

*(The following column appeared in the Calvary Herald (vol. 10, no. 3, 1994), a publication of Calvary Reformed Presbyterian Church in Hampton, Virginia <www.clearlight.com/~crpc/>.)*

## **Necessary Consequence: Timeout for a Story**

**by Michael Holloway**

In one of his tape series on theology, R. C. Sproul tells an interesting and enlightening story from his college days. The instructor for a particular systematic theology course in which Mr. Sproul was enrolled was John Gerstner. Professor Gerstner would on occasion challenge his students' mastery of the course material by playing the role of a "devil's advocate" for some heretical position and requiring his students to successfully refute his arguments for that heresy.

One day, Professor Gerstner decided to play the role of a Mormon theologian. He began that day's class by presenting arguments in support of the proposition that God has a physical body. After he finished his argument, he invited the students to explain to him from the Scripture why he was wrong. No one immediately jumped at this challenge, so Professor Gerstner asked R. C. Sproul to make an attempt at refutation.

Mr. Sproul began by saying that he would begin with the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well recorded in John 4. In particular he would cite verse 24, in which Jesus stated: "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (NASB)

Professor Gerstner responded by saying that this was all well and good, but that the passage only stated that God was a spirit; it did not say that God did not also have a body. Since he did not claim that God did not have a spirit, but only that God did have a physical body, this passage in no way refuted his central proposition.

Mr. Sproul replied that he understood this, but that he was not finished with his refutation. He went on to discuss the context in which Jesus' uttered the words recorded in verse 24, and claimed that this context demonstrated that God was not confined to a single location in space, and that, therefore, God could not have a physical body.

"No! No! No! That just won't do!" was Professor Gerstner's reply.

At that, Mr. Sproul conceded defeat, and another student made an attempt, and then another, and another, and another; all to no avail. By the time the class period was nearing an end, the students were all just about ready to become Mormons.

Finally, Mr. Sproul asked the professor to explain to them how they could successfully refute a Mormon theologian on the point in question. He replied that there were several possible approaches but that the one that he would probably use would be to begin with the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well recorded in John 4. In particular he would cite verse 24, in which Jesus stated: "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (NASB)

Professor Gerstner said that a competent Mormon theologian would respond to these statements by saying that this was all well and good, but that the passage only stated that God was a spirit; it did not say that God did not also have a body. And since he did not claim that God did not have a spirit, but only that God did have a physical body, this passage in no way refuted his central proposition.

To this, the professor said he would reply that he understood, but that he was not finished with his refutation. He said that he would then go on to discuss the context in which Jesus' uttered the words recorded in verse 24, and claim that this context demonstrated that God was not confined to a single location in space, and that, therefore, God could not have a physical body. This would complete the argument.

"But Professor Gerstner, that is the exact same argument I used," Mr. Sproul said.

"That is correct," the professor responded.

"When I used the argument, you dismissed it by saying 'No! No! No! That just won't do!'"

"Is that an argument?"