

SMSU's

Religious Studies Notebook

Special Memorial Issue

Newsletter of the Department of Religious Studies at Southwest Missouri State University

Dr. Gerrit J. tenZythoff: A Privilege to Have Known Him

On Saturday, March 24, 2001, Dr. Gerrit Jan tenZythoff was laid to rest following a short service attended by immediate family and a few selected guests at his graveside in Greenlawn Cemetery. Later that afternoon, hundreds of friends and acquaintances filled the aisles of First and Calvary Presbyterian Church to capacity as people from all walks of life gathered to pay tribute to an individual whose unusual, inspiring life had left an indelible impression upon those he touched. The reception immediately prior to the service had been prolonged twice to allow the long lines of SMSU faculty, students, staff and members of the greater Springfield community to greet the family and express their condolences. In the weeks and months since, the international network of tenZythoff's friends have been mourning their loss and commemorating his life through memorial contributions, letters, cards, and ceremonies.

Elisabeth tenZythoff has been overwhelmed by the volume of the response to her husband's passing. "I have received hundreds of cards and letters, and am still receiving them," she mentioned recently. Others have chosen to show their affection in other ways. The small congregation of first and second generation Dutch immigrants of Hope Reformed Church in Vancouver, Canada, recorded a tribute to their former pastor, counselor and friend filled with stories and remembrances of his work with immigrants during the 1950's. Two former Drury students—one from Turkey, one from Mexico—whose time in Springfield was marked by get-togethers for dinner and tea at the tenZythoffs' house visited to pay their respects. Both students became life-long friends with the tenZythoffs, so much so that they called them "Oma and Opa": Dutch for grandmother and grandfather.

And the list goes on. Shortly after his death, at the annual Holocaust Remembrance Day in Springfield,

tenZythoff was remembered as a Righteous Gentile for his heroism in World War II. Contributions to the Gerrit J. and Elisabeth tenZythoff Scholarship Fund have mushroomed over the last six months, and are still growing.



1922-2001

During his life, Dr. tenZythoff lived as a mediator, establishing bridges between sectors of society known more for their difference than their common ground. His sufferings in WWII gained him the respect, admiration and affection of the Jewish community. The faith, joy, kindness and optimism that he exuded, even after having seen the worst side of humanity, won the trust and loyalty of the community of churches and the guild of scholars. His accomplishments as a scholar and his commitment to making values of tolerance, understanding and respect a distinctive feature of the life of the university won the respect of his academic colleagues. His passion for good teaching endeared him to his students, and his creative vision for the department of Religious Studies laid the foundation for a department that would impact thousands of students.

The Religious Studies Department would like to add to the gestures of appreciation, commemoration, and respect as well. It seems fitting for us to pay tribute to the man who founded our department and profoundly shaped the SMSU community with a special memorial issue dedicated to presenting a few of the many twists and turns of "Dr. T's" amazing life in all its multiple facets. We have gathered remembrances, photos and stories from former students, administrators, colleagues, friends, and family. We have culled through some of Dr. T's own writings to present to you a snapshot of a life that has touched ours in subtle yet definite ways. One statement has been echoed by many during the last months, and seems a fitting summary of our relationship to him: "It is a privilege to have known him."

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HIS DARKEST HOUR--A DEFINING MOMENT

Extraordinary People

Gerrit was born to H.J. and Antonia tenZythoff on February 17, 1922 in Gramsbergen, Holland, a rural village in the eastern Netherlands surrounded by forests and heather fields. He was the second of six children in his family. His father was a school principal and his mother worked as an operating room nurse until her marriage when, according to Dutch custom at that time, she left her vocation. As the family of a school principal, the tenZythoffs occupied a place of prestige and responsibility within their town. Their commitment to education and refinement was a pillar upon which Gerrit's life was to be built.

