valley in BC) the present editors of RP were led to introduce a new magazine that maintained one clear editorial position and that would apply that position to the many issues that face the church.

Although we started with 30 subscribers there soon was interest from around the globe. Many seemingly local issues are also often found in other areas. Matters that are being discussed in Australia, the Netherlands, British Columbia or Ontario are of interest to readers throughout the Reformed churches. By becoming aware of the struggles that are being undertaken by others who are standing firm for the truth of God's Word we may be encouraged in our own desire to be strong and of good courage in a local situation.

The point of view of RP, its editorial position, is not surprising. We base our position on God's Word, the Holy Scripture. We agree with the summary of that Word as it has been adopted by the Churches in the Three Forms of Unity. But that does not differentiate us from many other groups, papers or editors.

What does bring us to another paper is the fact that we believe that there is a movement away from this basis. We are of the opinion that such occurrences were not always brought to the attention of the church members in the past. There are so many who hold to this basis in theory but do not follow it in practice. There are also those who maintain membership in Reformed churches that hold to this basis, but deny the truth and need for this basis. We intend to provide articles that point out divergence from this basis and that warn out brothers and sisters about the many dangers that lurk in and around the church today.

Although we do not yet have an official Mission Statement (something that might come about in the coming year) our motto “That We Might Rightly Know Thee” does reflect our intention and reason for existence.

Now it is, of course, very difficult to always have a paper full of matters which have not been addressed by other publications. Therefore it will happen that RP might publish an issue about which one could ask if it were truly necessary to have a separate paper for such articles. Yet many of our readers have frequently found things that were not published or presented by other publications.

In the past years we have spent more time on the content of the paper than on the number of readers. We are of the opinion that if the material is of interest the readership will come. At the same time it was high time to inform the whole federation of our existence. With the generous help of many who also saw this need, and agreed with our direction, the past four-issue campaign could be completed.

We wish to thank all those who participated by way of funding, layout, design, printing and distribution. The help and response we received show us that the undertaking is appreciated and respected, and, therefore worth continuing.

#### *Why So Much about the Agenda of Synod*

Very much connected with the Why of the magazine is the Why of the articles about synod agenda items. The reason, therefore, is also along the same lines. The items on the agenda of synods concern the churches in federation. They are matters that we are all busy with. Synod is not a secret counsel that deals with matters behind closed doors and then publishes a legal document in which people may search for conclusions. Synod is the meeting of delegates from regions of the country to discuss matters that belong to the churches together.

In recent years the majority of such items have been about church unity. Throughout the protracted discussions many consistories and individual members have expressed concerns about the discussions and decisions at Synods about these matters. For this reason it is not surprising that many people become more interested when the date for another Synod approaches.

It is, indeed, unfortunate that many wait till the discussions start again to determine if they want to overture or appeal to synod about a previous decision. Consistories usually review the Acts of Synods within the first year after the meeting. That would be a good time to decide if an appeal is warranted. Then there would also be more time for consideration and formulation. An added benefit would be that delegates would have more time to peruse the material. In the end a good ground work for well considered decisions would be laid.

It is a healthy sign when church members take an active interest in the matters that are being discussed at major assemblies. It indicates that there is life in the churches, that there is concern for the direction of the church. Just as every church member must be concerned that the preaching from the pulpit is the pure Word of God, so each member must also be concerned that the decisions made as churches in federation are in keeping with that same Word.

It is for these reasons that we continue to publish articles about the unity discussions. There are concerns that are actively living among the members of the churches. Each synod again receives appeals and overtures concerning the unity discussions and decisions. This most certainly must indicate that there is a fear among the membership that the churches in federation are taking an erroneous road. Or, at best, that the leaders in our churches have not shown the wisdom of past decisions to the concerned members. When articles are written and appeals presented concrete answers and explanations ought to be given. It is not sufficient to make one or two blanket statements and expect the concerned to be satisfied. Those who raise legitimate objections and Biblical concerns must be shown to be in error or Synod must implement corrective action.

### *The Why of Synod Decisions*

Now that we are speaking about the Why of things, the reasons for them, we might draw attention to another matter that continues to baffle us. Churches in the Netherlands and Australia, with whom we have Ecclesiastical Fellowship, include grounds for the decisions they make at their major assemblies. In Canada we have never done that. We observe, consider, recommend and decide.

