

THE *September 1, 2009* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

In This Issue

- ◆ Knowing the Scriptures 458
- ◆ Catechism...Or Discipline 460
- ◆ Letters 462
- ◆ Of Flocks and Herds, and Beasts and Birds,
and All Within the Sea 463
- ◆ Religious Freedoms Threatened 466
- ◆ Rome and Politics (8) 468
- ◆ Henry Danhof (6) 471
- ◆ Missionary to Islam: Samuel Zwemer 474
- ◆ Bring the books... 476
- ◆ News From Our Churches 478

Volume 85 ◆ Number 20

Knowing the Scriptures

Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.

Matthew 22:29

The Sadducees were a religious sect in Israel that believed that there is no life after death and therefore no resurrection of the dead. They sought to discredit Jesus with a question about the resurrection. They posed a situation in which a woman was widowed seven times by seven brothers. Their question was, "Whose wife will she be in the resurrection?" With this question they sought to demonstrate the absurdity of belief in the resurrection. In the process they sought to discredit Jesus before the people.

In His response to the Sadducees Jesus pointed out that they did not know the Scriptures or the power of God. There is

neither marriage nor giving in marriage in the resurrection. The very fact that Jehovah revealed Himself to Moses as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob indicates that these Patriarchs continued to live after they died and therefore would one day participate in the resurrection of the body.

Our concern is with Jesus' observation that the Sadducees erred, not knowing the Scriptures or the power of God.

The Sadducees have not been the only ones that have erred, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. The history of the church reveals that many, sometimes the majority, have done the same.

We must avoid the errors of history and of our present day by knowing the Scriptures and the power of God.

We emphasize this in connection with the beginning of school, catechism, and the Bible society season. If we will know the Scriptures and the power of God we must maintain our Chris-

tian schools, maintain a strong catechism program, and be busy in the study of Scripture, also with each other in our Bible study groups.



Jesus speaks here of the Scriptures and the power of God.

The Scriptures (writings) to which Jesus referred were the 39 books of the Old Testament. These Scriptures reveal God as the Creator, the Ruler, and especially the Savior of His people. They spoke mainly of the salvation that was to come.

And so more Scriptures followed, 27 books in number, which we know as the New Testament. These were written during the days of the apostles. These reveal especially how the salvation promised in the Old Testament has come to pass through the work of Jesus Christ.

We receive these Scriptures as the infallibly inspired Word of God in which God has revealed to us all that we need to know for salvation.

Rev. Slopsema is pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692) is a semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc., 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

REPRINT POLICY

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting of articles in our magazine by other publications, provided: a) that such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; b) that proper acknowledgment is made; c) that a copy of the periodical in which such reprint appears is sent to our editorial office.

EDITORIAL POLICY

Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions for The Reader Asks department are welcome. Contributions will be limited to approximately 300 words and must be signed.

EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prof. Barrett L. Gritters
4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW
Grandville, MI 49418
(e-mail: gritters@prca.org)

BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
Mr. Timothy Pipe
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
PH: (616) 457-5970
FAX: (616) 457-5980
(e-mail: tim@rfpa.org)

Postmaster:

Send address changes to
The Standard Bearer
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger
6597 40th Ave.
Hudsonville, MI 49426
(e-mail: benjwig@juno.com)

NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
c/o B. VanHerik
66 Fraser St.
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

c/o Mr. Sean Courtney
78 Millfield, Grove Rd.
Ballymena, Co. Antrim
BT43 6PD Northern Ireland
(e-mail: cpraudiostore@yahoo.co.uk)

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

\$21.00 per year in the U.S., US\$25.00 elsewhere.

ADVERTISING POLICY

The Standard Bearer does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. Announcements should be sent, with the \$10.00 fee, to the editorial office: SB Announcements, 4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW, Grandville, MI 49418 (e-mail: doezema@prca.org). Deadline for announcements is one month prior to publication date.

Web site for RFPA: www.rfpa.org

Web site for PRC: www.prc.org

Jesus speaks of the power of God that these Scriptures reveal.

The word "power" is often used to describe the power to do miracles, as it does also here. The power of God is the power of God to do miracles. When we think of miracles, what comes to mind are the many miracles that God performed through the Old Testament prophets and especially through Jesus and the apostles. However, all these miracles were only signs of a greater miracle that God has performed and is performing in His great power—the miracle of salvation. What a great miracle is the work of salvation. It includes the miracle of the incarnation, the miracle of the atonement, the miracle of Jesus' resurrection, the miracle of the new birth, the miracle of life after death as our soul is taken to the Father's house of many mansions, and the miracle of the bodily resurrection, which is the culmination of the miracle of salvation.

This power of God is revealed in Scripture.



Jesus speaks of *knowing* the Scriptures and the great power of God.

In generations past, many, even in society generally, knew much of the Scriptures, because the Scriptures were a part of society's life. No longer is that true. Many do not have this knowledge. And, sadly, there is the same appalling lack of Bible knowledge in the church world of our day.

Nor is this a new thing. We find the same ignorance repeatedly in Israel of the Old Testament. After the death of Joshua,

we read, "And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel" (Jud. 2:10). Later on, God indicated through the prophet Hosea, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (4:6).

And now Jesus indicates that the Sadducees did not know the Scriptures.

This is interesting in light of the fact that the Sadducees were the religious leaders of the people. They filled the ranks of the priesthood. As priests, they were called to instruct the people in the Scriptures. And so the Sadducees were for the most part well-

schooled in the Scriptures. Yet Jesus indicated that they did not know the Scriptures.

So we must understand the emphasis of the word "know." It is a word that means to have penetrating insight into something so as to understand it. This kind of knowledge the Sadducees did not have. For all the factual knowledge they had of the Scriptures, they did not discern the great truths of Scripture, including life after death and the resurrection of the dead.

The problem was not a lack of clarity in Scripture. The teachings of Scripture concerning the power of God to save sinful man are clear. The problem was a lack of faith. Scripture's teachings are contrary to man's pride and sinful desires. Sinful man finds Scripture's teachings to be offensive. Consequently, sinful man will either deny the truths of

Scripture or twist them to suit his pleasure. This is what the Sadducees did. And so Jesus concluded that they knew neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.

We must know the Scriptures, and know them with the knowledge of faith. We must not be content to be ignorant of what the Scriptures teach. We must know what the Scriptures teach. This means we must know the doctrines (teachings) of the Scriptures concerning the power of God in salvation. We must also know the history of Scripture, which is inseparably connected to the doctrines of the Scripture. But we must also know the Scriptures in faith, so that we submit to its clear teachings and embrace them with all our heart, even though these teachings are contrary to our natural inclinations.



Those who do not know the Scriptures will err.

The Sadducees erred. That does not mean simply that they made a mistake, but that they had strayed far away from God. To err has the basic idea of straying or being led astray from the right way. This word is used of sheep straying from the fold in Matthew 18:12: "How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?" The same word is used in I Peter 2:25 to describe those that stray spiritually, "For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." The Sadducees had certainly erred. They had strayed far from God. They had strayed from God by denying many important truths of Scripture. They denied the existence of angels. They denied life after death, teaching that at death the soul dies with the body. And so they

If we will know the Scriptures and the power of God we must maintain our Christian schools, maintain a strong catechism program, and be busy in the study of Scripture, also with each other in our Bible study groups.

also denied the resurrection. In addition, they had strayed by patterning their lifestyle after the world of Greek, pagan culture. Not surprisingly, they were also the enemies of Jesus Christ.

And it was because they knew not the Scriptures or the power of God.

The same thing is happening today. Apostasy abounds in the church world. Many embrace false teachings concerning God and the way of salvation. These false doctrines all have in common that they deny the power of God in salvation. Along with this widespread false doctrine, many worldly, sinful practices have been introduced into, and flourish in, the church. And the reason for it all is that many do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. Sometimes this is even true of believers, who in the weakness of faith are content to remain ignorant of the teachings of Scriptures, and are therefore deceived and led astray by every wind of doctrine. Often, too, it is true of those who know the Bible well, but do not know it in faith, and therefore bring into the Bible that which they want and distort its true meaning.

We must avoid this at all costs.

We must know the Scriptures and the power of God. We must know from Scripture what God has revealed about Himself and His mighty work of salvation. And we must by faith embrace the Scriptures with all our hearts, so that we embrace also the God of Scripture as our God and embrace His Son Jesus Christ, who is the power of God in salvation.



This knowledge comes only through hard work and faithful labor.

The church must be faithful to preach the Scriptures and the power of God in salvation. It is especially through the preaching that God brings His people to the saving knowledge of faith and sustains them in that knowledge. Let the church be faithful in its calling to preach, and the people faithful in their calling to hear the Word. Then they will know the Scriptures and the power of God to salvation.

But the people of God must also be diligent to study and reflect on the Word of God daily. Let them study the Bible in the home. Let them study the Bible

in the broader context of the church, so that they instruct and encourage each other from the Word. Then they will know the Scriptures and the power of God to salvation.

And don't forget the children. They also belong to the church and covenant of God. Without them the church has no future. They also must be taught. They must be taught the Scriptures by their parents in the home. They must be taught the Scriptures by the church in catechism. And the light of Scripture must be shed on every subject of study in school. Let there be good Christian schools in which parents have

their children instructed according to Scripture. Then the children will also know the Scrip-

tures and the power of God to salvation.

This requires hard, diligent labor!

But the reward is great!

God forbid that Jesus must say to us and our children, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God."



...the people of God must also be diligent to study and reflect on the Word of God daily.

Editorial

Prof. Barrett Gritters

Catechism...Or Discipline

I trust the alternatives spelled out in the title of this editorial do not need to be spelled out in most Reformed churches. But let us take nothing for granted, and be reminded of the significance of our responsibility in catechizing our children.

Very soon, again, elders will

be calling parents to send their children to catechism.

From mid-September through the end of April usually, Protestant Reformed Churches conduct the crucially important and formal exercise of catechizing the covenant youth. First in Bible history, then in Reformed doctrine, the ministers indoctrinate (that's

not a dirty word) the children and young people. For thirty weeks the children assemble at the feet of a capable teacher who "causes them to understand" truth. In a formal setting, where the children are impressed with the gravity of the business at hand, the minister declares, really preaches, to the children, "Thus saith the Lord."