Dr. Bob Flanders, former professor and department head of history at SMS, was a life-long friend of the tenZythoffs. He interacted with Father tenZythoff, as H.J. was known in the family, on more than one occasion. "All of the tenZythoffs were extraordinary people," Flanders remarked, "largely because Mr. and Mrs. tenZythoff were extraordinary people." For his 70th birthday, Flanders recalled, Father tenZythoff asked for his children to buy him an unabridged Dutch-Latin and English-Dutch dictionary so that he could put a finer finish on his English and Latin. "That shows you the kind of dedication to education that the tenZythoffs possessed," said Flanders.

Gerrit was to become the scholar of his family, but not before a painful education of a different sort. It was in the context of the terrors of war, imprisonment, constant danger, and separation from family that Gerrit learned the lessons that would form him into the scholar, spokesman and teacher that he became.

A Grim Time

On the tenth of May, 1940, Gerrit and his brothers heard an unbelievable news flash come over the Dutch radio and disobeyed their parents' strict orders to stay home as they scrambled to a forested hillside overlooking the main highway leading from the German border to the Dutch interior. Gerrit waited in the trees while the sound of vehicles in the distance grew louder and louder until rows upon rows of German troops and miles of armored vehicles burst upon his sight. The unimaginable was taking place. Holland was being invaded by Germany.

In a speech to the National Federation of Temple Brotherhoods and the Jewish Chautauqua Society in 1980, Gerrit recalled the sudden change that the Nazi invasion produced in Dutch society. "I grew up in a grim time. I didn't know how grim until Holland entered World War II, because that day, the 10th of May, 1940, our doctor came to visit us although nobody was sick. With my parents he had been instrumental in helping Jews escape from Germany to what was then known as British Palestine."

The tenZythoffs had discussed the possibilities of occupation with their Sephardic Jewish friend whose family had lived in Holland since 1499. He considered moving an impossibility. "This is my country," he had remarked. "I do not wish to live anywhere else, and I would rather die."



The tenZythoff Family in 1950. From the left: Gehrard, Hanneke, Chris, Mother, Father, Gerrit, Henk, Hans.

On the day of his unusual visit, Gerrit recalled, "He shook hands with us; something he had never done before, and the next morning, he was dead. He committed suicide. We were deeply shocked, but remembered that we had said, 'There will no longer be European civilization as we ought to know it.'"

The conflict over the place of Jews in Dutch society under Nazi occupation quickly became a matter of immediate personal concern. Gerrit recounted his experiences to students at the 1992 Pepperdine University convocation in a speech entitled "Am I My Brother's Keeper?" "Two weeks later, the butcher was taken. Neighbors began disappearing. The authorities told my parents, 'If you know what is best for you, you will keep quiet and not ask questions.'"

Scheming for Righteousness

It was then that his parents' clandestine activities became much more active. Before the German invasion, the tenZythoffs had been active in the underground movement to transport Jews out of danger. They had made the decision to participate without consulting with the children, but each member of the family supported the secret activities despite the danger.

Just before their activities intensified, Father tenZythoff gave specific instructions to his children, knowing that the less they knew, the less likely they would divulge important information if placed under interrogation: "One day you will see people whose presence you will deny. You will see

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faces that you shall not remember. And you will *never* ask a name.” Gerrit whole-heartedly supported his parents. “I was so proud of my parents,” he remembered. “Doggonit, we were going to continue the fight, I was as proud as a peacock.”

Elisabeth tenZythoff recalled the stories her husband told her. “Almost everything happened at night. There would be a knock on the door, and the person, they didn’t know who, outside would say, ‘We have a package, could you help?’”

So the tenZythoff children heard movements in the night that were never explained to them, and their parents harbored mysterious people until they could make the next leg of their nighttime journey. Some mornings they had breakfast with people that were “never there.” At other times, it was too dangerous to be home with their parents and the children spent time away at their grandparents’ house. And during all their efforts, no one ever kept track of how many people they had helped.