It seems that such a method of decision making does not give much direction to the churches and the membership. Such a scheme may give insight on how a decision was reached but does not necessarily give a good foundation on which the decision is based.

A student of past Acts of Synods may even find that at times one consideration may be in conflict with another. Which consideration would then have led to the recommendation and the final decision; which consideration ought to be part of the decision? Is it possible to appeal considerations?

It appears that better direction and greater clarity could be achieved if Synods would provide grounds on which decisions are based. When decisions are shown to be based on good and firm grounds they could also be more readily accepted by the membership.

From the appeals that continue to follow recent Synod decisions it becomes apparent that many are not convinced that these decision have been based on good grounds. Appellants often refer to scripture in order to show the errors that where made. Is it not incumbent upon Synods to show the membership why such appeals are in error or else to acknowledge the validity of the appellants submission?

Reformed Polemics wishes to address the matters that matter in ways that the average believer can understand. It wants to maintain the truth of holy Scripture as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity against various winds of change. It encourages our leaders and assemblies to give understandable guidance to believers who look for direction in a confused world.

PdB

### **Report to Synod of the FRCA by Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad**

The next synod of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA) will be held the Lord willing, in Launceston commencing June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1998. The FRCA is not large enough to allow classis to

function, so synod meets every two years. In the meantime, until classis can be formed, some of the functions of classis are performed by “classis-churches”.

Relations with other churches have played a large role in the agenda of the synods of the FRCA since 1983, when it was decided to join the ICRC. It was understood then that membership of the ICRC required the FRCA to make concrete “the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ” (ICRC Constitution, Article III (1)). Whereas synod 1983 was served by (mainly verbal) reports from the three deputies appointed by the previous synod, later synods received progressively more extensive written reports from an increasing number of deputies. These reports dealt with a variety of contacts with reformed churches all over the world. However, Synod Armadale 1990, whilst not denying the worldwide nature of Christ’s church (BCF, Art 27), decided regarding non-sister churches “to concentrate on relations and contacts with churches who are geographically closer to us” (Synod Acts, Article 58).

Synod Bedfordale 1992 divided the work of deputies dealing with other churches into four separate deputyships. One dealt only with sister churches, another with the PCEA, a third with the ICRC and the fourth with reformed churches in Australasia and Asia. Following the decision of Synod Kelmscott 1966 to withdraw from the ICRC, the number of deputyships has decreased by one and the previously extensive reports on the ICRC no longer appear. The report to Synod 1998, however, still comprises of 77 pages.

### *Sister Churches*

The deputies for sister churches report briefly on the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa, the Presbyterian Church of Korea (Kosin) and the Canadian Reformed Churches, concluding in each case with the recommendation that sister relations with these churches be maintained.

The same conclusion is reached regarding the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN), but the report is more extensive. Decisions of Synod Berkel en Rodenrijs are noted. Special mention is made of the decision regarding the Presbyterian Churches of Eastern Australia (PCEA). The previous Synod of our Dutch sister churches had already acknowledged the PCEA as a “true and faithful” church. Synod Berkel Rodenrijs decided not to offer sister relations at this time but to wait until 1999. This is in response to the expressed and urgent wish of the FRCA to the RCN not to establish such a relationship until discussions between the FRCA and the PCEA have come to clearer conclusions.

The report on a meeting of the FRCA and RCN deputies noted the following: “A better appreciation for each other’s positions developed. That is: Dutch deputies and Australian deputies are agreed that the points of concern raised by the FRCA to the PCEA (viz. pulpit exchange, fencing of the Lord’s Table, place of the children in the covenant) require discussion and resolution. Dutch deputies and Australian deputies differ on when these discussions ought to take place, viz. before recognition or after.”

Deputies lament that the (Dutch deputies’) concept of recognizing a church as true and faithful before discussing points of difference does not work out in practice. The FRCA deputies were informed that:

“The only mandate deputies have is to maintain a sister relation. In that framework, Dutch deputies have brought up with the FCS, the EPCI and the RPCI matters of common concern, such as possibilities for more cooperation in evangelism and mission. But discussions about differences (beyond what is covered by Article 46, CO) with churches such as the FCS and the PCEA have not occurred despite the recognition given to the FCS and planned for the PCEA.”

Apparently there are two reasons for this. First, the Dutch consider these points as belonging to the “non-essential points of ecclesiastical practice” mentioned in the Church Order. Second, the Dutch feel that adequate trust has not yet developed and the climate is not yet ripe for discussions on such points.