Children must attend catechism. The lessons of Scripture must be “constantly imbibed from childhood,” said Calvin. Yes, from childhood. In 1568, in the early years of the Reformation, the Dutch fathers assembled at Wesel and decided that the instruction ought to begin “as soon as their age permits.” But already in 1529, in Basel, Switzerland, the Reformed fathers’ “Reformatory Act” mandated that pastors “would take those between the age of 7 and 14 and gather them together” for catechism. Little children—about whom Jesus Christ said: “Feed my lambs.”

By this work, God is pleased to save the children and preserve the churches.

Elder Responsibility

Elders issue the call to the parents to send their children to catechism. It is a faithful elder who is conscious of his responsibility to issue the call. It would be helpful for elders to make that clear in the bulletin announcement in early September. Something like: “The elders have arranged the new schedule for catechism instruction and call all the parents to have their children come to their lessons.” Although we are thankful for diligent ministers who take the lead in the matter, elders rule the church, and the people are well served when they are reminded of that.

Parental responsibility

The church teaches, but the parents must send the children. The baptismal vows they take include the promise to see to it that their children are taught the “aforesaid doctrine.” When fathers present their request to the elders for baptism of their children, the consistory will ask about the Christian rearing of the little one—what their commitments are to Christian education, and what their commitments are to catechism instruction. No par-

ent has the right to baptism without a promise to send his child to catechism.

Discipline

So important is this responsibility that if the parents fail in it, they are subject to discipline. That is, if the parents refuse to send their children to catechism, they will be barred from the Lord’s table, subjected to all the censures of Christ’s church, and eventually declared to be outside of the kingdom of Christ unless they repent.

The church today takes that stand with good precedent.

In that assembly of the Dutch churches at Wesel (1568), the fathers decided: “Everyone who wants to be considered a member of the church shall surely present his children, as soon as their age permits, to be catechized. Those who refuse to do this must beyond doubt come under the discipline of the church.”

Following that tradition, as late as 1888, the Christian Reformed Church ruled that “parents who neglect to send their children to catechism, though they can do so, become subject to discipline.” Clearly, when the churches were strong, the people of God had clear understanding of the non-negotiable requirement of catechism instruction.

I am not aware of any synodical decision of the PRC that declares: “Failure to send children to be catechized must be met with formal church discipline.” But that lack does not indicate that this is not the PRC’s conviction. It only means that no one has challenged this historical tradition.

But the conviction must not

be challenged. It must not be challenged by uninformed parents. And we elders have the responsibility to make the calling clear at every opportunity. This making clear of the parents’ duty takes place when parents request baptism for their infants: “You understand that the promises you will make imply a promise to send your children to catechism, even at greatest inconvenience?” Without assent, baptism will not be administered.

This calling must also be made clear when new members join the church. I have always told people who seek membership that joining a church is like getting married—you want no surprises. The wife does not want to learn all the husband’s odd (or sinful) habits after they take their vows. Full disclosure, please. “You believe what about birth-control?!” “You want to do what on Sunday?!” Nor do new members in a church want surprises. The elders may not allow

them to be surprised. “You believe what?” “The consistory requires that?” Only after some weeks of visiting with prospective members to cover all the bases do elders approve a motion to grant their request for membership.

When the elders teach prospective members, interview young parents for baptism, or begin admonishing current members for failure, they patiently show the biblical and historical basis for this activity (see my three editorials a year ago in this regard). God appointed one tribe—the Levites—to be teachers of His people. Scattered among the tribes, they took up this high calling to uphold God’s law by teaching it—not only to

Clearly, when the churches were strong, the people of God had clear understanding of the non-negotiable requirement of catechism instruction.

the adults, but to the children. Jesus Himself, at age 12, was able to give such good testimony to the church leaders of His day, in large part (although certainly not only) because he had been taught as a youth. So, when He gave final instructions to His disciples, He said, as it were, "Feed my sheep, but don't forget my lambs, my precious little ones." The covenant perspective of the Lord Jesus helps believers to understand the parental responsibility.

These prospective members, new parents, or lax members, may also learn some church history, and the grand precedent that this "holy custom" (to use Calvin's expression) has.

But what, we pray, will win their hearts and minds toward catechism is also the great blessing of the practice.

To illustrate that blessing negatively, I would convey to them my own experience of teaching more than a few prospective members (and their children), coming often from Reformed churches. So often they were woefully ignorant of the Reformed faith. Many of them were far more Arminian than Reformed. I would also tell them of a recent defense, an aggressive defense, of *conditional* election by a neighbor, a member of a Reformed church. Why the ignorance? Why the false teachings? Because they were not indoctrinated in their youth by faithful ministers in catechism class.

Why the extreme measure of discipline upon those who fail to send their children to catechism? Because we love them, their children, and the church. The consequences of failure to send their children spells the ruin of their children, and the end of the church as a Reformed church. Because a little leaven leavens the whole lump, and very quickly one family who "gets away with it" turns into half a dozen families, and the elders have lost the ability to call (at least with any "teeth" in the call) anyone.

The Lord is terribly displeased with those who neglect the little ones.

The blessings of catechism may also be shown positively. Look at the church whose youth have been trained from earliest days! See her young men able to defend the faith to their own children, serve as deacons who "hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience," and as elders who are watchmen on the walls of Zion. Observe their young ladies grow up as "cornerstones, polished after the similitude of a palace." As they become mothers in Israel, they take up the greatest responsibility a woman can have—the full-time calling of instructing their youth. These parents now are able to discern the lies their

children may hear, point out to them the beauties and truth in Jesus Christ, and rejoice with "no greater joy" when they behold their children (and grandchildren!) "walk in the truth" which they confessed. These well-trained members understand church government, can recite the church's confession, sing the church's songs, and (if the Lord so blesses the instruction) love the Lord Himself who gave her such rich heritage.

What other kind of member does the church desire?

Let the elders see to a solid course of instruction again this year, and a full year of classes. And enough time (certainly more than 45 minutes for larger classes and for the doctrine classes) for the teacher to instruct without being rushed.

The Lord is terribly displeased with those who neglect the little ones.

Let those who teach devote themselves to the work that has proved to be such a blessing to the church; and remind themselves that a minister's neglect and failures do as much damage to

the church as any individual parent's.

And let us parents remember the exhortation of Wesel in 1568. Besides the reminder to send their children, the fathers of Wesel said, "exhort the parents of the catechumen...to teach them diligently at home."



Letters

Fruit of the Covenant

What a beautiful thing to belong to the body of Christ. What a beautiful thing to belong to a church that strives to be faithful to the Scriptures. What a beautiful thing to see how that church is made up of many members, strong or weak, quick or

slow learner. What a beautiful thing to be part of a church that has a yearning to teach all of the next generation the most comforting truth of God's sovereign grace and do so in common. What a beautiful thing that our church teaches not only the obligation but also the privilege we have to

start and maintain Christian day schools for that end.

A good phrase to describe the above is "the Fruit of God's Covenant."

Wes Koops
Holland, Michigan



Of Flocks and Herds, and Beasts and Birds, and All Within the Sea*

By the grace of God, King Solomon “gave his heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven” (Eccl. 1:13a). Of all the things Solomon searched out and contemplated he wisely took time to examine the things of the creation around him. He was not ignorant of the vast and intricate creation in which God placed him but, rather, grew in his knowledge of that creation in all its forms. He spoke of things from trees and birds to creeping things and fish (I Kings 4:33). The result of all this was that he grew in knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. As a wise king, Solomon taught the knowledge and understanding of the creation to the people (I Kings 4:32-34; Eccl. 12:9).

We do well to learn from King Solomon’s example—to inquire into the intricacies of the creation and to teach our children how the glory of God is revealed therein. As kings, we are called to rule well the creation and to glorify God and promote His kingdom with it. God gave us this beautiful and intricate creation for a purpose. That purpose is that He might display to us, His covenant children, glimpses of His majesty, power, and beauty. What

a glorious opportunity we have each day to look about us, also at ourselves, and contemplate God’s handiwork. What a fantastic privilege our covenant children have to go to good Christian schools, learning together under like-minded teachers who assist us in showing our children each day some of the marvelous things that God has made and continues to govern by His providence.

Such opportunities ought not to be squandered. We must desire to become knowledgeable of the details and marvels that God has placed in the creation for us to see, with the goal that we might give Him the praise and honor that He, the almighty God, deserves. The creation truly is a fantastic display of God’s glory, or as John Calvin called it, the theater of God’s glory.¹

* *The Psalter*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1927, #14, stanza 6—Versification of Psalm 8.

¹ Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Editor: John T. McNeill, Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1967. 1:6:2 (p. 72).

As a new school year begins, may we, with our children, be encouraged and renewed in our zeal to inquire into the details of the creation in order to learn more about our covenant God, and thereby to give Him the praise that is due His name.

*As a new school year begins,
may we, with our children,
be encouraged
and renewed in our zeal
to inquire into the details
of the creation
in order to learn
more about our covenant God,
and thereby to give Him
the praise
that is due His name.*

Let us, like Solomon, examine some of the details of the “beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes” (I Kings 4:33). In this article and others, Lord willing, we will consider some of these kinds of

creatures and stand in awesome wonder of Him who created them.

“And All within the Sea”

We begin with the sea creatures because of our familiarity with them. Many of us find opportunity to fish for food or leisure or have fish as pets. Great aquariums, stocked with a variety of fish, are found at numerous museums. Yet fish are more complicated than we might realize at first. The term “fish” is defined by scientists in a rather narrow way, excluding from the world of fishes what many of us might be tempted to

Mr. Minderhoud is a teacher in Covenant Christian High School and a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, Michigan.

include as fishes. According to scientists a “true fish” must be a cold-blooded vertebrate designed for existence in water, breathe by way of gills, and have limbs that are fins and not toes or fingers. This definition excludes animals that many might call “fish,” such as whales, dolphins, or seals; for although they spend their lives in the water and have other characteristics similar to fish, they are not cold-blooded and do not breathe using gills. There is an even narrower definition that excludes animals such as sharks (cartilaginous rather than having bones) and lampreys (no jaw, no limbs, and no bones). As helpful as these distinctions may be to help show us the great variety of creatures in the sea, many of these categorizations have arisen, unfortunately, out of a desire to promote the lie of evolution.