Gerrit’s personal involvement began in a public context. “I was a high school boy then,” recounted Gerrit. “I remember the day that I came to my school. The students refused to go in because my Jewish classmates were no longer permitted to enter the building. Neither were my Jewish teachers who taught me Physics, Latin, Greek and Hebrew. We went on strike. ‘If they don’t go in, we don’t go in.’ We stood there for hours. Finally, the other teachers had the Jewish teachers address us. They thanked us for our support and, concerned with our safety, asked us to go in to the school.”

Gerrit mounted his own personal form of protest against the German occupation: “Once, after Holland entered the war, I came home with the first report card. We had good teachers, but grading on the scale of zero to ten, I came home with a perfect zero for German. I was so proud of myself. I was the only one in the class who had deliberately flunked the course. My Dad had a word with me. He said, ‘Son, it was not always thus in Germany, nor will it always be. A day will come when you will have to know the language. After the Germans have lost the war, we will have to talk to them, and you will have to know that language if you want to be part of the solution.’ I argued, but I finally compromised that I would score the passing grade of six.” His father’s insight would be a lifesaver at a later date.

Into the Valley of the Shadow of Death

Gerrit completed his B.A. at the University of Utrecht in 1941, and continued studying for a bachelors in divinity at Utrecht. But soon, he faced a moment of decision. The situation for students was at times precarious, at other times more free, depending on conditions in Germany. The manpower situation in Germany was desperate due to the drain of men toward the war frontier. Dutch men were conscripted to work in factories. In 1942, students at all Dutch universities were forced to sign a solidarity agreement with the Nazi party in order to continue their studies. Gerrit refused. Before long, he was arrested by the Gestapo and imprisoned in a forced labor camp where he began to realize the personal cost of his decision. At different times, he was beaten severely and tortured. In 1943, he was sent to work in a factory for armored vehicle parts in Berlin. He was 20 years old.

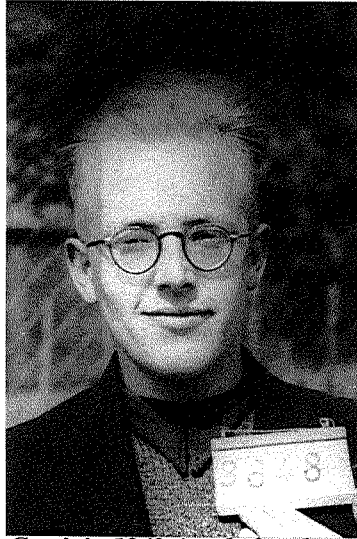
Gerrit was far from the model employee. He was unable to stand the thought of contributing to the German war effort, and became involved in a game of sabotage while manufacturing brakes for military vehicles. Though he was watched very closely, eventually Gerrit was able to substitute sand for machine oil, and during the course of time all four machines he worked with experienced breakdowns that were very difficult to fix. One never worked again. But Gerrit was savagely beaten once discovered and sustained damage to his bones, spinal cord, and nervous system that would plague him for life.

“During his darkest hour he faced death--and afterward he grinned. And after he was done grinning he usually laughed.”

-- Dr. Karl Luckert

The most perilous chapter in his wartime experience was yet to come. Gerrit had been in Berlin for three months when an Allied bombing raid destroyed the factory where he worked. The gates of the camp were blown open; Gerrit and a fellow student walked through the smoke and haze to freedom—almost. When they left the camp, the boys were dressed in shabby clothes; they had no real shoes, no identification papers, and no ration coupons. They began a 500 mile trek home to Holland.

The boys knew Germany well. During more peaceful times, both had traveled extensively throughout Germany. During summers, they could load their bikes on a train and visit virtually anywhere the railway would take them. So over time they had come to know the little cities and towns, the railway system and the geography of Germany. And because of his father’s insistence, Gerrit spoke fluent



Gerrit in 1943, just before being deported from Holland to Germany.

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German. They made their way by foot and by train back to the German/Holland border.