Some of the frustration felt by the FRCA deputies is apparent in the printed address of Br H. Dekker, the delegate from the FRCA to Synod Berkel en Rodenrijs. In the address he accused the Dutch sister churches of measuring with two standards. There are strict guidelines to assist the RCN to come to unity with churches in their own country, he said, whilst for contacts with churches outside of the Netherlands there is a different approach. The FRCA delegate told Synod Berkel Rodenrijs “what is for you a foreign church is for us a church next door. The church you approach with a measure of latitude, we approach with the same standards that you apply to churches within your own country”.

#### *Presbyterian Churches*

Deputies for Relations with Other Churches (Presbyterian) had a mandate to study the matter of contacts/relations with Presbyterian churches and to address questions such as the weight that ought to be given to areas of concern and whether or not all areas of concern must be cleared before the FRCA can make progress with contacts/relations.

Deputies identified the following as areas of concern:

1. The supervision of the Lord’s Table
2. The practice of pulpit exchanges
3. The position of children in the covenant
4. Covenanting
5. Purity of Worship

Deputies reported that they were unable to complete their mandate. They decided to concentrate on the areas of concern in relation to the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia. Thus the matter of covenanting, not an issue in the PCEA, was not examined. Although the deputies included a position paper on children in the covenant, deputies did not consider this issue to be an impediment to recognizing the PCEA.

However on the matters of the PCEA’s manner of supervising the Lord’s Supper Table and their pulpit exchange deputies acknowledge there remains division within the FRCA on whether or not these matters form an impediment to recognition. Deputies themselves admit to being divided on this. Rather than come with a divided report, deputies have put forward a number of statements for

adoption. In an effort to break the impasse in the relations with the PCEA, deputies have recommended that the FRCA enter into sister relations with the PCEA if they can agree to principle statements about the supervision of the Lord's Table and the opening of the pulpit to visiting ministers. In this approach deputies state that "if the PCEA is willing to agree to our proposal statement we have to trust that they will also implement them."

The proposed statements are included in the report whilst position papers relating to these issues are added as appendices. These principle statements rely heavily on, and include segments from, the report of the "ICRC Committee on Theological Affirmation" presented to the ICRC in 1993.

The proposed statement on "The Supervision of the Lord's Table" notes that the PCEA rule for supervision is: "The session is responsible to see that no person openly known to be ignorant or delinquent in doctrine or life be permitted at the Table. Persons other than communicant members of the congregation, who the session are satisfied are members in good standing of other evangelical churches, are welcome at the Lord's Table" (The Handbook of Practice and Procedure of the PCEA (1992), sec 2.18).

Article 57 of the Church Order of the FRCA says: "The consistory shall admit to the Lord's Supper only those who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life. Members of sister churches shall be admitted on the basis of a good attestation concerning their doctrine and conduct."

Deputies conclude "that only those guests should be admitted to the Lord's Table who the session/consistory are satisfied, on the basis of an authentic intimation from the minister or elder of his congregation, are members of good standing of another true church of Christ".

In the proposed statement on "the supervision of the pulpit" deputies again list the requirements specified in the PCEA and in the FRCA. It notes that both federations have stringent procedures in place regarding the calling of ministers, their ordination and their installation or appointment to a pastoral charge.

Deputies conclude that "it is the recognition of another Church as a true church that lays the basis for opening the pulpit to guest preachers, therefore only guest preachers from churches in ecclesiastical fellowship (sister church/fraternal relations) should be invited to preach".

### *Indonesia*

Deputies give an extensive report regarding the relations with Gereja Geraja Reformasi Di Indonesia (sister church to the FRCA) and the Gereja Geraja Masehi Musayfir. Visits have been made and sponsorship of visits to Australia as well as sponsoring of a student to attend the Canadian Reformed Theological College is reported on. It is proposed that another student, Pila Njuka, be sponsored to study at Hamilton, commencing 1998.

### *Reformed Churches of Australia*

Deputies were mandated to send an appeal to the sessions of the Reformed Churches of Australia and to their Synod encouraging them return to a Reformed Confessional direction. The appeal addressed major concerns in the RCA including: the decisions about "Word and Spirit" and especially the 1991 decision about ongoing occasional prophecy today in the church; the rejection

of appeals against this decision at the 1994 Synod, the divergent liturgical practices within the RCA the continued membership of the REC the discussion about 'women in office'

Deputies report that the appeal was not sent in time to be dealt with at the 1997 RCA Synod. They report that the appeal was misunderstood as a regular appeal according to the Church Order. Consequently deputies request a mandate to resubmit a revised appeal.