When we examine the multitudes of different fish in the creation we come to one simple observation. God made an amazingly wide range of diversity among the creatures of the sea. Fish were created with many different characteristics in order to live and “work” in the environment in which God placed them. We confess this in Belgic Confession Article 12—“that He doth give unto every creature its being, shape, form, and several offices.” This leads to fish of great variety, differing in size, shape, color, and habitat.

To view a small sampling of the great variety of fish God made, go to <http://australian-museum.net.au/Fishes>. Whereas we see in this great diversity a picture of the manifold wisdom and beauty of God who made all these different fish, the evolutionist claims it is proof that fish have evolved different characteristics as necessary for their environment. So blind is man by nature.

In contrast to the scientific classifications, the Scriptures,

when making reference to fish, suggest a broader definition by using the phrase, “whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea” (Ps. 8:8). This includes the great fish—the whales—that live in the sea. Although there are multitudes of fascinating individual forms of fish, whose study would be beneficial and would illustrate wondrous things about God, let us take a moment to consider the largest creatures that we find in the seas (and in the entire creation, by the way)—the blue whale. I suspect that if you had an opportunity to see a blue whale you would immediately be impressed by the grandeur and power of God displayed in such a creature and, by comparison, our own smallness. In reality, though, few of us will ever see a blue whale with our own eyes. However, we can still marvel at this creature and see it in our mind’s eye by considering some of the details of this fascinating creature.¹

The blue whale is the largest animal ever known to live on the Earth. We would anticipate that the largest animals on Earth live in water. This is because the water buoys up an object with a force equal to the mass of the water that the object displaces. We all know from life experiences that trying to heft someone more than half our size onto

our shoulders would be quite a feat, but to do so under water is much more feasible. This can be explained by the “buoyancy of water”—that water “lifts” some of the object’s weight, or buoys it. Land animals cannot be as large as a blue whale because their skeletons would crush under the sheer weight of the body. By this design of creation, God restricts or limits the size of animals that live on the land. Thus, we find many of the largest animals in the creation in the depths of the seas.

The blue whale can grow to an amazing length of up to 110 feet. Imagine that a blue whale spans a distance equal to the length of two full-length semi-trailers. This massive creature can weigh up to two hundred tons—a weight equivalent to the weight of twenty full-grown African elephants or two hundred automobiles. Its huge tongue weighs three tons, and its mouth is so enormous that it can hold tons of water and food. Yet, its throat is so narrow that objects must be smaller than a beach ball to be swallowed. Baby blue whales weigh as much as a grown hippopotamus, and during the first seven months they drink up to one hundred gallons of milk per day—gaining two hundred pounds each day.

To maintain that weight and size, an adult blue whale must have an incredible source of nourishment. It is calculated that an average blue whale has a daily diet of three million calories (the recommended daily allowance for us is 2000 to 2500 calories). These calories come primarily from its main food source—a tiny shrimp-like creature called krill. The blue whale eats approximately four tons of krill per day or forty million krill. What an incredible amount of tiny krill there must be in the ocean in order to feed *all* the blue whales with a *daily*

¹ The following sources, from which we derived many of the facts and figures used in this article, would make worthwhile additional reading:

Calambokidis, John and Gretchen Steiger. *Blue Whales*. Voyageur Press, 1997.

<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/blue-whale.html>

<http://www.animalcorner.co.uk/galapagos/bluewhale.html>

<http://www.seaworld.org/animal-info/info-books/baleen/index.htm>

<http://www.acsonline.org/fact-pack/bluewhl.htm>

diet of forty million krill; and note that the blue whale is not the only creature that eats krill for its sustenance! Clearly we see in this example evidence that God cares for all His creatures and supplies them with their daily needs. “These wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good” (Ps. 104:27, 28).

Interestingly, despite the blue whale’s size, which so readily captures our attention, this enormous creature of God moves through the water with remarkable ease and freedom of motion. The law of God for this creature is that it lives in the water. Equipped by God with many special characteristics, it is certainly at home in the vast sea. The blue whale is technically not a fish, but a mammal. Consequently, it is warm-blooded and breathes air through its lungs.

Warm-blooded creatures maintain a constant interior temperature regardless of the surrounding environmental temperature. In order to maintain this constant body temperature, a blue whale must consume much food, which in turn will be converted to heat energy. This explains in part why a blue whale eats forty million krill every day. Also, the blue whale needs a great source of insulation in order to survive the frigid water temperatures in which it often lives. God therefore equips the blue whale with a hefty layer of blubber. The blue whale has so much fatty insulation that it was once heavily hunted for that blubber. The blubber from one ninety-foot long blue whale could be converted into one hundred and twenty barrels of oil.

As a mammal, the blue whale breathes oxygen by using lungs, like humans and other mammals do. To allow the blue whale to

stay under water for long periods of time, God gave it efficient lungs. Whereas humans can hold their breath under water for a minute or so, blue whales can remain under water for twenty minutes or longer before surfacing to exhale through the blowhole and inhale fresh oxygen. This is due to the highly efficient lungs with which God equips the blue whale. While human lungs exchange around fifteen percent of the oxygen in each breath, the blue whale’s lungs exchange up to ninety percent.

In addition, the blue whale must be able to withstand tremendous water pressure. When the blue whale swims to the great depths of the sea, there is tremendous pressure exerted on the whale. We all recognize that water pressure increases with depth. Swim a few feet under water and your ears will not

“pop,” but swim to the bottom of a 12-foot swimming pool and they will. Similarly, as the blue whale swims deeper it experiences greater water pressure. In order to prevent the blue whale’s ribs from being crushed by the tremendous water pressure to which it is subjected in the depths of the oceans, God in His wise designs created the blue whale with cartilage-like ribs that can flex and adjust to the great variety of pressures that are experienced in its habitat.

For Our Consideration

Why choose, for our consideration in this article, the *blue whale*, out of “all within the sea”? For the same ultimate reason we look into *anything* in this creation—to honor God and to grow in knowledge of His wisdom and greatness. As God cares for this immense creature, so He will

daily provide us with what we need for our physical existence—a comforting reminder in these lean economic times. Our God is greatly to be praised for He provides all we need in body and in soul.

In addition, God makes explicitly clear that the creation is one organic whole—a living creation made up of many different creatures working together according to their God-given callings. All creatures are intimately woven together with other creatures—tiny krill (that consume even tinier photosynthetic plankton) supply the dietary needs of the mammoth blue whale. So, ultimately, the mighty blue whale is dependent on tiny solar energy-converting plants in the vast oceans.

And similarly, God gives to us our daily needs through the means of His other creatures. Consider for a moment how dependent we are upon the physical creation for our physical existence. We need air to breathe, we need food from the earth, and we depend on bacteria to purify our water. When mindful of this we ought to be more conscious of the fact that we are *stewards* of God’s glorious creation—avoiding waste and abuse. And hereby we learn also to confess that our dependence is ultimately on God, who governs all things—the molecules of the air, the bacteria in the ground, and all within the sea.

In addition, this interdependence within the creation reminds us that not only do we belong to the organic whole of creation, but we belong to the organic Body of Christ. The creation constantly testifies to us that we need each other *and* that we are needed. We each serve a place in the body of Christ and seek to live in loving


*As God cares for
this immense creature,
so He will
daily provide us
with what we need
for our physical existence....*

service for each other in the Body. Praise God for giving us such a marvelous creation and a place within the Body of Christ despite our own unworthiness.

Finally, we must not ignore the very simple and obvious truth God shows to us by the majesty of the blue whale—that our God is the All-powerful and majestic One. Much of what we learned about the blue whale focused on its great size. The massiveness of the creature, its appetite, its habitat—all speak to us of our God. When we stand before this

creature, we stand in *awe*. But not in awe of the creature in and of itself, but in awe of God the Creator. God created the blue whale and all things, with such beauty, power, and magnificent detail, to show us who He is. God is powerful. God is majestic. How clearly are these attributes on display as we examine the blue whale! Praise Him for the glimpses of that within the creation.

Let us seek and search out the things of creation, whether magnificently large or delicately ti-

ny—and see the *glory* of our God. As we enter another school year let us remember that throughout the day we are privileged to inquire into some of the glory of our God. So it is in all of our life. Whether young or old, look and listen to the beautiful things in the creation and honor Him who made it so. “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (Rev. 4:11). 

Understanding the Times

Mr. Rick DeVries

Religious Freedoms Threatened

Those of us who live in America are ruled by a government the seeds of which came from the ungodly enlightenment thinkers. These thinkers proposed that all authority came from the people and not from God. They proposed a violent revolution to overthrow what they perceived as an oppressive regime. Our country's founders thought this was an acceptable means to an end, freedom. We as Reformed Christians obviously disagree with that view of the government, revolution, and freedom.

Nevertheless, God in His providence has now, for well over two hundred years, provided us a country that is governed as a democratic republic that af-

fords us many freedoms. This has allowed the church of Jesus Christ to worship freely, proclaim the gospel, and form Christian schools with little or no interference to this point.

Our constitution calls for three branches of government that check and balance each other and make sure that those that govern do not abuse their power. To further mitigate this risk and ensure our freedoms, we have certain rights guaranteed by amendments to the constitution, which have become the rule of law for the land.

Of those freedoms, the ones we hold most dear have to do with the freedoms of religion that we now enjoy in our land. The 1st and 14th amendments set out two guarantees of religious freedom. The guarantees prohibit an establishment of religion (the Establishment Clause), and any arbitrary interference by government in the “free exercise” of religion (the Free Exercise Clause).

Those of us who are Christians living here in America should be thankful for these freedoms. We know the Bible indicates that as we come to the last days there will be less and less toleration of true Christianity. There will even be outright persecution in the entire world, and ultimately the one-world government will also control religion. Therefore, it would behoove us to know a little about the challenges to these clauses over the years and how these clauses have been interpreted recently. This will allow those with an understanding of the times to prepare for what will come in the future in these regards.

We don't want to be ungrateful or become complacent about protecting these freedoms. Compared to the level of government control in other countries such as China or Myanmar, where we see God's people struggling to meet and proclaim the gospel, we have it very good.

Mr. DeVries is a teacher in Covenant Christian High School and a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, Michigan.