But fear was their constant companion and one brush with a German officer was breathtakingly close. The boys bluffed their way onto a train in Germany, and then separated during the ride. In the course of their travels, Gerrit had overheard a conversation about a

“Memory is sometimes a painful thing, but it gives you the capacity to understand what suffering is. That capacity is hard to acquire and I wish there were easier ways to do it.”

-Gerrit and Elisabeth tenZythoff

barber in a small town along their escape route who was looking for someone to help with his business. Though Gerrit usually hid behind a newspaper as if he were reading it, on this leg of the journey a German officer engaged him in conversation. When asked where he was going, Gerrit told the officer about his new position as an apprentice barber. The soldier was a personal friend of the barber. He knew where Gerrit was going, and had been in conversation with the barber earlier that week. “Ah,” remarked the soldier, “you must be his new apprentice. He told me he had filled the position.” The conversation ended, and they went their separate ways.

When they arrived near the border, Gerrit and his friend wound their way through ditches to the house of a German pastor and friend of his father. When they knocked on his door after curfew and spoke with the pastor from the shadows outside, he was initially reluctant to help. He had already raised the suspicion of authorities who had visited his house more than once. But since it was a tenZythoff in trouble, the pastor agreed to help. The pastor took the boys to a potato field that sat adjacent the border and returned home. After monitoring the patrols of guards and dogs, they scampered across the border into Holland. Now the danger level had risen even further. The boys separated to make their own ways back home.

Meanwhile, back in Gramsbergen, Nazi troops visited the tenZythoff family. Gerrit had disappeared, they informed them, and they wanted to know his whereabouts. They had heard nothing. Father tenZythoff was angered and indignant. “You took him, you had better bring him back,” he replied.

Hiding in Gramsbergen

Gerrit made it to the house of a farmer outside of Gramsbergen. The owner was a personal friend of Father tenZythoff. As principal of the school, Father tenZythoff had worked especially close in helping one of his sons learn to read. The family had been helping others up to a certain point, but when they knew they were suspected of underground activities, they foreswore any further involvement—except on one condition. The farmer had mentioned

to his wife, “When one of the tenZythoff boys comes, we will help.” Gerrit lived with them in hiding for two years.

From 1943 to 1945, Gerrit actively served with the Netherlands Interior Forces and other resistance movements while in hiding. He slipped through the fingers of authorities many times. He hid in haystacks, in between animals in their stalls in the barn, in every nook and cranny on the farm. But his activities with the resistance were not a point of pride in later years. Desperate times called for desperate measures, and Gerrit took no pride in having to live in a manner that turned all rules for living upside down.

In 1945, when Allied troops finally broke through German lines, the situation on the small farm outside of Gramsbergen rose to a level of danger previously unseen. A group of 20 German troops surrounded the farm and made camp while they waited to confront Allied soldiers marching westward. During the night, Gerrit and the other hired hands on the farm snuck into the camp and stole their guns while the troops slept. Gerrit hung out a large white sheet from a window on the farmhouse as a sign to Allied troops. When the German troops awoke in the morning, they found themselves surrounded by scruffy Dutch farmhands and looked down the road to see Allied troops advancing toward them.

When the war was over, Gerrit returned home to his family in Gramsbergen. He had endured torture, deprivation, confinement and incalculable risks because of his stand for principles modeled by his parents. But the most profound lessons were yet to come. Gerrit described his reunion with his parents to the students at Pepperdine:

“When I finally came home, I found in my father’s home and mother’s home two kids that I did not know. I asked, ‘Who are they?’ Names were no longer a secret. When I heard the names I said, ‘What! These are Nazis!’ ‘Yes,’ my parents said, ‘their

parents were.’ ‘Then I don’t want to be under the same roof with them!’ I walked off.

“Good will triumph over evil; all that you and I have to do is suffer a little bit.”