### *Philippines*

Deputies have provided extensive information, gleaned mainly from reports of our sister churches, regarding the Free Reformed Churches of the Philippines. The FRCP is a sister church of the RCN (Lib). It is stated that the FRCP is a young, small and weak bond of churches and therefore could benefit from an offer of help from us because of our many resources our reformed heritage.

Deputies propose to synod that official contact be established to provide this assistance and to get better acquainted with this reformed bond of churches.

L. van Burgel

### **“Until I Came to the Sanctuary” - A Meditation on Psalm 73:17**

Psalm 73 really needs no introduction. Generations of believers have turned to this Psalm for an answer to a difficult question. We're likely all familiar with the answer which was revealed to Asaph. He had seen the wicked prospering and the righteous suffering. What kind of sense did that make? Didn't God promise many types of blessings to His covenant people in such passages as Deut. 28? Did not Jahweh promise curses for all those disobey Him, both inside and outside of the covenant community?

Asaph struggles with these questions, he feels completely frustrated, he even begins to question whether or not his faith has been in vain. It just doesn't make any sense to him. Then in verse 17 it all comes together for the Psalmist. Now he understands. This verse is the turning point in the Psalm.

What happens here that makes Asaph understand? What brought about the end to his frustration? He says that he went into the sanctuary of God and then he understood the end of the ungodly. But how shall we understand those words? Commentators have arrived at many diverse interpretations. Calvin understands "sanctuary" to refer to the "celestial doctrine," meaning that Asaph (or David, as Calvin says) reflected upon the Word of God and thereby understood what happens to the wicked. Such a metaphorical understanding of sanctuary is found among others as well, though some see it not as referring to Scripture, but a coming into God's heavenly sanctuary via prayer. In other places of Scripture the word used here appears, from the context, to be metaphorical. Our passage doesn't indicate that. One of the most speculative interpretations of this passage suggests that Asaph came to the temple courts and saw a wicked man there have a heart attack and die! Naturally, we're not interested in such speculation. We want to know what this verse means and thereby understand what caused Asaph to understand the riddle.

We should begin with that word "sanctuary." The Hebrew word used here is most often used in all the Old Testament genres to speak of the Temple or the Tabernacle. On that basis, it would seem

appropriate to understand verse 17 as referring to the physical Temple or Tabernacle complexes. For the sake of consistency, let's suppose that this means the temple, although the fact of the matter is that we don't really know the date of the Psalm, and Asaph lived both before and during the existence of the temple in Jerusalem. Either way the end result isn't that different. So we have Asaph going to the temple, to the sanctuary of God. The problem is probably still bothering him as he makes his way to the temple. But when he comes to the temple, suddenly it all becomes clear to him! What brought this sudden burst of light?

To answer this question, come back with me to the temple during the time of Asaph. Let's walk to the temple courts and the temple complex, into the sanctuary of God. As we travel together through the streets of Jerusalem up to the temple, we hear an intense cacophony of sounds. We hear singing, beautiful singing, it puts shivers down your back and goose-bumps on your arms, perhaps you can also hear the sound of musical instruments. But there's also shrieking and deathly noises—these make it difficult to enjoy the beauty of the music. As we draw nearer to the temple, we realize that all these sounds are coming from within the temple courts.

People and animals are all around. The earthy smells of sweat, dirt and manure hang in the air and creep into your nostrils. Here, we're at the entrance to the temple courts. Let's go inside. The noises become louder and louder. We look around. The very first thing we see is the altar and behind it the huge bronze laver for the ritual cleansing of the priests. How beautiful, with all their ornamentation. On the altar there's a fire, a continual fire which burns night and day. The priests are busy placing sacrifices on that altar, and spreading blood on its horns. That's when you realize the smell, the sickly stench of death that hangs in the air. You turn your attention away from the altar to what is happening along the edges of the temple court. There you see the source of all the shrieking and hellish noise: the animals being slaughtered. Then you can also understand why the music is there. There's no painless way to kill all these beasts, each one of them suffers pain in death and shows it. There in the corner is an Israelite preparing a sacrifice -- he lays his hands on the sacrifice, takes his knife and slits its throat. You cringe as the animal lets out his cry of death. The blood of the ox flows abundantly, and a priest collects the blood in a large container. Our Israelite friend then cuts up his beast and cleans it, making it ready so that he can pass it on to the priest for the offering. Meanwhile the flies begin to gather. They know death when they smell it.