There have been many landmark cases in the U.S. involving religious freedoms involving both the Establishment Clause and Free Exercise Clause.

The Establishment Clause, or the separation of church and state, as it has been fought in the courts has largely had to do, in one way or another, with religion and education—issues such as prayer and the use of the Bible in public schools, teaching of evolution, seasonal displays, etc.

While the right to hold varying religious beliefs is currently protected under the Free Exercise Clause, the right to act on those beliefs is not. The Supreme Court has recognized that the right to practice one's religion must yield to the interests of society in some circumstances. A parent's right to refuse medical treatment for a sick child, for example, may be subordinate to the state's interest in protecting the health, safety, and welfare of its minor children. Similarly, polygamy and child labor laws have been upheld in the face of free exercise.

We may agree with those rulings, which are largely against various cults and adherent religious groups, but yet, in light of increasing government control in our own country, one is left to wonder how much longer we as conservative Christians will be afforded these freedoms—especially when it comes to preaching and practicing our own distinctive beliefs, which increasingly run against societal norms.

The Supreme Court is the main part of the branch of the government that has the responsibility of checking the power of the other two branches. Their rulings make sure other branches

remain within the constraints of the constitutions. By doing so, the high court sees to it that the constitutional rights of the individual are not being trampled by the government, including the Free Exercise and Establishment Clauses.

However, in some cases the Supreme Court has shown willingness to level the Free Exercise Clause by making it subordinate to any governmental objective, so long as that objective was nominally rational and evenhanded. This leaves an opening for challenging our own Reformed, biblical beliefs and practices in the future.

As was noted with some alarm in my last article published in the *Standard Bearer* (September 15, 2008, p. 494), the government is using the "economic crisis" to control the mortgage lenders and banks. Now, since that article was published, we see the government taking increasing control of other sectors that were in private hands. Our government has taken controlling interest in the auto industry, and now is debating how much it should control the health-care industry.

The founding fathers of our country knew that the more spheres of the private sector that the government ends up controlling,

the less freedom the people will enjoy. If we become uninterested and apathetic toward those dangers, the problem is no longer complacency, but outright dependence on the government for just about everything. When more and more of the citizenry is dependent on the government, they will not be in the position any longer to question the actions

of the government or to fight the encroachments of the government upon religious freedoms.

Sonia Sotomayor was nominated by President Obama to replace Justice Souter on the Supreme Court. The Senate hearing to decide whether to confirm her or not was set for July 13. There has been much debate already in the media whether the nominee will exercise judicial restraint or activism if confirmed and does indeed become a Supreme Court Justice. By taking a look at Sotomayor's oft-quoted "policy is made" statement of 2005 in reference to her role on the U.S. Court of Appeals, it appears she will lean towards the latter. Considering the liberal nature of this nominee, this is a very dangerous way of looking at the role of a Supreme Court Justice, for those of us who value our freedoms as *guaranteed* in the Constitution.

The debate over Sotomayor's nomination will probably be long over before this article gets published, but it might do us some good to look at a similar debate our country had over twenty years ago. Ronald Reagan had nominated Robert Bork in 1987. Bork was a nominee who also was accused of practicing judicial activism, only this time with a conservative slant. It would be profitable to re-read the article by a very capable *SB* writer, James Lanting, in the December 1, 1988 issue of the *SB* in an article entitled, "A Nation of Laws or Lawlessness?"

As Mr. Lanting wrote back in 1988, whether the nominee practices judicial activism or not in an "undemocratic way" is important for our "democratic rights," but it is not the larger issue. The larger issue is whether we, or any nominee to the Supreme Court, should put our faith in a legislative body that is swayed by public opinion, or in the Bible, for moral direction. Unfortunately, a Reformed and Christian jurist who looks to

...in light of increasing government control in our own country, one is left to wonder how much longer we as conservative Christians will be afforded these freedoms....

God's Word as Law will not be nominated.

We must be men and women who have an understanding of the times. It is important that we follow these nominations carefully and understand that these events can have an effect on our church life as well as our individual freedoms as Christians.

I will end with a fitting quote from Mr. Lanting's article of December 1, 1988.

But the Reformed citizen is called to more than passive obedience. He has a mandate actively to be the salt of the earth by witnessing to the government by speaking to or corresponding with his elected representatives,

lawfully demonstrating when necessary, and exercising his right to vote and take office. Finally, the Christian citizen will pray for his legislators and judges that "God may rule and guide them in all their ways, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (Belgic Confession, Art. 36).



Special Article

Rev. Angus Stewart

Rome and Politics (8):

Rome's Syncretism with Pagan Religions

Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (1965)

Given the Roman Church's false ecumenism with the Eastern Orthodox, Anglicans, and Protestants, it is no surprise that it is engaged in syncretism with pagan religions.¹ After all, Jehoshaphat's false ecumenism with the apostate Northern Kingdom (II Chron. 18; 20:31-37) led him into syncretism with pagan Edom (II Kings 3). Rome has always been syncretistic to some degree. Witness its compromises in the conversion of the barbarians in Northern and Eastern Europe or the acceptance of pagan elements in its

missionary work in Asia (where a Jesuit, Francis Xavier, even went too far for the pope), Central and South America, and Africa. In God's just judgment, those who are willing to sell the truth of His Word in exchange for worldly, economic, or political gain find it hard to stop.² With apostate churches, like Rome, things are far worse than we imagine; just read Ezekiel 8.

Vatican II (1962-1965) gives modern Rome's creedal position on both its false ecumenism (the *Decree of Ecumenism* [1964]) and its syncretism (the *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* [1965]).³

² Apostate Protestants and the World Council of Churches are also engaged both in false ecumenism and in syncretism with paganism for the same reasons.

³ Both documents are found in Walter M. Abbot (gen. ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II* (USA: The America Press, 1966, p. 345). Henceforward, pages in parentheses refer to this book. By "Church," Roman Catholic authors mean the Roman Catholic Church; by "Catholic," they mean Roman Catholic.

The latter is the shortest of Vatican II's sixteen documents and is named *Nostra Aetate* in Latin (*In Our Age*).

The *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* deliberately and explicitly emphasizes, and "gives primary consideration" to (p. 660), "common" ground (pp. 660, 663, 665) between Roman Catholicism and pagan religions. After a somewhat philosophical introduction, which seeks to find some lowest common denominator in man's humanity and religiosity, and a paragraph outlining the evolutionary idea of the development of religion (pp. 660-661), *Nostra Aetate* turns to various religions, starting with those "farthest" from Christianity before coming to those "nearest" to it (pp. 661-667).⁴

⁴ Rome works the other way, from those religions "nearest" to it to those "farthest" from it, in two shorter treatments of this subject: Vatican II's *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (1964), pp. 34-35, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (USA: Doubleday, 1995), pp. 242-243.

¹ False ecumenism is illegitimate communion between groups claiming to be Christian; syncretism is illegitimate communion between those claiming to be Christian and pagans.

Rev. Stewart is pastor of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland.

Previous article in this series: May 1, 2009, p. 352.

Hinduism, Buddhism, and Other Religions

Despite Hinduism's 330 million gods, holy cows, animal sacrifices, and caste system, the *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* finds in this religion, a religion of some one billion people, many of whom are in India, "a certain perception of that hidden power which hovers over the course of things and over the events of human life" (p. 661):

...in Hinduism men contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an unspent fruitfulness of myths and through searching philosophical inquiry. They seek release from the anguish of our condition through ascetical practices or deep meditation or a loving, trusting flight toward God (pp. 661-662).

Like Hinduism, out of which it arose, atheistic Buddhism teaches reincarnation. On this religion, found predominately in East Asia and numbering about 400 million followers, *Nostra Aetate* declares,

Buddhism in its multiple forms acknowledges the radical insufficiency of this shifting world. It teaches a path by which men, in a devout and confident spirit, can either reach a state of absolute freedom or attain supreme enlightenment by their own efforts or by higher assistance (p. 662).

The Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism, is a frequent visitor to the Vatican, for dialogue with the pope on promoting global religious peace.

Sikhism, Jainism, African religions, and native American religions are included in this catch-all statement dealing with smaller, less well-known religions: "Likewise, other religions to be found everywhere strive variously to answer the restless searchings of the hu-

man heart by proposing 'ways,' which consist of teachings, rules of life, and sacred ceremonies" (p. 662).

Rome believes that there are things that are "true and holy in these religions" and in their "ways of conduct and of life," for they "often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men" (p. 662).

Islam

The world's 1.5 billion or so Muslims are mostly in Islamic countries and provinces centered in, and spread out from, the Middle East, with wars and conflicts on many of their borders with non-Muslims. Rome states,

Upon the Moslems, too, the Church looks with esteem. They adore one God, living and enduring, merciful and all-powerful, Maker of heaven and earth and Speaker to men. They strive to submit wholeheartedly even to His inscrutable decrees, just as did Abraham, with whom the Islamic faith is pleased to associate itself. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin mother; at times they call on her, too, with devotion. In addition they await the day of judgment when God will give each man his due after raising him up. Consequently, they prize the moral life, and give worship to God especially through prayer, almsgiving, and fasting (p. 663).¹

Yet, just to take one example, Pope Urban II declared full remission of all sin for all who would die traveling to, or fighting in,

¹ Rome's syncretism with Islam (like all syncretism) is a two-edged sword. Rome sees it as a way to win Muslims to itself, while devout Muslims seek to use it to draw Roman Catholics to Islamic Unitarianism (cf. Malachi Martin, *The Keys of This Blood: The Struggle for World Dominion Between Pope John Paul II, Mikhail Gorbachev, and the Capitalist West* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990], p. 285).

the first crusade (1095)!² What an about-face in Rome's views of Islam from the days of the crusades, or even a century ago!

Vatican II's *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (1964) is even more explicit: "along with us, [the Muslims] adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind" (p. 35). Speaking to Muslims in Casablanca in Morocco, John Paul II affirmed, "We believe in the same God, the one and only God, the living God, the God who creates worlds and brings creatures to their perfection" (8 August, 1985).³ When in Turkey (28 November - 1 December, 2006), Benedict XVI, unpopular with many Roman Catholics for being "too conservative," declared that Christians and Muslims praise the same God.⁴

What! Islam believes in and worships the same God as Christianity! Even though it denounces the Trinity as blasphemy, rejects the Deity of the Son of God, denies Christ's crucifixion and atonement on the cross, and decries the inspired Scriptures as hopelessly corrupt! A few centuries before, irate Roman Catholics would have called for the burning of John Paul II and Benedict XVI at the stake for this, and Vatican II would have been denounced as an assembly of heretics!