It was my mother who followed me and said, ‘Gerrit

--Gerrit tenZythoff

I love you very much but you’re wrong. You and we are not Nazis, we’re Christians, and we shall stand with the innocent.’ Am I my brother’s keeper? I repeat what my parents taught me. Yes, I am. Good will triumph over evil, all that you and I have to do is suffer a little bit.”

Years later, in reflecting upon his wartime experience, Gerrit confided to Dr. John Strong, “My father’s and mother’s actions really, literally saved me from a life of bitterness, resentment and hatred.” The outcome of his response to the anger he was forced to deal with was a life dedicated to preserving values of tolerance, love and reconciliation, despite the obstacles he faced.

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Joy Instead of Mourning

In 1945 the war was over, and Gerrit was free to return to his family. The Netherlands, however, had been devastated, and rebuilding was difficult. Clothing was scarce and insufficient during winter months. Few shops carried goods. Farmers had trouble transporting goods to market and making ends meet. There was no normal life to return to. Between 1945 and 1947, Gerrit worked for the Dutch government as a chaplain and counselor in summer youth camps held in England. The camps brought Dutch students and children to England for a period of ten days in which staff fed them well, talked about their experiences, and tried to restore some sense of normalcy to their lives.

The University of Utrecht reopened in 1947, and Gerrit was able to return to his studies. School supplies were hard to come by, and the somewhat spartan life of a student was complicated even more by the conditions of the time. Gerrit could not handle the close quarters and pressures of the university very well after having spent two years in hiding, and he struggled to complete his first semester.

Though travel was difficult, on weekends Gerrit attempted to catch a ride with Allied trolleys driving between Utrecht and his home town where he could do laundry, have a good meal, and be with family. On one particular weekend, the ride home was marked by a torrential downpour and Gerrit, sitting in the open bed of the truck, was drenched to the bone. As they neared the city of Arnhem, Gerrit recalled that a young lady, introduced to him by a mutual friend before the war, was working at the hospital in Arnhem. When he arrived in the city, he made his way to the hospital, the hospital staff gave him directions to his friend's house, and Gerrit showed up on the doorstep of Elisabeth Bok, looking like a kitten caught out in the rain.

Elisabeth was living with her aunt at the time, and the two were the sole occupants of their house. The only dry clothes they could offer Gerrit were a pair of pajamas and a robe. They hung his clothes out to dry and spent Saturday laughing and talking about Gerrit's peculiar manner of calling on old acquaintances. "He was such a joy," recalled Elisabeth. "He and my aunt got along so well, and we laughed and laughed." When his clothes finally dried by Sunday evening, he thanked his hosts for the wonderful weekend and promised to stay in contact.

During the war, Elisabeth had studied at a school of home economics until the picturesque school perched on the bank of the Rhine burned down during exchanges between Allied and German forces. She began volunteering for a local hospital and eventually was taken into their nurses' training program which she completed in 1947.

The city of Arnhem was a key flash point in the Allied effort to recapture Holland. The small hospital was highly regarded by everyone in Arnhem, so Elisabeth spent her time taking care of shrapnel wounds for German soldiers

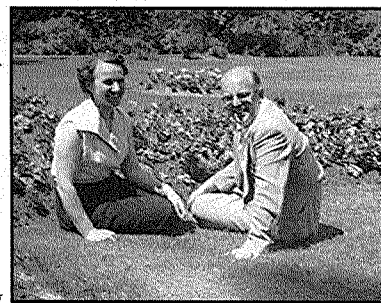
and Dutch civilians. The hospital had been badly damaged, so there was no running water, electricity or heat and medical supplies were short. The nurses cut up sheets for bandages, sterilized and reused what they could, and kept everyone away from the windows to avoid being hit by stray bullets. Working at the hospital provided a few benefits. Employees were able to get a little milk, some vegetables, and a paltry amount of watery bread, which was better than the general subsistence diet of tulip bulbs, sugar beets and little else. But working at the hospital also had its own unique intrigues. The hospital was a hiding place for young Dutch men, as well. At night, they would occasionally slip out of hiding to help the nurses pump water into buckets and containers for use the next day.