But there's more to see: up ahead, not very far, beyond the huge bronze laver, is the temple itself. We're not allowed to go in there. But what a luxurious building, all that gold! But our attention is distracted again to the action around us: the priest collects the offerings and places them on the altar where they are immediately consumed in the intense fire. What an event to experience all of this before your senses!

We can now come back to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and our consideration of Ps.73:17. We now have some sort of an idea of what Asaph saw, heard, and smelt there in the sanctuary of God. But we still haven't formulated the answer to the question of how this helped him to understand the end of the ungodly. Well, as we walked through the temple courts together, surely you saw and heard some beautiful things, but did you notice the death that was all around? Did you hear the blood-curdling screams of the sacrificial victims? Did you see the monstrous unending fire on the altar? Did you smell that rotten disgusting odour of death? Did you see all the blood, blood in the bronze

basins, blood on the altar, blood on the knives, blood in the containers, blood on the hands of the priest, blood, blood, blood? It was everywhere. And death! Fire! Blood, fire, and death! It overwhelms the senses there in the temple court, in the sanctuary of God. If you go there, you can't escape it. Once you've left you can't forget it. If you've ever been in a slaughter-house or meat-processing plant, you'll never forget the smell. After you've finished work for the day, it lingers on your skin (even after you've showered), that smell of blood and guts—the smell of death.

The Israelites reading or hearing this Psalm would understand very well what Asaph was speaking about. Ah yes, of course, the sanctuary of God—yes, you would understand the end of the wicked if you went there! Asaph went there to the temple, there he comprehended what would finally be the end of the ungodly. The whole sacrificial system reminded the Psalmist that the wages of sin is death, you could almost say that it reminded one of hell. Sin requires punishment. Asaph reflects on this further in verses 18-20. The LORD casts them down to destruction; He brings them to desolation in a moment! Just as the quick slice of the knife on the neck of the ox, so also the LORD puts an end to the wicked. The ungodly are utterly consumed with terrors—their bloody screams remind us of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Yes, the LORD of life will despise them; they will be confronted with the due punishment for their sins.

Asaph's trip to the temple solved the riddle for him. Yes, the wicked may sometimes prosper in this life. The most immoral and wicked people are often the wealthiest. Think only of Hollywood and all its excesses. They have no pangs and their bodies are sleek. But the righteous suffer in various ways. Chinese Christians can't even openly worship God. They suffer in horrendous ways at the hands of their wicked rulers. Christians in the Sudan have their church buildings rocketed by the Islamic government helicopters. Their suffering can hardly be compared to what we experience in Canada when we have to pay excessive taxes for a public education system we don't agree with and then on top of it support our own schools. All of this injustice!

But we know from Scripture what the end of the wicked is: even though they may not always suffer very much here, in the hereafter sin will be punished. God is righteous and just. The wages of sin is death.

But we would be short-sighted to leave it at that. Isn't there more? Didn't the sacrificial system point to more than the death which awaits the wicked? Christ, the one great sacrifice, died for the sins of His people. His death and suffering assure us that we will not experience the bloody horrors of hell. Asaph didn't have that knowledge to the extent that we do. But yet because of the sacrificial system (and from our perspective what it foreshadowed), he knew that he wouldn't be punished for his sins. Through his struggle with this paradox, God revealed to Asaph the depth and riches of His covenant mercy and His justice. As we move toward the end of the Psalm, you can almost see Asaph hitting himself on the head, thinking, "How could I have been so foolish?"

Asaph confesses that he had been like a stupid animal, but despite that, the LORD remained faithful, He showed Asaph the way within His sanctuary and in the sacrificial system which He commanded. For that reason, Asaph can declare in the final verses of this Psalm that it is good to draw near to God and trust in Him. Apart from Him, there is only death. With Him, there is life eternal!