Judaism

The *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* reserves its longest

² Similarly, Islam's Koran teaches that Allah will bring all those dying in jihad against the infidels straight to paradise, where they will be surrounded by many virgins with big eyes.

³ RC Committee for Other Faiths, "Other Faiths: What Does the Church Teach?" (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1986), p. 27.

⁴ There is, of course, a sense in which Roman Catholics and pagans do worship the same god: their father below (John 8:44).

treatment for Judaism, a religion with some 12-25 million followers (pp. 663-667). Abraham, Moses, the prophets, Christ, the apostles, and “most of the early disciples” were Jews; the Old Testament is used by both Jews and Christians; and “the Jews still remain most dear to God” (p. 664). *In Our Age* continues:

Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is so great, this sacred Synod wishes to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit above all of biblical and theological studies, and of brotherly dialogues (p. 665).

The Jews’ role in the crucifixion of Christ and Rome’s historic anti-Semitism are explained away in a politically correct way (pp. 665-667).

“Mother” Teresa of Calcutta

A prime example of Rome’s syncretism is seen in “Mother” Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997), darling of Roman Catholics and liberal Protestants, who is being fast-tracked for canonization as a Roman Catholic “saint.”

“Mother” Teresa declared: “If in coming face to face with God we accept Him in our lives, then we are converting. We become a better Hindu, a better Muslim, a better [Roman] Catholic, a better whatever we are.... What God is in your mind you must accept.”

“Mother” Teresa also participated in a “Summit for Peace” in Assisi, Italy, in November, 1986. This blasphemous prayer meeting was arranged by Pope John Paul II and was attended by leaders of pagan religions, including Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, Shinto, Sikh and North American Indian—all of whom united in prayers for world peace.¹

¹ “Mother” Teresa (1910-1997)” (www.rapidnet.com/~jbeard/bdm/exposes/teresa/general.htm).

“Outside the [Roman] Church There Is No Salvation”?

What then of the famous formula, taken by Rome historically in a self-serving sense: “outside the [Roman] Church there is no salvation”? Robert Zins lists various proclamations by popes and Roman councils from A.D. 585 to 1950, stating Rome’s traditional position.² For instance, the Council of Florence (1438) declared,

It firmly believes, professes, and proclaims that those not living within the [Roman] Catholic Church, *not only pagans, but also Jews and heretics and schismatics* cannot become participants in eternal life, but will depart ‘into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels’ (Matt. 25:41).³

In *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (1964), “outside the [Roman] Church there is no salvation” is taken to mean “Whosoever... knowing that the Catholic Church was made necessary by God through Jesus Christ, would refuse to enter her or to remain in her could not be saved” (pp. 32-33).

This does not seem to exclude Jews or Muslims (pp. 34-35), for they are also included in “the plan of salvation” (p. 35). Moreover, “good” people can be saved *in any religion or none*:

Those also can attain to ever-

² Robert Zins, *Romanism: The Relentless Roman Catholic Assault on the Gospel of Jesus Christ!* (USA: White Horse Publications, 1994), pp. 202-205.

³ Quoted in Zins, *Romanism*, p. 203.

lasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of their conscience (p. 35).

The Holy See has clearly given up its historic view of all other religions (and churches!) as false and idolatrous, another U-turn euphemistically called *aggiornamento* (Italian for “updating”). Rome still sees itself as *the* church ordained by Christ upon Peter, possessing “the very fullness of grace and truth,” as the *Decree of Ecumenism* puts it (p. 346), but—and this is the key point—whatever measure of grace and truth is in the other religions (or churches) leads back to Rome as the apex and fulfillment of all religion, for it is Christ’s one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

In its evaluation of pagan religions, as throughout its theology, Rome is opposed to God’s Word. All religions are false and idolatrous that do not worship the triune God of the Bible revealed in the cross of the Son of God (first commandment) as He has laid down in the Holy Scriptures (second commandment). Those who follow pagan religions are idolaters. In fact, they are serving demons, as both the Old Testament (Lev. 17:7; Deut. 32:17; II Chron. 11:15; Ps. 106:37) and the New (I Cor. 10:20-21; Rev. 9:20) declare.⁴

⁴ For a modern, irenic critique of inclusivism (similar to what I am calling syncretism), see Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson

The Holy See rejects the scriptural position against paganism because it is thoroughly riddled with higher criticism of the Bible, evolutionism, and humanism; and it is itself pagan and idolatrous.

The Holy See rejects the scriptural position against paganism because it is thoroughly riddled with higher criticism of the Bible, evolutionism, and humanism; and it is itself pagan and idolatrous. Furthermore, the spirit of the ungodly world wants and promotes syncretism (and ecumenism). Syncretism is seen as the way of promoting world peace. This is evident from the policies and work of many national governments, the United Nations, and various non-governmental bodies, such as the Tony Blair Faith Foundation (TBFF).¹ This is the

(eds.), *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008).

¹ The website of the TBFF carries endorsements for the inter-faith work of Tony Blair (Roman Catholic convert and former prime minister of the UK) from, amongst others, Rowan Williams (Archbishop of Canterbury), Nicky Gumbel (Alpha Course), and Rick Warren (Purpose Driven Life). The TBFF is helping to set up Abraham House in central London, where members of the three "Abrahamic

purpose too with modern compendia of the texts of various religions.²

Goal and Methods of Rome's Syncretism


The goal of Rome's syncretism (like the goal of its false ecumenism) is the absorption and assimilation of all religions (and churches) into one worldwide religion (and church) – itself! The methods of its syncretism mirror those of its false ecumenism:

faiths," Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, can "discover what they share," "tackle their differences," and "work for a more peaceful and just world."

² For instance, *World Scripture: A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts* (USA: Paragon House, 1995), which contains citations from the books of over twenty different religions, states its purpose: "One guiding principle behind *World Scripture* is that all religions are connected to the same Ultimate Reality and lead people toward a common goal" (p. 33), which is, as the preface puts it, "peace on earth" (p. xiv). As one would expect, the advisors and contributors include Roman Catholics.

honeyed words and common social activities: "...prudently and lovingly, through dialogue and collaboration...acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral goods found among these men, as well as the values in their society and culture" (pp. 662-663) and "make common cause of safeguarding and fostering social justice, moral values, peace, and freedom" (p. 663). Rome's number 1 means of syncretism is, of course, dialogue (pp. 662, 665)! If evolutionism reckons that everything has come (eventually) through time *and chance*, Rome reckons everything will come its way (eventually) through time *and dialogue*.

With all the Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, and Protestant churches and others under Rome's wing through false ecumenism and all the pagans under its umbrella through syncretism, the pope would have the whole world in his hands.

We will conclude by considering Rome's credentials and gospel as it seeks world dominion. 

Origins of the PRC

Rev. Andy Lanning

Henry Danhof(6)

Danhof and Common Grace

One Sunday morning in 1925, two ministers had a race to the pulpit to see who would lead the worship service. Rev. Henry Danhof won.

Rev. Lanning is pastor of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan.

Previous article in this series: November 15, 2008, p. 92.

He was not about to lose—not after what he had just been through. He had been branded an Anabaptist. He had been reprimanded by synod. He had been badgered by classis. Repeatedly, he had tried to resign from the office of minister of the gospel. Repeatedly, his consistory had refused his resignation. He had been deposed from office, ille-

gally, by Classis Grand Rapids West of the Christian Reformed Church. And finally, the same classis had appointed another minister to lead the worship services of the First CRC of Kalamazoo, the newly deposed Danhof's congregation.

This all was simply too much for Rev. Danhof, and he was determined to be first to the pulpit the

next Lord's Day. He secretly made arrangements with the consistory and congregation to begin the worship service half an hour early. By the time his opponent arrived at church and poked his head through the side door leading onto the platform, the service was already well underway. And to ensure that their pastor would not be disturbed, all of the strong young men of the congregation were sitting in the front row with their arms crossed. The losing minister turned around and went home, and Rev. Danhof kept his pulpit.

The occasion for all of this excitement was the controversy over common grace. By the time Henry Danhof arrived in the First Christian Reformed Church of Kalamazoo, MI, in 1918, the idea of a common grace of God was already being promoted vigorously by prominent men in the CRC. Danhof had publicly opposed this teaching from time to time, but he had been busier defending the truth against other false doctrines: the premillennialism of Harry Bultema and the higher criticism of Ralph Janssen. However, by 1922, it was becoming clear to all that the root issue of those other controversies was the theory of common grace. Henry J. VanAndel, a proponent of common grace, claimed in the July 4, 1922 edition of *Religion and Culture*, "The problem of Common Grace is the problem in Reformed circles the world over. It is also the problem in our Christian Reformed denomination. It appears more and more that at the bottom of all our controversies the question is: what we think of Common Grace." Rev. Herman Hoeksema, who denied the idea of common grace, likewise saw that in the Janssen case the "underlying principle is the theory of common grace."¹

¹ Herman Hoeksema, *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America* (Grand Rapids: First Protestant Reformed Church, 1936), p. 23.

As readers of the *Standard Bearer* well know, the central question in this controversy has to do with God's attitude toward mankind. Does God favor all men? Is He in some way graciously disposed toward every human born? Or is God's favor and grace only for His people, for the elect?

The Christian Reformed denomination was divided on the question. Several prominent ministers had been teaching for some time that God in some sense has positive, gracious feelings for all men, including the reprobate, which feelings are expressed in His material, scientific, and cultural blessings that allow the life of man to develop in the world.