During 1947, Gerrit visited Elisabeth in Arnhem when he could. Over time, a slow transformation took place in Gerrit's life. "He really found the healing that he needed," said Elisabeth, "by working with others, counseling them, and sharing their experiences."

New Horizons

In 1948, the World Council of Churches asked Gerrit to consider spending a year at New Brunswick Theological Seminary in the U.S. Gerrit took the offer and spent the next year polishing his English, pursuing his theological studies, and learning about the situation of Dutch immigrants in the U.S. and Canada. Before he left, however, he proposed to Elisabeth.

When Gerrit graduated from the University of Utrecht in 1951, a long-term goal for his life had grown from the initial stage of possibility into full fruition. While sailing to the U.S., Gerrit had spoken with immigrants from all over eastern and western Europe as they made their way down the St. Lawrence River into the U.S. and Canada. Thousands of Dutch immigrants were making their way to farms in the U.S. and Canada to fill the demand for farm laborers created by Canadian losses during the war. When he returned to Holland, he told Elisabeth of the



Gerrit and Elisabeth enjoying a sunny afternoon in Canada, 1956.

large families he had seen disembark in a new world with no possessions, no understanding of the language, no place to go, no work and no one to meet or help them. "We can do something there," he insisted.

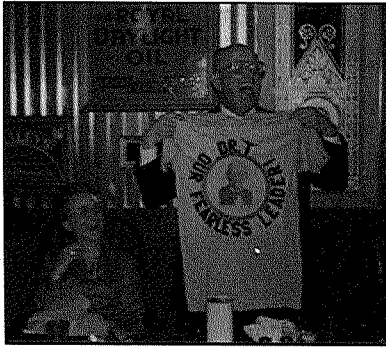
So in 1951, the newly-weds embarked for Canada where they spent nine years working among the Dutch immigrant communities. They worked as a team to be the pastors, counselors, social workers, teachers, apartment locators,

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and support group for new immigrants as they arrived on a daily basis. "It was such demanding work," remembered Elisabeth, "but it was so rewarding."

Building a Bridge Between History and Religion

In addition to his pastoral work in Canada, Gerrit earned a Masters degree in sacred theology at Union College, University of British Columbia in 1957. His academic



Dr. T unwraps a present at his retirement party in 1981 while Mrs. T looks on.

interests later became a full-time vocation for him. In 1959, the constant stress of his work began to take a serious toll on his health, and doctors ordered Gerrit to rest. So Gerrit and Elisabeth moved to the University of Chicago where Gerrit completed a Masters in history and began work toward his Ph.D. In the meantime, he taught at Western

Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, and then at the Mansfield branch of Ohio State University. While in Chicago, their daughter Cora-Joan was born. In 1967, he completed his Ph.D. under the supervision of Dr. Martin Marty of the University of Chicago.

At SMSU, then president Dr. Arthur Mallory had discussed the formation of a Religious Studies Department with the Board of Regents, Attorney General of Missouri Jack Danforth, Dean of Faculties Dr. Duane Meyer and Dr. Bob Gilmore, Dean of Arts and Humanities. There was a great deal of interest on campus, and with faculty support the search began for a person to head up the new enterprise.

Prior to the founding of the Religious Studies Department, religion courses had been taught by various campus ministers and students received credits that could transfer to SMS. Though the classes were taught by well-qualified scholars, the administration was concerned about issues of separation of church and state. When the proposal for the formation of a department of Religious Studies came down the pipeline, campus ministers and the community became concerned. Both were interested in how religious topics could be taught in both a sympathetic and objective manner.

The university wanted to create a facility that would teach about religion from a non-theological, non-confessional perspective that would have secular academic credibility. So the task was one of balancing the academic study of religion with respect of the faith perspectives of

students and the surrounding community, a job that would require someone who took religion seriously but allowed for a wide variety of perspectives, traditions, and shades of belief and unbelief. The program was to examine the origins and development of different religious traditions, the interrelationships between religions, the connections to culture and the distinct qualities of different traditions.

