

**Reports by Deputies for  
Relations with Presbyterian Churches  
of Eastern Australia**

**as submitted to**

***SYNOD 2006***

**of the**

***FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF  
AUSTRALIA***

**West Kelmscott, Western Australia**

**Deputies for contact with the PCEA**  
**Report to Synod West Kelmscott 2006**  
**Date: 02/01/2006**

We, the undersigned, appointed by Synod Rockingham Article 92 <sup>1</sup>,

- 1) In fulfilment of the mandate of Synod Rockingham 2003, Article 81 have implemented the decisions of FRC Synod West Albany 2000, Article 64, with respect to the PCEA, and have had one meeting with W P Gadsby and G Kinder in relation to this.

At this meeting W P Gadsby submitted a detailed written response to FRC Synod Launceston 1998, Article 93, to which deputies responded later by letter.

- 2) Further as mandated by Synod Rockingham 2003, Article 78, we have had discussions with R S Ward about his views on Genesis 1-11.

We have come to the following unanimous positions:

In relation to

- 1) Above the only matters outstanding were the fencing of the Lord's Supper Table and the Pulpit.

With respect to the LS the deputies can accept the PCEA's fencing of the Lord's table as adequate. Neither our, nor their system is failsafe. Deputies accept that the PCEA does make every effort to only allow true believers to participate. The difference in practice stems from our more 'ecclesiastical' approach and their more 'individual' approach.

Deputies have more difficulty in regarding the PCEA's fencing of the pulpit as adequate. This does not mean that unscriptural doctrines are preached from their pulpits because of this, for it is understood that controversial points will not be dealt with. At the most it can be argued that this practice increases the possibility of error. We have had unscriptural doctrines preached from our pulpits as well. The test is what is done with such cases.

- 2) Deputies have discussed the book of R S Ward, Foundations in Genesis: Genesis 1-11 Today and entered into correspondence with him about it. Deputies cannot accept the teachings promoted in his book as Scriptural. A summary of the main points of deviation is given below.

- a) His view of Scripture is troublesome. He makes room for his interpretation by making Genesis 1-11 history expressed in the terms of the culture within which it was written. The message for sinners is said to remain the same, but the facts are reinterpreted in the light of modern scientific findings. (e.g. p 21 line 3-6) He

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<sup>1</sup> We included the alternate, D Veltkamp, in our discussions and decisions. This led to no material changes in any of the outcomes.

says the creation account is a sustained polemic against the creation myths of the ancient world, (p 34 point 4) meaning that the manner in which the story is told is also determined by the desire to refute the creation myths of the culture of the time and not simply by the statement of the facts.

Consequently Scripture is interpreted through the lens of both the state of the knowledge of the culture within it was written, the myths it was meant to counter and the 'scientific' (mythical) vantage point of our own culture. In the process what is presented as factual information in Genesis 1-11 turns out to be the cultural framework within which the true facts are obscured. We are not to enter into vain polemics about these things, for the message to sinners remains.

- b) The days of creation are not 24 hour days, but reinterpreted as reflecting structure, relationships and purpose of creation and not scientific chronology. (p 21 line 4; p 39 line 7; p 54 point 5) The earth is possibly 15 billion years old. (p 37 line 2)
- c) This leaves open for him the possibility of a progressive introduction of different species over an extended period of time, (p 57 line 4-6) and a divinely directed evolutionary process is open for discussion. (line 10-14) Within this 'hypothetical' framework he argues that animals lived and died before the creation of man. Their death was not the result of the fall. (p 70 line 6) The lack of the words "according to their kind" with the procreation of man gives him the scope to say that the animals, of whom this is said, *break up into different species* and man not. (p 62 line 10-15<sup>2</sup>) R Ward believes that there could have been other human like creatures before Adam's time, and even entertains the thought that they may have been related by ancestry to Adamic man. He retains Adam's unique status by reducing Adam to religious progenitor of our race. (p 81 line 12-19)
- d) The snake is most probably not a real snake, but simply Satan is described as a snake. (p 102 line 1)
- e) The flood was not universal. (p 159, 178 line 3,4) More humans than Noah and his family survived. There was not one universal language before Babel. Others from pre-flood time came together and worked on Babel. (p 196 paragraph 3)

Deputies were told by W P Gadsby that similar approaches to R S Ward's have a long history in the Free Church of Scotland from the nineteenth century onwards (e.g. Thomas Chalmers, first Free Church Moderator 1843) and have been tolerated. The PCEA, coming from that church, therefore, would not be proceeding against R S Ward.

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<sup>2</sup> "According to their kind" means, since God has created the many animals, so each will reproduce according to its kind. However, since He only created the one man, the words are not necessary with Adam.

Deputies do not consider that the differences in practice under point 1 above are of such weight that we may deny the PCEA the recognition that she is a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their intention is certainly to be faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ, although in the fencing of the pulpit their practice is less than ideal.

The matter of R S Ward is of a somewhat different nature, for, although his opinion is not shared by other ministers of the PCEA, they permit this doctrine to be held/taught in their federation. This deputies find this to be a grave weakness and raises the question what erroneous doctrines can be taught from the pulpits of the PCEA without censure.

Deputies have debated what the implications of this are for recognition of the PCEA in light of our relationship with our sister-churches in the Netherlands, where the same grave error is being committed. Although we consider the PCEA to be delinquent in the matter of R S Ward, deputies, in good conscience, cannot deny that the PCEA is still a true and faithful church of the Lord. Deputies would be comfortable in simply recognising them as true and faithful without attaching to this the normal consequences such as exchange of attestations, or opening up our pulpits to each other<sup>3</sup>. In the circumstances we are unable to recommend a sister church relationship with the PCEA. We consider the differences sufficiently great to make this type of union unwise.

In our meeting with the PCEA deputies, W P Gadsby intimated that the PCEA also was not seeking organisational unity, but a more distant fraternal relationship. He told us that the PCEA were looking at a two tiered fraternal relationship with respect to the calling of ministers, those coming from the second tier undergoing a greater scrutiny. We would fit into the second tier.

We pray that God may guide the Synod in its deliberations.

Rev J G R Kroeze  
Rev A Veldman  
J Wielstra  
G Reitsema  
Alternate: D Veltkamp.

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<sup>3</sup> Article 67, Synod Launceston 1985, would seem to invalidate the deputies position, but that article will be appealed at the upcoming Synod.