On the other hand, the Revs. Henry Danhof, Herman Hoeksema, and George Ophoff taught that God is gracious only toward the elect. The development of man's life in the world is not a fruit of God's grace to him, but God's providence. Even though ungodly men develop the life of the world, they are not doing good—not in God's estimation. For they use all of their developments in the service of sin. And therefore the material, scientific, and cultural advances of mankind must not be seen as God's blessings on all men, or as indicating some favor of God to all men. Rather, they are an evidence of God's providential care of His creatures. In an article written several years later, Henry Danhof summarized the controversy this way:

Dr. A. Kuyper, Sr., in his "Stone Lectures on Calvinism," had defined common grace, in distinction from particular grace, which works salvation, as something "by which God, maintaining the life of the world, relaxes the curse which rests upon it, arrests its process of corruption, and thus allows the untrammelled development of our life in which to glorify Himself as Creator." Over

against this, the Revs. H. Hoeksema and H. Danhof, who denied common grace, maintained, negatively, that God is not gracious to the ungodly reprobate; that there is no operation of grace in the heart of the reprobate; and that there is no influence of grace outside of regeneration whereby the sinner is able to do good before God; and, positively, that God's grace is always particular, for His people, the elect only; that the development of sin follows the organic line of development of the human race; that the natural man is wholly incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil.²

The lines were being drawn, and it appeared that the next battle to convulse the CRC would be over the theory of common grace.

Enter Rev. Jan Karl Van Baalen. VanBaalen did not have much use for Danhof's theology. He especially bristled at Danhof's insistence that there was nothing spiritually good in the ungodly: not their culture, not their science, not even their marriages. In a speech in 1919, Danhof had gone so far as to compare the adulterous marriages of the ancient heathens to bestiality. Danhof meant that, as far as God was concerned, the adulterous marriages of the heathens were no holier than the animal passions of beasts. No matter how enthralled cultured man became with the ancient Greek love stories, God found no pleasure in them, and counted them as sin. VanBaalen was outraged.

Taking aim at Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema, Van Baalen began a pamphlet war. In his writings, he accused all who denied common grace of being Anabaptists. According to his logic, those who deny God's grace to the ungodly must also deny that there is anything good

² Henry Danhof, *Weekly Bulletin*, no publication information, vol. 2, no. 330, p. 4.

or useful in the scientific and cultural products of the ungodly. And anyone who denies that there is anything good in science or culture must separate himself as much as possible from the life of mankind in this world: Anabaptists.

Hoeksema and Danhof responded with booklets of their own, in which they insisted that a denial of common grace was Reformed and biblical. It is worth taking note of Van Baalen's charge that Danhof was an Anabaptist. Henry Danhof's actions in the First CRC of Kalamazoo proved that charge false. Neither he nor his congregation had any interest in fleeing away from the life of man in the world. They had a great interest in fleeing worldliness, but that is something different. As far as the science, culture, and commerce of the world were concerned, they lived right in the midst of the world, though they were not of the world.


For instance, Henry Danhof had a keen interest in astronomy. He loved nothing better than to examine the heavens by night. One can imagine Henry as an orphaned shepherd boy on the shores of the North Sea in the Netherlands, his face lifted upward in the dark night to behold the host that God had brought out. This was not a boy who would grow up to flee the science of man. He would certainly grow up to criticize the unbelief of worldly scientists. How could anyone with an understanding of the stars not also be in awe of the God of the stars? "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth" (Is. 40:26). But criticizing the unbelief of worldly scientists is not the same as shunning science.

As another example, Henry Danhof instituted an English-language worship service in the First CRC of Kalamazoo. Twice on the Lord's Day he would preach in Dutch, and once in English. A Dutchman preaching in English? Surely this was not a man trying to isolate himself or his congregation from the culture of America. He certainly warned against the disobedience to God's law that he found in American culture. For example, his congregation heard him oppose the labor union on more than one occasion. But as to using the American language for worship, here was something perfectly acceptable to him.

The whole matter of common grace would soon be taken up by the CRC Synod of 1924, held in Kalamazoo. It is not really fair to recount the actions of this important synod in such little space as we have left in this article. But fine accounts of it can be found elsewhere in our churches' literature, so we will have to be content with a brief overview.

Several protests and overtures were filed with synod dealing with the theory of common grace and with the persons of Rev. Hoeksema and Rev. Danhof. Debate on the floor of synod was long and contentious, especially over the formulation of what would become known as the "First Point" of common grace. Eventually synod adopted a motion that, among other things, formulated the doctrine of common grace in three points.¹ Synod also declared that some of Danhof's and Hoeksema's expressions "do not har-

monize well with what the Scriptures and the confessions teach us regarding the three points." Nevertheless, synod declared with respect to the two ministers, "It cannot be denied that, in the basic truths of the Reformed faith as set forth in our confessions, they are Reformed, albeit with a tendency to be one-sided."²

Rev. Danhof, who was a delegate to synod, formally protested the adoption of the Three Points by a written letter. He pointed out that it had become obvious from various activities on the floor of synod that synod was not at all prepared to make a unified, definitive statement on the three points of common grace that had been adopted. Synod had acted too hastily in adopting the proposal formulating the three points of common grace, a doctrine about which it was not fully decided. Danhof also denied "that synod had clearly and correctly reproduced what Scripture and the standards teach."³ Because of all of this, Danhof informed the synod that he was constrained to "protest formally against these synodical decisions" as well as "to take practical measures against them."⁴ What these practical measures were, we shall see next time. 

¹ For a convenient quotation of the three points adopted by synod, as well as a discussion of the doctrine contained in the three points, see Herman Hoeksema and Herman Hanko, *Ready to Give an Answer: A Catechism of Reformed Distinctives* (Grandville, Michigan: RFP, 1997), especially Section II.

² *Acts of Synod of the Christian Reformed Church: 1924*, trans. Henry De Mots (Grand Rapids: Archives of the CRC, 200), Article 132, II.

³ D. H. Kromminga, *The Christian Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1943), p. 146.

⁴ *Acts of Synod: 1924*, Article 149, p. 199.

Missionary to Islam: Samuel Zwemer

One of the most prolific writers and proponents of missions through the first half of the 1900s was Dr. Samuel Zwemer. Zwemer authored over fifty books and countless articles promoting mission labors primarily among the Muslims. In addition, through his influence with the Student Volunteer Movement and as professor at Princeton, Dr. Zwemer influenced countless numbers of young men and women to go into missionary service. J. Christy Wilson, Jr. states that Zwemer probably influenced more young people to consider missionary service than anyone else in all of Christian history. Kenneth Scott Latourette writes in his introduction to J. Christy Wilson, Sr.'s biography of Zwemer:

It will never be known, unless God himself discloses it in "that land of large dimensions," how many missionaries either first heard the call or had their purpose crystallized through the compelling, loving appeal of Dr. Zwemer. Nor until that roster is revealed will it be clear how many countries have been touched by them or how many thousands have been introduced to eternal life by their witness.

According to Ruth A. Tucker, Samuel Zwemer's converts were "probably less than a dozen

during his nearly forty years of service" and his "greatest contribution to missions was that of stirring Christians to the need for evangelism to Muslims."

Samuel Zwemer was born on April 12, 1867 as the thirteenth of fifteen children born to Adriaan and Catherina Zwemer. Samuel's father, Adriaan, was a pastor in the Reformed Church of America (RCA). Samuel was born in the parsonage at Vriesland. Rev. Adriaan Zwemer had aspirations to be a missionary to Africa, but God in His providence kept him in America, where he served churches in Wisconsin, New York, Michigan, and Iowa. Samuel enjoyed a close relationship to his father and later found the entire absence of the idea of fatherhood in the Muslim doctrine appalling at both a spiritual and a personal level.

After graduating from Hope College, Zwemer continued his education in September of 1887 at the theological seminary of the RCA in New Brunswick, New York. Samuel was fluent in three languages already as a child. While in seminary Samuel displayed an increasing interest and zeal for foreign missions and decided to take up the study of medicine along with his seminary courses in order to prepare him for overseas missions.

While a seminary student, Zwemer joined two other students to form an Arabian Mission Society. They chose Arabia because the Muslim religion was the only one that had met and conquered Christianity on a large scale and

therefore was the great rival of the Christian faith. He arranged his first mission conference during his second year of seminary, a conference that featured speakers and delegates from many other seminaries. The conference was a great success, and the young seminary student began to devote his vacation times to speaking engagements throughout Michigan, Illinois, and Iowa promoting foreign missions.

Zwemer graduated with honors in 1890 and was ordained in the RCA in May. In June he sailed for Arabia and joined up with a classmate one year older than he who was laboring in Beirut. Both men sailed throughout Arabia, visiting various cities and learning the culture and language of the Arabs. Zwemer made it his business to know everything there was to know about missions to the Muslims. One of his first books was a biography of the thirteenth century missionary Raymond Lull, after whom he later named one of his sons.

In 1896 Zwemer met a nurse, Amy Wilkes, who was on her way to assist with a medical mission in Australia. They were married on May 18 at the British Consulate in Baghdad and proceeded to the island of Bahrain. During their forty plus years of marriage, God blessed them with six children, two of whom died in 1904 of dysentery.

While in Bahrain, Zwemer pursued extensive studies of the Koran in original Arabic, striving to understand the religion through the eyes of its best ad-

Rev. Brummel is a home missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches, stationed in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

vocates. As a result he wrote a book entitled *The Moslem Doctrine of God*. This book highlights the differences between Muslim and biblical theology. Zwemer exposed the fact that Islam underestimates the holiness of God and the offensiveness of sin. The result is that there is no effective remedy for sin. Zwemer rightly and boldly attributed this error to the hand of Satan.

In 1905 the Zwemers returned to the United States, where he spent the next five years speaking at conventions and promoting mission work in Muslim countries. In 1912 he moved his family to Cairo, the center of Islamic thought and in many ways a key city to Muslims of Africa and Egypt.

While in Cairo, Zwemer established close relations with the professors at Al Ahzar University, the oldest and greatest Muslim university in the world. Zwemer provided Bibles and Christian literature to interested professors and sat in on courses and interacted with the teachers.

In the years during which he was stationed in Cairo, Zwemer traveled extensively throughout the world to hold conferences and preach. He always had literature with him and was always looking for opportunities to hand it to individuals. One year alone he traveled 19,000 miles in North Africa and East India, giving fifteen major conferences and ninety-nine public addresses in English, Arabic, French, and Dutch. He was invited to speak in mosques, Muslim schools, Muslim literary societies, and military schools, because of his command of Arabic and Islam.