Dr. Mallory recalled the debate surrounding the formation of the department. "It was a ticklish situation at the moment," he remembered. "We had to find the person who could exactly fit the bill."

They found just the man in Dr. tenZythoff. His Dutch background may definitely have contributed to his suitability for the program. The non-theological study of religion had its beginnings in the Netherlands in 1877, when the Dutch parliament passed the Dutch Universities Act which separated the theological faculties at four state universities from the Dutch Reformed Church, thereby creating a secular, humanistic mode for the study of religion. One of those schools was the University of Utrecht, where Gerrit received both his Bachelor of Arts, and Bachelor of Divinity degrees. Dr. T had worked as a pastor, had obtained a seminary degree, but was also trained as an immigration historian, which allowed him to bring a different set of concepts and perspectives to the study of religion.

Dr. Bob Flanders had just come to SMSU from Mansfield, Ohio, where he had become good friends with Dr. T. Dr. Meyer and Dr. Gilmore made the trip to Mansfield to interview Dr. T, and Dr. T visited SMSU to see the campus and speak with community members.

Dr. T managed to convince both the SMSU faculty and the religious community of his sympathy to religious issues and his unique perspective with a now-famous turn of phrase. When speaking with a large group of interested inquirers, someone asked him which version of the Bible he preferred. He responded with characteristic wit and humor, "I don't think anybody here would be able to read it. I prefer the Dutch version, of course. Dutch is the language of God." The crowd roared with laughter.

Dr. T began building the department gradually. At first he was the only full-time faculty member and courses were taught by outside ministers, the local rabbi, and other qualified volunteers. As resources grew, they were able to add more full-time faculty and expand course offerings. He also made sure that the connections between the department and area religious groups remained strong. He saw to it that in no way did the academy set itself against religious groups, and that the department was able to establish an atmosphere of respect, openness and reverence for people of all faith communities.

Dr. Stan Burgess was hired into the department by Dr. T, and became department head when tenZythoff stepped down in 1981. "He didn't focus only on a person's vitae

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when he hired," said Burgess. "Gerrit was a person collector, he collected people because he saw promise in them."

That dedication to the personal side of academic life won Dr. T the respect of students, staff and faculty alike. Dr. Kathy Pulley, now associate vice-president for Academic Affairs, was a student of Dr. tenZythoff's that eventually went on to study at the Ph.D. level before returning to SMSU. "It was impossible to separate his teaching and professorship from him as a person," Pulley said. "He enmeshed himself in his vocation." He showed concern for the families of students and faculty, and combined the roles of colleague, friend and mentor in a way that few have mastered.

As an administrator, Dr. T's approach was one that leaned heavily on the side of personal relationships rather than bureaucracy. Dr. Dominic Capeci of the History Department worked with Dr. T on various committees. He referred to Dr. T as "padron" or "Machiavelli with wooden shoes" due to his ability to work the university system for the best interest of his department. Dr. Jim Moyer, current head of the Religious Studies Department, recalled one specific incident of Dr. T's statesmanship. "When the new major in Religious Studies came up in the Faculty Senate in 1982 it was controversial, as new programs always are. Gerrit stood up and in magisterial form gave a long, circuitous speech and sat down. Everyone scratched his/her head at what he really meant. The vote to approve the major was taken; it passed by just one vote. One senator admitted later that he had lost concentration during Gerrit's speech and voted for the major by mistake! Gerrit had done the dance effectively once again. Today, the department has over 20 full time and part time faculty and serves around 1800 students each semester. I estimate the department has served fifty to seventy-five thousand students since Gerrit came in 1969."