Wes Bredenhof

## **Wanted: Modern day Josephs**

By Wayne Pleiter

Scare tactics are the weapon in today's moral campaign to educate and persuade today's youth to practice safe sex. Fear is hammered into the teens of North America, throughout all forms of the media, on the deadly consequences of 'dangerous' sexual practices. Fear is the force behind the education to prevent the spread of the deadly AIDS virus and some two-hundred odd other communicable sexual diseases.

Some time ago a US community announcement campaign was aired on the popular music stations. Targeting the American youth, this campaign gave a soft version of the safe sex issue, concentrating on the continued need for the use of contraceptives. One teen said on the radio advertisement, '...my friends don't listen to the heavy stuff, so I just tell them, hey use precaution or you will end up with a disease or a kid!' [Although teen pregnancies are a tragedy in North America, to put the risk of contracting a deadly disease in the same basket as (an unwanted) pregnancy is a crying shame. Are the consequences of having a child as deadly and devastating as the contracting the AIDS virus?]

Numerous Christian and family oriented organizations have jumped on the issue of safe sex. Many of us are familiar with the efforts of Focus on the Family. Their programs promote and defend the traditional family, and oppose the modern 'anything goes' mentality of society. They actively fight against family violence, abortion, homosexuality and promiscuity, amongst numerous other important issues.

Another active campaign has graced the pages of Rolling Stone, Seventeen and other teen oriented magazines featuring trendy advertisements extolling the virtues of waiting to have sex until marriage. The full page ads are part of the 'Save Sex' (as opposed to safe sex) campaign that contains a strong premarital abstinence message. Sponsored by the Family Research Council, the messages read like: 'We think its time for love that is real and lasting and pure... That's why we believe in marriage', 'It takes a lot more strength to keep your passions under control than to give in to them. We're holding out for the ultimate: sex with the one we'll vow to love forever'

Further inroads have been made within the sex education curriculum of numerous public and private schools and colleges. Public health boards are encouraging the incorporation of virtuous qualities like monogamous relationships and premarital abstinence into the curriculum of sexual education. It seems that society is beginning to see the deadly consequences of the excesses started in the sixties, and is now re-focusing on the stability found in the constraints of the traditional, conservative morals and values.

Although the (re)turn to traditional moral standards in society may be stimulated by the activity of Christians and Christian organizations, (like Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council) it is not motivated by a love of God and His commands. This return to conservative morals is not motivated by a revival of Christianity but caused by self protection and self preservation. Society is literally scared of the dangerous living conditions of the nineties.

So what is the motivation for Christian teenagers to avoid one nights stand and general sexual promiscuity? What is the encouragement for young couples to abstain from sexual activity before marriage? What is the drive for our marriage couples to remain faithful to each other? Surely it has nothing to do with the risk of diseases, or pregnancy or being caught out! Surely our only reason comes from the lesson that is taught to us in Genesis 39.

The story is about the muscular, handsome young man who is seduced by the attractive wife of his boss. (39:6 &7) After numerous sexual invitations and daily seduction to come to bed, Potiphar's wife cannot persuade Joseph to succumb to her sexual advances. Instead Joseph avoids her attention and remains faithful to his task as head of Potiphar's household. So what was he so afraid of? Was he afraid of being caught out by his boss, Potiphar? Was he afraid of her becoming pregnant or him contracting a disease? No, Joseph is not afraid of 'modern' concerns or excuses, he is fearful of the Almighty God! 'How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?' asks Joseph. How can I possibly disobey God? What right do I have to do my will and not submit to God's will? Joseph's fear was a holy fear, not motivated out of self-preservation but for the preservation of the honour and glory that is due the Almighty God.

While the social pendulum begins the swing more in line with Christian values and morals, let our motivation be the pursuit of God's will, a fearful desire to submit to His commands. While the moral improvement in society is encouraging, without trust in God's Holy Word it will be another hopeless attempt of humanity to redeem itself from the pit of destruction. (see Proverbs 29:25) Society needs to learn, and Christians need to maintain, the lessons from Joseph ordeal with Potiphar's wife! Wanted: modern day Josephs!

### **CLASSICAL NEWSLETTER**

At its first organizational meeting on March 3, Classis Michigan of the United Reformed Churches voted to establish what will also be a "first" in the denomination — an official classical newsletter to share news of local churches." The overture from Faith URC of Holland didn't pass without scrutiny, however, and classis also voted to ask the newsletter's new editor to develop publication guidelines for presentation to the next classis session seven months from now.

United Reformed News Service