Beginning in 1911, as the fruit of a conference, Zwemer was involved in establishing a quarterly publication called *The Moslem World*. For thirty-seven years, regardless of his extensive traveling, Zwemer, as editor of this scholarly publication, put together an issue each quarter.

In 1920 Zwemer accepted an invitation from Princeton Theological Seminary to be professor of the Chair of History of Religion and Christian Missions. His travels continued as he taught summer courses and spoke for conferences and conventions in addition to writing books and articles. He faced mandatory retirement from Princeton at the age of 70, though he was able to continue teaching a couple of classes until he was 71.

But Zwemer had no desire to quit working. At his 70th birthday Zwemer gave an interesting talk about life beginning at seventy. After citing biblical passages, he listed these seven reasons: 1) We should have a diploma from the school of experience by that time. 2) We are near to the river that has no bridge. 3) We have passed our apprenticeship in the school of life. 4) At seventy we can look further backward and further forward. 5) By this time we should know that life consists not in the abundance of things we possess. 6) The responsibility to witness for God to the next generation is greater. 7) At seventy the Christian must redeem the time and live in more deadly earnest.

In 1937 his beloved wife, Amy, passed away suddenly, leaving a deep loneliness. After moving to New York City in 1939, Zwemer met Margaret Clarke, whom he married in 1940. Margaret became a great help to Dr. Zwemer in his continued preaching and writing as well as extensive travels on the speaking circuit. In one month Zwemer traveled twice across America, speaking forty-five times, in addition to a great number of informal talks and interviews.

In 1950 Margaret suddenly died after their return from Arabia. Two years later Zwemer had a heart attack after giving two addresses in New York. He recovered enough to be released from the hospital, but then, ten

days short of Zwemer's eighty-fifth birthday, God took him to his eternal rest.

Zwemer was a hard working man with a brilliant mind and a single passion—to promote the gospel of salvation through Christ alone to Islam. While he had many interests and a wide range of knowledge, one could not talk with him more than ten minutes without the conversation being steered to Islam.

Not only did Zwemer have an excellent grasp of the Bible and theology, he was also an inquisitive man, who worked hard to understand the culture of the Arabs. One day he is said to have gone out to visit the famous tombs of some kings in Luxor. On the way he met a Mohammedan funeral procession and noticed something in the customs that he had not encountered before. He turned and followed the procession and never arrived at his destination.

He always had an abundance of fresh illustrations for any theme on which he was speaking, making him a fascinating teacher. Zwemer is remembered as one who had a lovable character and a keen sense of humor that made him a delightful companion. Kenneth Scott Latourette writes:

There was something of the Old Testament prophet about Dr. Zwemer. He had the prophet's fearlessness and forthrightness, the burning conviction which would brook no compromise. That, indeed, must be true of any who would across the years present the message of Christ to adherents of so sturdy a faith as Islam.... Yet he never forgot that the Evangel means Good News, and that the Good News is the gospel of God's love. His zeal was always transfigured by love and it was not only for his simple, unquestioning faith that those who were honored to be in the circle of his intimate friends will best remember him, but it will be also and primarily for his loving heart that they will recall

him, a loving heart which was the reflection of God's love in Christ.

Zwemer maintained his Calvinistic beliefs all his life, and toward the end of his life gave more lectures and presentations to smaller groups that were Calvinistic. Mainline denominations began to turn away from missions as smaller, more biblical denominations began to take up the work. Zwemer spoke against the liberal theologies that compromised the doctrine of Christ. He taught that in order to be a missionary, especially to Islam, one needed a strong doctrine of Christ and an emphasis on Christ's work of atonement and resurrection. While Zwemer accepted speaking engagements from a broad array of religious affiliations, he was unflinching with regard to the doctrine of Christ and sin, and no listener left in ignorance of Zwemer's convictions.


Zwemer's knowledge of Islam has known few equals among missionaries. We can learn much from his dedication to learning the language and theology of those among whom he labored, to the point that he was esteemed

even by the locals as an authority in their own religion.

Zwemer promoted literature that set forth Christianity over against Islam. In 1910 he joined a group of men who set up a society for the promotion of Christian literature to Islam. This society, known as the American Christian Literature Society for Moslems (ACLSM), left a tremendous mark on the Muslim world with its Christian books and tracts. Repeatedly in lectures and conferences he bemoaned the small amount of literature available and promoted support of this cause. A friend of his, after reading some of the literature, said: "No agency can penetrate Islam so deeply, abide so persistently, witness so daringly and influence so irresistibly as the printed page."

As God gives us opportunity, we must also prepare literature for the Muslim world. Currently we can be grateful for the contribution of Hussein Wario, a member of our Byron Center PRC, through his recently published book: *Cracks in the Crescent*. [See review, by Mark Hoeksema, below.] This book gives excellent insight to readers as to how to understand and evangelize their Muslim

neighbors. Copies are available for purchase from Amazon.com or from <http://www.husseinwario.com/>.

The challenge that Zwemer sounded must continue to be heard today. Islam constitutes a large population in the world and continues to make advances. The laborers for the harvest are few. The churches and missionaries that are able to face the challenge of Islam are those with a strong, biblical theology that sets forth God in all His glory and salvation from sin through Christ alone. God has entrusted us as Protestant Reformed Churches with this glorious gospel. May we be faithful as we seek to proclaim it to every nation and people as God gives us opportunity. 

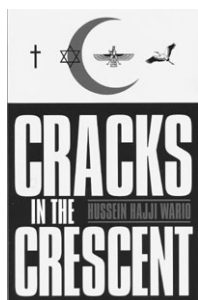
Bibliography

1. J. Christy Wilson, *Apostle to Islam* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), 1952.
2. Ruth A. Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya: A Biographical History of Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 1983.

Bring the books...



Rev. William Langerak



Cracks in the Crescent, by Hussein Hajji Wario. Self-published, 2009. ISBN: 978057800155. Paper, 252 pp. (\$15.99). Excerpts and purchasing information at [http://www.](http://www.cracksinthecrescent.com)

[cracksinthecrescent.com](http://www.cracksinthecrescent.com). Reviewed by Mark H. Hoeksema.

The ingenious title of this book is descriptive of its content. By "crescent," the author obviously refers to the symbol of Islam. And his purpose is clearly to expose the 'cracks' or defects in this widely practiced and growing religion. This he does with admirable success by means of autobiography, which comprises most of this book. Carefully using the vehicle of his life, he

shows the errors and inconsistencies of the Muslim religion.

Hussein Wario is a resident of the United States and member of a Protestant Reformed congregation. But this situation was not always so. As he details in the book, Wario was born into a conservative Muslim family in Kenya more than thirty years ago. Within a tribal context, he was raised in the Muslim faith and culture until about the age of fourteen, when he was converted to Christianity, at which time a

Rev. Langerak is pastor of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

formerly devoted, intelligent, and enthusiastic proponent of Islam became a fledgling believer in Jesus Christ.

It is not my purpose to summarize or recapitulate the narrative of Wario's life, because I could never do justice to its telling. It is a tale of severe hardship and trials of faith such as none of us has ever experienced. The events that befall him are so well-nigh unbelievable, they simply must be read for oneself. What I do wish to make clear, however, is that every event in his life that Wario chooses to record, and every point of explanation he gives, is well-organized and meticulously documented. Although a handful of references may be unclear, this book is on the whole a scholarly and careful work.

What makes Wario's detailed explanations and documentation necessary is that the saga of his life in the context of Islam and the culture of Kenya is so foreign and unbelievable to the Western mind. He lived a peripatetic, hand-to-mouth life for many years on account of his faith, seeking refuge where he could find it, always standing not on expediency but on principle. His family disowned him, persecuted him, and even tried to poison him. Others, especially at the schools he attended, threatened and physically abused him because of his unwillingness to compromise his faith. He has been the continued target of threats, which have been investigated by the FBI, and even now is unable to visit Kenya and his family for fear of his life.

Yet his testimony is this: "My conversion to Christianity was not of my own. I believe it was the Almighty God who fashioned it in my heart through the work of the Holy Spirit to show me His truth that is found only through Jesus Christ His Son (p. 174)." Indeed, in the context of dealing with unbelievers and fanatical

Muslims, the book contains many profound thoughts and insights, as well as thoughtful and clever answers to the calumnies of Islam, due no doubt to the work of the Spirit.

Regrettably, Wario does not detail his journey from his general evangelical position to the Reformed faith and his public confession and membership in the PRCA. This would have been a valuable component of his testimony.

Hardly is this book dull or prosaic. To give but one example, the tale of a stamp on Hussein's buttocks (see p. 184) is both hilarious and illustrative of the ridiculousness of Islam's teachings. This incident, one of many, shows the randomness, disorganization, and contradictions of the Quran (see p. 164). Another theme that Wario documents is the Muslim principle of abrogation (see p. 209), which means that later revelations to the prophet Mohammed supercede (and often contradict) previous revelations. This is significant in that later revelations are much more hostile toward the Western world and Christianity than early pronouncements (pp. 131-134), even including admonitions to kill apostates and infidels (p. 150).

Why should you read this book?

First, because great danger is the consequence of this book for the author, and because he has expended considerable effort in detailing the nature and teachings of Islam. We need to hear and understand what he writes, because he speaks both from experience and with authority.


Second, because we as a Western society and as a church know virtually nothing about Islam. This book, a tale of personal knowledge and unbelievable courage, will go a long ways toward dispelling our ignorance. It also details the primitive, arbitrary, and violent nature of Islam, a stated goal of which is the

destruction of Christianity and Western Christian culture. We need to know the enemy!

Third, the events of September 11, 2001 constitute the first major and overt confrontation between Christianity and Islam since the crusades of the Middle Ages. These events have changed our lives forever. It therefore behooves us to know as much about Islam, its goals, and its principles as possible. Scripture foretells that eventually there will be one world religion and government. This means there must be an accommodation between Christianity and Islam, which is now unfolding before those who have eyes to see and ears to hear.

If nothing else, Wario's book should make us aware of the huge (irreconcilable) differences between the two religions. Wario makes those differences clear in writing, from his own personal perspective, about Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and even the matter of divorce and remarriage (in the brief Part II of the book). Yes, we can learn also about the nature of marriage from this conflict against Islam.