Dr. T was also an excellent scholar with broad interests and an ever-expanding vision of what could be done in the department. "He was a consummate dreamer," said Dr. Bob Hodgson, who was hired in 1980 by Dr. tenZythoff. "There was always a new vision and territory to conquer. He was always encouraging colleagues to research a new topic, attend a new conference or write a new book." As early as the mid-1970's, Dr. T was talking and scheming and planning to implement a master's program in Religious Studies. He also hoped to be able to develop full Jewish studies and Islamic studies tracks for the department.

His personal academic interests were widely varied, and he was able to pull from a broad background that had been established early on in his educational career. He was also convinced that education could be the key to better relations between religious groups. Dr. Charles Hedrick, SMSU's third Distinguished Professor and a recruit of Dr. T's commented on Gerrit's character. "He blended better

than anyone I know scholarship and faith. His deep piety was hammered out in World War II, but he was non-discriminating in his respect for peoples' faith positions, whether they came from a background of a deeply fundamental or a more casual religious experience."

Dr. Hodgson referred to him as a "Renaissance thinker." "He was broadly knowledgeable in history, languages, social studies, arts, music, so he could easily hold conversations with historians, linguists, and social scientists," recalled Hodgson. Others recall conversations about poetry and jazz artists, physics and geological history, and the staples of history of religions and theology.

Dr. T authored a number of works on the history of the Dutch Reformed Church and Dutch culture and life both in the Netherlands and in the new world. In 1976, he was one of 12 scholars selected out of 400 to participate in a seminar in Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration in American History at Columbia University. His perennial interest was the confluence of the three Abrahamic faiths—Judaism, Christianity and Islam. He taught a course in Islam at SMSU, and, at different times in his career, led study tours to the Middle East. On one trip, his father joined the group from Springfield at Amsterdam Airport for a tour of Egypt, Kuwait, Iran, and Israel. In 1982, he co-authored with Richard Wilkinson a text on psychology and religion, and taught business ethics classes with Dr. Burt Helm. In 1988, he was elected executive director of the National Council on Religion and Public Education, a position that his role at SMSU equipped him for. "He worked hard to become a master of the subtleties of constitutional law regarding the issues of church and state," Dr. Holt Spicer, former Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities, remembered. He knew the important Supreme Court cases by heart and his involvement with religious communities and students gave him a very nuanced understanding of the role that religion can play in education.

Dr. T was convinced that no education, especially a liberal arts education, was complete without the study of religion and the impact of religion within global history. He confided his vision to Dr. John Strong of the Religious Studies Department. "I believe that we will see slowly but surely far more of a drift toward the importance of the spirit and the soul. I think that, for instance, the enduring significance of a Gandhi, also of a Jesus, or also a Buddha tells you that there are characters in history who have demonstrated a lifestyle or a method of existence that really accomplishes something that eludes the Hitlers, the Mussolinis, the Francos and the Stalins. From that angle I strongly believe that religion will continue to be a very important part of the intellectual pursuit. But I would hate to isolate it into a separate school. It has got to exist on a campus where there is diverse opinion. That's where it does best."



Southwest Missouri State

U N I V E R S I T Y

Department of Religious Studies

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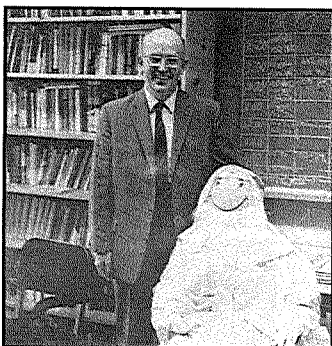
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On his 50th birthday Dr. tenZythoff played host to Father Abraham. Hollanders who turn 50 are routinely teased about being old enough to have known Abraham. On this occasion, Abraham brought a letter from heaven stating that "Jacob, Isaac, and the boys send their regards."

Compiled and written by Ethan Mayes

"His eccentricities were the most lovable part about him," recalled Professor Dave Embree. "He kept his phone in his desk drawer; so during meetings, his desk would ring, and then he would pull open the drawer, and answer the phone."