Fourth, besides being a wake-up call to twenty-first century American Reformed Christians, this tale of Hussein Wario's life is a testimony to grace. There is no other explanation for it, or for the line of the antithesis that he strictly draws.

People of God, *Cracks in the Crescent* is not an easy read. Understanding it will require effort and concentration. This is not due to any deficiency on the part of the author, but solely because the entire world of Islam is so foreign to us. But for those who are interested in current events and the rapid development of the end times, this is a "must read." It is appropriate, both for ourselves and for the cause of the gospel, that we validate Wario's courage by giving him audience. 

Congregation Activities

The installation of Rev. Rodney Kleyn, the first pastor of the newly instituted Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA, took place at the morning worship service of July 19, with Rev. Tom Miersma officiating. Rev. Miersma preached on "Desiring the Sincere Milk of the Word," from 1 Peter 2:2. In the evening Rev. Kleyn preached his first sermon as Covenant's pastor on, "Love the Church," from Psalm 137:5, 6. The Kleyn family had arrived in Spokane and moved into their new home just two days before that, on the 17th. Their address is 7317 N. Deschutes Dr., Spokane, WA 99208, and they will have Rev. Miersma's old phone number: (509) 926-0372.

The Providence PRC, presently meeting at Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, MI, recently approved a proposal from their Council to purchase a plot of land on the east side of 22nd Ave., near the Bridlewood subdivision, a growing area just to the south of Hudsonville. We give thanks to God, with this sister congregation, that He has provided for them this location for anticipated future growth.

The Adult Fellowship Society of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA, along with their families, enjoyed a summer outing at Hope Christian School on July 17. Plans called for outdoor games and a Mexican potluck dinner.

Everyone in the Doon, IA PRC was invited to the Rock Rapids Swimming Pool on July 29 for a

Family Swim Night. After swimming, everyone was invited to a nearby campground for a bonfire, with a promise of plenty of campfire goodies to share and enjoy.

The Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN hosted their annual Vacation Bible School on July 27-30. This year the VBS was held at the South Holland PR Christian School. Children ages 4 through 5th grade were welcomed to attend.

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI invited their congregation and members of other nearby PR congregations to a summer singspiration, "God's Glory in Creation," on Sunday, July 22. There was plenty of audience singing assisted by the Majestic Brass, and also other vocal and instrumental special music.

The Reformed Witness Committee of Hope PRC in Walker, MI sponsored their 2009 Summer Class Series during the month of July on the relevant and timely subject of "The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit." Prof. Herman Hanko was the featured speaker for all four classes.

The Reformed Witness Committee of our churches in Iowa and Minnesota was pleased to have Prof. Russell Dykstra present a lecture on the topic of the formula of subscription in the Hull, IA PRC on July 17. The speech, entitled "To Be or Not to Be Reformed: Upholding the Form of Subscription," was intended for anyone who has a desire for the church of Jesus Christ to remain faithful to the Bible. The lecture promised to answer questions about the form, about how long the Reformed church

has required subscription, why it was necessary, and why the weakening of the form will spell the end of a Reformed church or denomination.

Sister-Church Activities

A recent bulletin from the Covenant PRC in Northern Ireland included an encouraging quote that we like to pass on to the readers of the *Standard Bearer*. From Namibia, Africa; "We receive hunters from all over the world on our hunting ranch. About two years ago we ordered 20 *Doctrine According to Godliness* books.... So from then onwards, we gave these books as presents to hunters when they go back after their hunts with us.... It is, and always was, our prayer that people will someday, some time, start to read Rev. Hanko's book and that it will bring them to understand and read the Bible. We have now only one book left and plan to order more of them for future visitors. So yes, we would love more literature of the PRCA."

Mission Activities

Prof. and Mrs. David Engelsma were recently in the Philippines helping the members of the Berean PRC in Manila conduct a three-day conference, July 22-24, on the theme, "The Five Points of Calvinism and the Covenant of Grace." Their presence also helped the Smit family to settle into their new residence.

Rev. Allen Brummel, missionary pastor of the Heritage PR Fellowship in Sioux Falls, SD, spoke at a public lecture on the subject of John Calvin and his relevance for today. The lecture was held July 31 at the Trinity Reformed Church in Sioux Falls.

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

Young Adult Activities

The Young Adult Society of the Lynden, WA PRC hosted their first Young Adult Retreat on July 20-23 at Camp Brotherhood, about an hour south of Lynden. The young adults began the retreat on Monday by exploring the coast at Fort Casey, and ended the retreat on Thursday with white-water rafting in the mountains. Along with these and other activities were profitable discussions and speeches by Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, from Pittsburgh's mission, and Rev. Ron Hanko, from Lynden, on the topic of "Missions and Witnessing," an especially relevant topic in light of Washington's Spokane Mission organizing as a church and the recently-accepted calls to the Philippines by Rev. Smit and Rev. D. Kleyn.

Eighteen (age 27+) people took part in the first Middle-Age Adult Singles Retreat on July 27-30 in beautiful Larkspur, CO, hosted by the Loveland, CO PRC. Activities included trips to the Air Force Academy, Pikes Peak, and the Olympic Training Center. Excellent group discussions were led by Mr. Bill Pipe and Mr. Frank Tolsma on the theme, "Our Place as Members of the Body of Christ," from I Corinthians 7 and 12. One attendee told me, "It was a great time of fellowship, and the wonderful Loveland congregation surely made us feel welcome."


Minister Activities

We extend our congratulations to Rev. Heath Bleyenberg, pastor of the Providence PRC in Hudsonville, MI, and

Miss Deb Key, who were united in marriage July 10. Our prayer is that they may experience the Lord's love in their marriage, that their marriage may prove a blessing to the congregations they serve, and that they may grow in their own oneness in the faith.

Rev. William Langerak declined calls from both Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI and Calvary PRC in Hull, IA.

Candidate Cory Griess is considering four calls to serve as pastor. He has been extended calls from the Byron Center, MI PRC; the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada; First PRC in Holland, MI; and Calvary PRC in Hull, IA.

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma received the call to serve as the next pastor of the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI. 

Announcements

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

We praise and thank God as we celebrate the 30th wedding anniversary of our parents and grandparents,

PROF. BARRY and LORI GRITTERS,

on August 23, 2009. We are thankful that God has blessed us spiritually through them. "I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations" (Psalm 89:1). With prayers for God's continued blessing and grace in their lives,

- ✿ Curt and Julie Gritters
Jaydon, Tyler
- ✿ Kevin and Audra Gritters
Derek, Jared, Hayley
- ✿ Eric and Alicia Gritters
Camden, Brennan
- ✿ Dan and Kara Gritters
Emma
- ✿ Brad Gritters
- ✿ Lisa Gritters

Hudsonville, Michigan

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On August 30, 2009, our parents and grandparents,

ROGER and ANNE VELDMAN, celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary. We give thanks to God for the years He has given them together and for the godly instruction they have given us. "For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

- ✿ Andy and Ruth Baas
Brianna, Drew, Ella
- ✿ Geoff Veldman
- ✿ Randy and Heather Veldman
- ✿ David Veldman
(and Michelle VanOverloop)
- ✿ Andrew Veldman
(and Renae Koole)
- ✿ Renae Veldman

Wyoming, Michigan

REMINDER:

The Annual Meeting of the RFPA will be held on September 24, in Trinity PRC, at 7:30 p.m. Everyone is invited to attend.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

We are grateful to the Lord for granting our parents,

GEORGE and JAYNE BODBYL, 35 years of marriage to be celebrated on September 4, 2009 D.V. We are thankful they have given us a Christian upbringing and a godly example of patience and trust in the Lord. "He will bless them that fear the LORD, both small and great. The LORD shall increase you more and more, you and your children" (Psalm 115: 13, 14).

- ✿ George and Michelle Bodbyl
Olivia and Emma
- ✿ Marcella Bodbyl
- ✿ Mike and Monica Vanderkolk
James
- ✿ Emily Bodbyl

Hudsonville, Michigan

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council of the Hope Protestant Reformed Church expresses sympathy to their fellow officebearer Elder Cal Kalsbeek and family in the death of his father-in-law,

MR. BILL SWART.

We do not grieve as those who have no hope though our sorrow is real and very great. May this promise be real in our sorrow: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Revelation 14:13).

Council of Hope PRC
Rev. James Laning, President
David Moelker, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council and congregation of Doon PRC express their sympathy to Rev. Overway and his family in the death of their grandfather,

MR. MARVIN HAVEMAN,

of Holland, Michigan. May the family be comforted by these words found in Deuteronomy 33:27: "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

Jim Regnerus, Vice-pres.
Bob Mantel, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their Christian sympathy to Cornie and Trudie Jonker and family in the death of Trudie's sister,

MRS. ALICE HULS.

"I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that were I am, there ye may be also" (John 14: 2, 3).

Rev. K. Koole, President
H. De Vries, Asst. Clerk

Check out the
RFPA web page at
www.rfpa.org

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With thanksgiving to God we rejoiced with our parents and grandparents,

DARREL and BONNIE HUISKEN,
as they celebrated their 45th wedding anniversary on August 14, 2009.

We are thankful for the godly instruction God has provided us through them, as well as for their godly example. We pray that God will bless them with many more years together. "O give thanks unto the LORD, for He is good: for his mercy endureth forever" (Psalm 136:1).

✿ Joel and Janna Huiskens
Trevor, Mitchell, Kelly,
and Emily

✿ Alison Huiskens
Grandville, Michigan

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies' Society of Hudsonville PRC extend sympathy to fellow member Grace Bruning in the recent deaths of two sisters,

LENA BALKEMA

and

BERTHA BALKEMA.

May Grace and her family receive comfort from Psalm 73:24: "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel and afterward receive me to glory."

Martyn McGeown, President
Donna Boven, Secretary.

Please note:

Because of the Calvin Conference scheduled for September 3-5, sponsored by the Protestant Reformed Seminary, the seminary will not be holding their usual Convocation Activities this year.

Reformed Witness Hour

September 2009

Date	Topic	Text
	"In Praise of Sovereign Grace"	
September 6	"Limited Atonement"	John 10:15
September 13	"Irresistible Grace"	John 6:44
September 20	"Preservation of the Saints"	John 17:11, 12
September 27	"To God Be the Glory"	John 12:28